

2010 Furnace Creek 508

By Willy Long-Eared Jerboa Nevin

Getting ready

As the days wind down toward the start of this year's Furnace Creek 508 I am becoming more and more nervous. Last year I bailed at mile 290ish due to getting blown off my bike repeatedly. I should have taken a long break then kept going but I was broken. I should have ridden smarter as now I have to return to get this monkey off my back. I believe that every solo rider can easily ride 508 miles and it is only the unknown conditions at this race that have to be dealt with. It may be heat, wind or both but if you manage it correctly for your abilities you should be able to finish in the 48 hours.



I have been getting my bikes and van all ready over the past couple of months and everything is coming together. My van has been a crew vehicle three times before and I have it all dialed in. Everything has a place and it is well organized. It is the Bikemobile. Inside there is a plywood shelf system that allows everything to have its own place that can be accessed from both inside and outside which is important

since at night you do not want to have to stop the van to get to anything. If the van stops the rider has to stop.

I have ridden 400k's, 600k's and a 1,000k this year with only my bike and what I can carry on it so having a van with my entire bike shop and three bikes seems overkill. It is but you never know what it is you may need out there and there is nowhere out there to buy anything you may need as far as bike stuff.



Crew

I put the word out for crew about two months before the start. I got three fairly quickly and even had two or three extras that I had to turn down. You let them down easy knowing you may need to ask them later as your original volunteers sometimes have to bow out due to more important things than following me around in the desert.

Roland

I met Rowland on a few brevets and he is hard not to notice as he rides an odd bike. Not a standard upright frame and not a recumbent but something in-between. Since he volunteered I got to know him a bit better while riding a couple of the Santa Cruz brevets. He is very mellow and seems more than happy to learn the art of crewing

Tom

I have known Tom since 2005 or 2006. We put together and rode a fleche together in the rain. He is much faster than me and hates to stop for any length of time so I had a tough time keeping up with him on brevets. He also is known as the guy who rides in SPD sandals. Tom has lots of crewing experience and soloed the 508 in 2004, the year of the nasty winds

Chuck

Hadn't met Chuck before but I am sure I rode a bit with him at the SF 600k this year. Chuck has solo'd the 508 and has crewed five or six solos to successful finishes. He has lots of brutal lights which are going to come in handy heading down Townes Pass at midnight hitting 40-50 MPH.

Misc. Stuff

Other than having every bike tool on hand as well as tubes, tubes, tubes, I am bringing three bikes. My main bike is a Speedvagen with clip on aerobars. It has Reynolds Attack carbon wheels and a 50/34 up front and a 12-25 in the back. Gears good for everything except Townes Pass. I have to ride 200 miles to get to Townes Pass and it is 10 miles and 4,000 feet. I may be able to make it up on fresh legs but once at the top I still have 300 miles to go and need fresh legs. I would be beat taking this bike up Townes. Over the past 3-4 months I have been riding it to get used to the aerobars. You just can't throw aerobars on a

bike and be comfy. You have to get your legs and upper body used to them. By the time of this race I could have fallen asleep in them I was so dialed in.

My back up bike is almost identical to the Speedvagen but without aerobars. If the SV gives out I will transfer the bars to my Green Vanilla. It has the same gearing but has Open Pro wheels. These wheels will be much better if the winds pick up like last year.



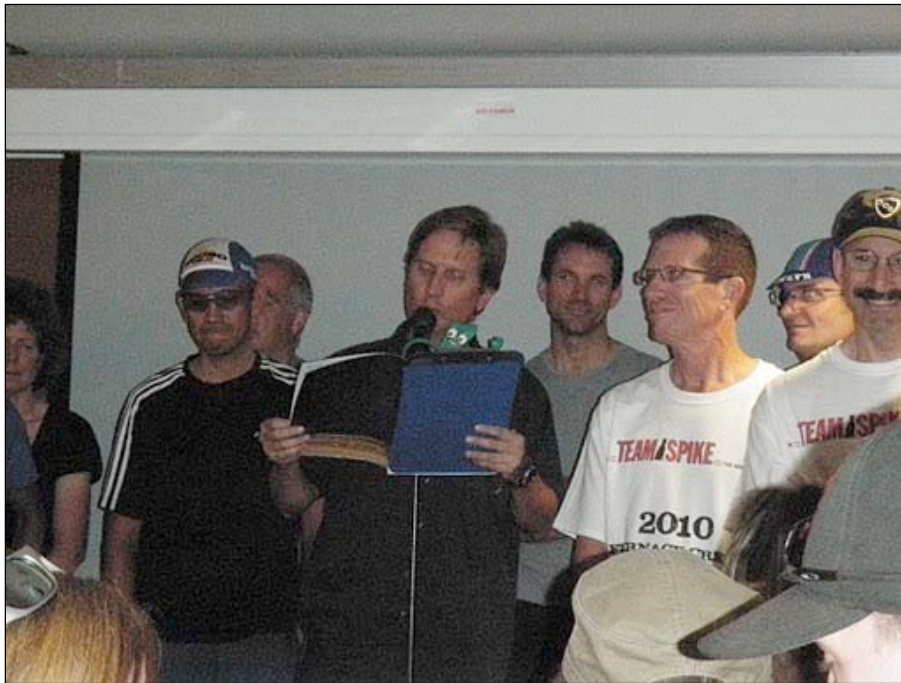
My third bike is a new bike for me. It is a Monster Cross bike capable of using 2" + tires. I will not have cross tires on it but I brought a set for one particular downhill with terrible roads that just eat your standard wheels. A buddy broke his bars on that section of road this year. The bike was built by Paul Taylor. It has a 44/32/22 up front and a 12-27 in the back and uses Industry Nine disc

brake wheels. This bike will be used for riding up Townes Pass, down KelBaker and any other uphill later in the race if I start to poop out. Tom switched out the cross tires for the Michelin Pro 2 25mm tires since the first time I plan to get on it is for riding up Townes.

Trip down to start

I woke up Friday morning and out of the blue my left forearm is killing me. It is very tight as if I have some nerve damage. There was no indication of this Thursday evening and I cannot think of anything that would have brought this on. I leave home about 7:30ish to drive south to pick up my crew on the way to Santa Clarita. All the way down my arm continued to hurt and it seemed to move up my arm toward my shoulder. I tried to remember if when you have a heart attack does the pain start in your chest and move to your arm or start at your arm and move to your chest. I get to Tom's place in Mountain View and run over the van with him while waiting for Roland who will be dropped off by his wife. I mention the arm pain to Tom but just casually as I do not want him to think I am already coming up with excuses. But the damn thing is really painful and tight. Roland shows up and we jump in the van to get on the road to pick up Chuck in Morgan Hill. We stop by Chuck's beautiful estate in Morgan Hill; load him into the van, grab some gas and we are on our way. A little later than I would have wanted but we should have no problem with bike or van inspection as I have done this before and Tom and Chuck are experienced with the check in as well.

We stopped for lunch at an In and Out Burger and noticed the Taylor was coming loose up on the rack. I think it may be the heat that is melting the foam portion of the claw on the Lock-Jaw bike rack. I reposition the bike and add a tie down. The rack allows for both wheels to remain on the bike and both wheels are ratcheted onto the rack for extra security. Well as we are approaching the Grape Vine I hear Roland say "Cross bike down" and I start looking in the side view mirror for a bike tumbling down Hwy 5. What had happened is that the lock Jaw portion of the rack failed but the bike had just fallen sideways since the wheels were secured. We pull over and remount the Taylor on the fork mount rack without a front tire. I was so freaked out thinking I had lost my new bike and so relieved it did not even have a scratch on it. Tom had been driving since In and Out and resumed driving duty. It is about 100 degrees out and has been for most of the drive. We had the A/C on full blast to keep cool and when Tom gunned it to re-enter the freeway the AC compressor went out. We smelled burning rubber which turned out to be the belt. I believe when the AC went out the AC pulley froze, we smelled burning rubber but then the pulley became freewheeling again and everything was well again. Athou no AC now. The crew was bummed and I was worried about the serpentine belt since it runs everything including the power steering, power brakes, alternator, and the cooling. If you lose that belt you are done and would need a tow. It seemed to hold up to race headquarters and we got the bikes and van inspected. Tom and Roland were using their smart phones to see if they could find someone who could fix it, otherwise it would be hot for the crew this weekend. I had a bit of sympathy for them since they were volunteering but hey, I'm not getting any AC this weekend :)



We attended the mandatory meeting and met up with the usual crowd of crazy's. Most of the folks who ride these things are just your normal next door neighbor type. Very few of us look good wearing a helmet compared with the pros you see at any of the tours who look like they were born with helmets on. I have to say we are a weird looking bunch of folks.

After the meeting we hit the Albertsons for ice, water and crew food for the weekend then head back to the hotel where I get to bed about 9pm.

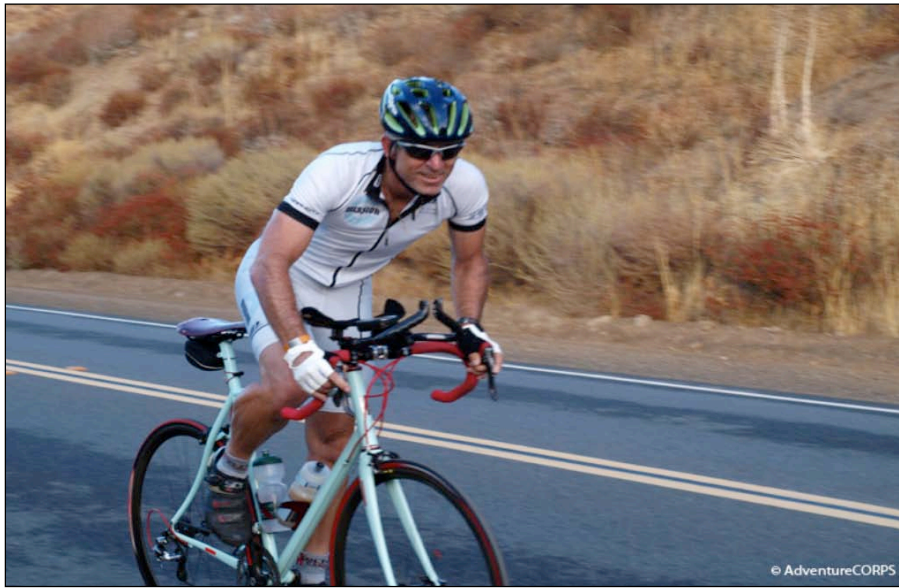


Pre-race

I am up at 6ish for the 7am start. At 6:30 I get on my bike and ride the half mile to the start hotel, get some coffee and sit down with Paul V who is doing the relay this year. That lasts about 10 minutes then I figure I might as well go outside to see who is out there. I wonder around saying hello to all the folks I know and wishing them a great ride. Then I grab my bike and wait the

next 10 minutes for the start. I am right next to basketball HOF'er Bill Walton so we chat a bit about both of us having grown up in San Diego. BTW my arm is still in pain and I am really worried about getting to mile 25 and having to tell my crew I am done.





Stage 1 - Start to California City, 82 miles, 6,200"

7:00 finally comes and we all ride out together for the first 5 miles. I ride up and down the group to talk to racers like Susan F (Scarlet Macaw), Adam B (Rock Rabbit) and meet a few others. This section and the first 25 miles is a great place to meet new riders and find out their story. Once we

turn into San Francisquito Canyon at mile 5 the race is on. I always make a point to be as far back as possible so not to get caught up with faster riders. This is a time trial after all so being up front will only get me carried away. By being in the back I do not have to worry about too many riders passing me and I actually get to do the passing.



As we ride along I chat up a few riders including the Texas Tortoise (tandem couple), Frank who ran the Badwater 135 ultra and is riding this race to complete the Desert Cup, Jim (Gyrfalcon) in the classic division who I have ridden many brevet with and Black Sheep who is also going for the Desert Cup and has an artificial leg from the knee down. I kid him that I hope he does not plan to pull out a

fresh leg at the half way point. My arm is still in pain and I am finding myself holding it against my chest like in a sling and thinking this is not good. I am riding with one arm and I have over 500 miles to go. Well I drop into the aerobars and off I go up and down thru the canyons looking for my crew who have to wait at mile 25ish. I have two bottles and that is it until I see them. It is slightly overcast so the temps are fine.



I keep leapfrogging with Jim and the tandem as we go up and down the hills. Jim is in the classic division which means he has to ride with only 7 speeds and has to use downtube shifters on a steel bike. Not too bad but the killer is you are not allowed to use clipless pedals and have to use toe clips. He is doing well and should be killing me but we keep seeing

each other and so we talk a bit here and there but not too long as we are not allowed to ride together. As I approach the section of road where all the crews are waiting I realize my arm is improving. At the start I would say my arm was at 50% and now it is creeping up to 80%. I am ecstatic. Last week I was worried about the heat but last night I was only worried about my arm. If I can get my arm back then I will be in good shape.



I pass the crew, exchange bottles and off for what is a great downhill into the desert. This downhill is very fast and I hit 46 MPH. As you come off the hill you hit a road that just goes straight forever. There are lots of roads like this out here but it still amazes me how far they go. I am moving but not as fast as last year which is great. Last year we had tremendous tailwinds which pushed me thru this

section in the high 20's but now I'm riding along in the low 20's. Since last year we had such nasty headwinds on day two I smile hoping the lack of tailwinds today means I will be able to get thru day two this year. My crew is leapfrogging me and I am keeping on my schedule

of one bottle of Hammer Perpetuem per hour. I have told my crew to put 1.5 scoops of Perpetuem in each bottle and a shot of Hammer gel for taste and calories. This along with straight water should work for quite a while. The crew waits at each corner to let me know when to turn and also to remind me to come to almost a complete stop or face a 15 minute time penalty if caught. I see the van more often than last year which is nice but they are stopping more than needed. But this gives Roland a chance to get lots of pictures which is great.



Eventually I head up the Windmill climb and turn right toward Mojave. These hills are long but not tall so on some of them you can stay in the aerobars. The downhills are the same so you get long gradual downhills in the aerobars and they are fast and fun. I keep seeing the van and they have not mentioned the AC issue so I feel better. Then I see the van off the road with the hood up but still then send me forward.



However, the next time by they stop me around mile 60 and tell me the engine noise is getting worse and smelling bad. Both Tom and Roland have smart phones and figure this is the do or die point to find a rental car. They load me up with water then they head to Lancaster to get an SUV rental car. They tell me to wait 20 miles down the

road at time check 1 in California City until I hear from them. If they get a car they will call

and send me on my way otherwise I am heading out into no-mans land and I may not get cell reception. I head out on course and worry all the way to Cali City. I do not want to have to come back next year to get last year's monkey off my back. I am here now and 70 miles into this thing. I see Nicole, Jim's GF and crew, and tell her the story and ask her to keep an eye on me. In the next 15 miles or so she is out on the road with bottle handoffs and bananas for me. By the time I get to time station 1 she has recruited 2-3 other teams to keep an eye on me as she needs to get back to Jim. I cannot tell you how special it made me feel that folks who I have never met started to fill my bottles and stuffing gel packs into my pockets.



I hung around for maybe 45 minutes until I talked to Tom who said they had a SUV and to get going.

Stage 2, California City to Trona, 70 miles, 4,200"

So I take off like a bat out of hell and am feeling great. My arm is now at about 95% so it is now off the table of problems. I get about five miles down the road when the road surface changes. I hit a very minor bump, hear a twang and look at a wobbling front wheel.



One of my 20 front spokes broke. I stop, pull the spoke out, open up my brakes a bit and continue down the road. I have a spare set of wheels in the van so just have to wait until the crew gets here to change it out. It is not that bad but there are downhills that I would not want to ride down in excess of 40 MPH on 19 spokes. I continue to get fantastic support from about 3 crews out on the

road. Sockeye Salmon, Black Sheep, and Coon Hound are all over me.

Eventually my crew flies by in a new GMC SUV but since there was no factory rack they were not able to transfer over my Mega Road Warrior rack system. I tell them I need my spare front wheel but it is still in the van. They could not bring everything so chose what they thought was most important. I continue on the wobbly wheel then stop and ask to try the Industry Nine wheel off the Taylor. There is just no way I am going to hit high speeds on this wheel with confidence. The I9 rim is too wide to fit inside my brake pads. I continue riding then stop again as the wheel is now rubbing on the pads.



We try opening the brakes more and I see there is a quick release cam and flip it. It still rubs but got me thinking we may be able to fit the I9 wheel in. Sure enough it fit perfectly and I am set to go.

So now my SV road bike has a disc brake up front. But it is smooth and stable and just in time for the long downhill into Trona at time station 2.



Stage 3 , Trona to Furnace Creek, 99.2 miles. Elevation Gain: 7538

I stop for a moment in Trona to check in, put on my lights which I will need in 30 minutes, then head right back out. The guys will stock up on Trona Burritos and meet me down the road. There is another long road known as the Trona Bump. Long easy climb that goes on for 15-20 miles rising about 2,000 feet. It just takes time and patience. Right at 6PM I

have to go into night time mode which means my vehicle has to be right behind me at all times. I stop at 6 on the dot as my van still has not caught up to me. Within 30 seconds they are behind me and I am off. For the past couple of hours the teams have been catching me. They start 2 hours after the solos so this is about right on target. I know lot of riders on teams so get to say hello as they blast by. For four person teams this will be rider #3's first of two pulls. For two person teams this will be rider #1's second pull. So some teams go by with so much speed I cannot say a thing other than "go man go".

I am waiting for my buddy on Zombie Squirrel to go by and glad I could hold this team off for stage 3. Their stage three rider is the guy I rode with on a two person relay in 2006. Jim and I have ridden many miles together and he crewed for me in 2009 when I DNF'd and I crewed for him in 2008 with his dad when he finished in 40 hours. This is why I would like to break 40 hours just so I beat him. I am surprised they have not passed me yet especially since I was in Cali City for 45 minutes. Just before the top of the Trona Bump I finally hear some loudmouth behind me and it is Jim. He pulls up next to me with his van behind my SUV while I fill him in about what happened. We chat for maybe 5 minutes then it is time for him to drop into the Panamint Valley with a fantastic descent. He takes off and his van swings around me with all the other Squirrels giving me some hoots and hollers then down they go.

I follow behind with now about 175 miles in my legs. It is now almost completely dark and I can use the Zombie Wagon to determine the upcoming turns. Only one problem. It starts to slow down and I almost run into the back of it. So I zoom around yell some obscenities at Jim and kick his ass all the way to the bottom. Well he did have almost 25 miles in those legs so I guess I should cut him some slack. After the race I would call his dad in PA and tell the story of how I kick his sons butt and made sure his dad would relay to Jim that I made a point of calling his dad to rub it in. OK so a few miles later the Zombies all roll by me again never to be seen again.



I was still making good time along the valley and just before mile 200 we all pull over to switch to the Taylor for the 10-mile climb up Townes pass. I took a 30 minute break then got on the Taylor. I have been up this hill twice before. Once my back acted up a bit so I needed to stop and stretch it twice and last year it was very windy so I took a break half way up. So in two tries I have not had great success.

This year I have very low gears and plan to ride up in low gears with as little effort as possible. I have been practicing on some of the Woodside hills and have been able to do 6-10 mile climbs with next to no effort. I do not mind spending the time on the hill I just want to feel fresh at the top. With the low gears of the Taylor I never stopped and it went very well. I passed a few riders and got passed by teams I am guessing. Just before the top I saw Rock Rabbits car on the side of the road with his crew wandering around. They were giving him a break. He has a tough time around this point in the race with keeping his nutrition down. He should be well on his way to the finish as he rode about 425 miles at the Davis 24 hour TT last year. So he can easily go 20 MPH but his stomach can only go 18 MP so he stops to let it catch up.



At the top we pull over and I throw on a pair of leg warmers, arm warmers and a vest. It is not that chilly but I will be getting up to speed and need something to take the edge off. I also add a 1500 lumen light onto the bike as we will be hauling butt.

I remain on the Taylor as it is very stable and has disc brakes. You drop right off the hill and for the next 17 miles will drop 5,000 feet. Just an E

ticket ride the whole way. I am flying and this year I will let loose more than last year. Sometimes you get going so fast it is just scary. When I hit a straight section I let loose of the levers and it is as if someone gave me a giant push.

The road is nice and smooth so I do not worry too much about the speed and I am surely hitting in the 50's. I will have to wait until I get to the bottom to ask the crew how fast I hit as I do not have a computer on this bike. By the time you hit bottom you are ready to be done going downhill. It gets to you after a while and I have to remind myself to pedal on the downhill even thou I am spun out of gears. But I spin my legs on the way down so when I get to the bottom my legs are still warm. I roll back to the van only to find out I was lucky if I hit 45. But I tell you 45 at night seems like 60 in your head. It is a blast and worth the ride up the hill. The next 30 miles or so are flat'ish with a few rollers into time station 3 at Furnace Creek and about the half way point.



We pull in, check in and hang out for about 30 minutes. I have some grapes and use the restroom and relax a bit. I think 40 hours is not doable so my next goal is 48 hours without worrying about the time cut off. I really want to enjoy this race and not work so hard as to make it miserable. Who cares about an hour here or there unless you plan to win the race? There are still a couple teams I know are behind me

with people I ride with. Jason and Alex's teams are still out there so I still have something to look forward to as they catch me.



Just as I am about to leave Jason arrives so we get in a couple of pictures then I am off on stage 4.

Stage 4 Furnace Creek to Shoshone, 73.6 miles. Elevation Gain: 6744'.

From Furnace Creek it is fairly flat for the first 45 miles then you turn and climb out of Death Valley for 14 miles. I had a tailwind for the first section of this and I had the biggest grin on my

face as last year I was working as hard as I could to maintain 4-5 MPH in the nasty wind. Even if I had a manageable headwind I would have been happy. There is not much out here since you cannot see anything and there are no notable hills. You see scorpions and tarantulas so you keep an eye out for them so you do not run over them. I dodged a few just missing them only to realize they may have met their demise under one of the SUV wheels.

But at least I didn't kill any. Along this section Alex and the Blue Whales pass me. I gave chase for about 100 yards to regain the lead only to remember I was in about 100th place. I said goodbye to Alex and continued along. It is 90 degrees out here at 4am in Death Valley and dry as hell. I keep thinking I need to find some shade it is so hot. At 4 f'ing AM :)



I am still on the Taylor. I should have switched bikes but since I thought I might need the gearing on the 14 mile climb out of Death Valley I figured I might as well just ride it. Now that we do not have the rack, in order to switch bikes you have to pull the frame out of the SUV and attach both wheels. A little more of a pain but I should have switched for the aerobars. Just before the turn up the hill we stopped for a potty break and I decided I would take a 30 minute break

before the climb. I didn't get any sleep but just the rest helps a lot. If I am off the bike for 30 minutes I probably make up 15 minutes by being fresher on the hill.



The first hill is 4 miles long followed by a one mile descent and then a 9 mile climb. I have never ridden this section and it would have been fine on the SV. Along this hill we hit 7am which signifies I do not need a follow vehicle and that I have hit 24 hours. I think I hit 305 miles in 24 hours which is fine. I wanted to be at the next time station at mile 325 but I am on an easy pace and feeling great. I have yet to be stressed physically. Just keeping it in the green.

With about 10 miles to go I send the crew ahead to get me some coffee and I want to change out my entire kit (clothes). I have a little bag with an entire change of clothes ready.



Just before the time station I can see spots of rain coming down. I did not get rained on but the road was wet and it cooled everything down. I pulled into Shoshone and did a quick clothes change and had a cup of coffee. It was now about 9am and it was starting to get hot. The next section does not have much climbing but it is slightly up hill almost the whole way.

Stage Five: Shoshone to Baker, 56.3 miles. Elevation Gain: 2186'.



I take off for Baker, the home of the world's tallest thermometer at about 9:30. When I did this as a relay it took me 3 hours to ride the 56 miles. This year it is much hotter and I have a bit of a headwind. Again not a horrendous headwind so I am still happy'ish. I do have to climb Ibex pass which is about 750 feet then drop

down to a highway. This goes fine but on the highway the temps really pick up. It is now about 100 degrees and windy in my face. My feet start to hurt from Hot Foot so I switch to the sandals again. This helps a little but the bottom of my feet are on fire. I try everything. I squirt water on them take my socks off, even take my feet out of the sandals and put them on top. Luckily it is flat so I can try all these things but nothing works. I just have to tough it out to Baker on these long hot roads. Roland jumps out every mile or so and squirts me down with the pesticide bottle. This feels fantastic but only last a couple of minutes before I am dry again. I have not sweat the entire ride. I know I have but there has not been a drop



of sweat on me as it dries instantly. I tired one of those cool necktie things but again it was dry in 5 minutes. Then Roland ties two of my arm warmers together and filled them with ice. He strung it around my neck and tucked it into my collar. It started to melt and felt wonderful. It lasted about 30 minutes or so before it was dry but it got me to Baker in 5 hours.

As soon as we got to Baker I headed right for the AM/PM looking for AC. I grabbed a big Mt Dew and sat by the door. AM/PM has double sliding doors with a big fan in the middle to keep the heat out of the store. I plopped myself between the two sets of doors out of the way and relaxed. I now only have 125 miles to go and about 15-16 hours.



Across from me is Rock Rabbit who passed me on the way to Baker. He is still having a tough time but he is tougher. Not only does he have to deal with the heat like the rest of us but he is racing this thing fixed (no coasting) and you cannot change gear ratios for the hills. We talked a bit and I rub in that I have beaten him over the top of Townes Pass the last couple of years then he heads out to time station 6. I wait another 10 minutes and follow.





Stage Six: Baker to Kelso, 34.90 miles. Elevation Gain: 2920'.

I have not ridden this section but everyone moans about it. It starts off with a 25 mile climb for about 2,000-3,000 feet. It was really not too bad except like every other stage in this race there is zero shade. There are only Joshua trees out here and they supply no shade.

Again it is hot but now only in the 90's and there is a bit of cloud cover to cool things off a bit.



I meander around the 25 miles of climbing and at the top get rained on for a while. Feels fantastic and it creates the most perfect rainbow.

Still on the Taylor but I could have ridden up on the SV as it is not steep. There is the worst road I have ever ridden on at the top of this climb. It will take me down to time station 6 in Kelso. It was not very steep so I did not get the rest I was hoping for. Plus you are constantly dodging rocks and pot holes so you are tense the whole way.



On the way down this hill I had a chance to look down at my new bike. As I looked directly down to the BB thru the top tube I noticed that the frame seemed to be bent. I mean really bent. I felt all the joints to see if I could feel any chipped paint or cracks, but nothing. When I look straight down at the BB it is completely on the right side of my top tube and the rear triangle is out of whack as well. How could my crew not

notice this since they have been behind me for a while now. I was able to bomb down this 10-15 mile section of bad roads due to the solid rims and tires I had on the bike. When I got to the bottom it was about 7pm so I have 12 hours to ride 90 miles but I am cooked, bonked. I sit in the SUV and try to get a turkey sandwich down. The only way to get any solid food down is to flush it down with coke or root beer but it does go down.



Stage Seven: Kelso to Almost Amboy, 33.8 miles. Elevation Gain: 2280'.

I sit around for another 30 minutes then the crew gets me out of there. I can spin up this 12 miles hill and recover on the way and it worked. Along the climb I tell the crew I will need to switch bikes at the top since this frame is bent and there is a screaming fast 17 mile descent on

the other side. There is no way I am taking that frame down that hill. In addition my knees are acting up a bit. They take a good look at the frame from the SUV and say it looks fine. They mention it looks like I am favoring one of my legs so we stop and check it out. Ends up the top of my seatpost is twisting. So we do a quick change to my backup seat and post but that means I lose the comfort of the Sella An Atomica and have my lightweight saddle on the bike now. I didn't want to screw around with changing seats and have to dial it in so figured I can go a mere 90 miles on anything. Once back on the bike it looked good then I realized it was no better and the frame must still be bent.

The crew tells me everything looks fine but my knees are acting up and I do not want them to get worse. So I have them take a good look at the frame from behind in the SUV. Check, all is good according to them. OK, check my posture against the frame. Again check, AOK. But I am telling you the bottom bracket is way to the right of the midline. I am kind of pissed that my new bike may be ruined and my knees are hurting but only a bit. I am guessing it happened when it fell over on the rack on the trip down to the start. I just don't want my knees to get worse.

So I then call the crew up and ask them to look at my head. Sure enough my head is cocked to the right and I am looking at everything down and to the left. I am cracking up as I look around to see that the road is leaning to the left etc. Not enough to notice before as it looks like it could have been designed this way for drainage. But now I know it is just from the

neck up and has nothing to do with a bent frame or my knee problem. The knees are fine I was just worried it might get worse. So now I feel better and mosey up the 12 miles climb. At the top you mosey around for another 4-6 miles then you head down another fantastic descent. 17 miles of full on coasting on half way decent roads. Every once in a while there would be a crack or pot hole but I was all over it, zigging and zagging around them to perfection. Sure that the crew behind me were in awe of how after over 36 hours I was able to work my way thru this section. More than likely they were bored but I felt like I was on fire. At the bottom of the hill comes the final stop at Almost Amboy. It has a Hawaiian theme so I get lei'd, take a couple of pictures with the crew then head out.

Stage Eight: Almost Amboy to Twenty Nine Palms, 58.2 miles. Elevation Gain: 4170'.

I am getting tired now but only have less then 60 miles to go and one last notable hill. A 10 miler. I ride about 5-6 miles on flats, turn left and then another 10 miles or so to the start of the climb. Just before the climb I have to take a break and rest my eyes. I do not get any sleep but just closing them helps for quite a while. After 15-20 minutes I am off but not before about four riders pass by. I pull out with my crew and it is about 11PM. As I ride I am gaining on the group ahead.

As I get behind the last vehicle I decide to just sit there for a while but then after 5 minutes I decide to pass. This will be tricky since there are four in a row and my crew needs to sneak into the mix somehow. Well I will let them worry about that so I ride by the first rider, say good evening then move along. I do the same for the next three riders stopping to chat for a minute or so each time then move to the front. It is then that I realize maybe I should have hung back as my legs are a bit sore from the extra effort. But I cannot slow down now only to reverse the whole process and go to the rear. I've made the commitment and I now hear my crew behind me. So I keep a good clip going and do not look back. I can't see behind my crew anyways but I am sure the other riders are all que'd up to re-pass me.

Ends up I got quite a ways ahead of them and in all the slow speed excitement I was now part way into the climb. It took a while for this climb but knowing it was the last hill I was not going to stop even thou sleep was catching up to me again. The crew kept telling me to keep going and I couldn't be that tired as I haven't weaved all over the road yet. And besides, they told me, how bad of a crash could it be since you are going up hill slow. So I just kept going knowing with each pedal stroke I was getting closer to the end and a jersey and medal. I reached the top and had a 5-6 miles descent followed by a few miles of flat run in to 29 Palms.

I was now in my big ass ring (OK only a 44 on the Taylor) humping along. I could see the flashing lights of support vehicles of other racers ahead of me and was waiting for them to make the left turn which signifies just 6 miles to go. This went on forever. So long that I thought at my pace I may catch one of them. Then it happened, the lights were gone. OK 6, 7, 8 miles to go. I go back to the crew and mention it must be just a mile or so to the next turn. They tell me I have 8 miles.....to that damn turn then 6 more miles. Man, that let all the gas out of me and I slowed down. The vehicle in front of me just went over a rise instead of a turn. I am now running out of gas so ask for a cookie or something to get me

going. I think we stop for a crew pee break then back on the road. Just then Wolverine flies by me like a bat out of hell. I let him go and now I have another vehicle to watch up the road. Eventually I actually see it turn and get excited. Mainly just so I can get off this damn road. I make the turn then it is another couple miles to the final right turn to the finish in 29 palms. About one mile before the finish is a little bump that everyone complains about. It is 10-20 feet up so how bad can it be? I just rode 10 miles up the last hill.



Well it just about killed me but I made it up and over to see Wolverine turn into the finish hotel parking lot. I did not speed up as I wanted to give him his time at the finish. I would hate to ride 508 miles, finish to great fan fare, only to have everyone yell out that there is another rider approaching and be forgotten. Well I made the final climb into the parking lot after 45 hours and 15 minutes.



It felt great to get off the bike knowing I would not have to get back on. And I got that giant monkey off my back. Chris presented me with my finisher's jersey and the coveted 508 medal.

I was a bit overwhelmed thinking back at all the help I had along the way and wanted to tell so to Chris. But I knew if I got to far into how so many folks had helped

me I would start to ball. Just thinking about it and writing it now tears me up. The crew

packs as much into the SUV as we can but Roland has to ride the bike to the hotel as there is not enough room inside at the moment to fit both bikes inside. I take a shower and it is 5:30ish. We set the alarms for 8ish to get the rental SUV back to wherever Lancaster is and I am out like a light



Next Day

We make our way back to Lancaster to return the SUV and deal with my van. Turns out there is a Chrysler dealership right next door. So I rent a car for the crew to get home and the drop the van off at the dealership. I get a hotel for the night and the van is ready for the trip home Tuesday afternoon. I pull into home just before 9PM Tuesday night to finally see my girls

waiting for me and working on a welcome home sign.

There are so many people I need to thank but most of all to the fantastic crew of Tom, Roland, and Chuck. For sure there is no way I could have done this without them. Not even another crew would have worked. Both Tom and Roland having smart phones and jumping right on the rental SUV saved my race. When I was cramping Tom suggested salt which I never would have brought in the first place and it worked like a charm. Chuck wouldn't let me in the van on that last leg and all the cooling help from Roland got me to Baker. It is every little piece of help that gets you to the end not one big revelation. I can't wait to pay them back by doing something as big as they did for me