

Lon Haldeman History

Start Part III

In 1978 a fellow named John Marino raised the intensity of the Transcontinental Record when he crossed the country in 13 days. His pace was considered humanly impossible to maintain across the country. I knew I had to improve if I had a chance at going any faster. In 1979 four guys riding two tandems shattered the record again by crossing the country in 10 days, 21 hours. Pete Penseyres, Rob Templin, Bruce Hall and Brooks McKinney had averaged almost 275 miles per day. Even though they were drafting each other on tandem bikes their pace showed what was possible. In 1980 John Marino broke his solo record again and lowered the individual time to 12 days and 3 hours. That was the goal time that I wanted to beat. All the previous records had been set riding from west to east. The winds were supposed to be more favorable going that way. I was starting my record attempt by riding from east to west. If I didn't break the one way record heading to California I was hoping I could go faster on the return trip to New York. Either way I had to finish in under 36 days to break the round trip record which was set by Victor Vincente in 1974. These were the pioneering days of long distance

cycling. Everything we learned was by trial and error and the learning curve was pretty fast as we had many failures.

The logistics of riding multiple days was something I needed to learn. As a test I planned to ride 310 miles south to the town of Litchfield, Illinois where they held their annual Double and Triple Century events. My father would drive the support car outfitted with flashing lights for night riding. I was joined by two friends who would get out of the car and ride with me occasionally. We made it down to Litchfield in about 18 hours with enough time to get some rest in a cheap motel. The next morning the event began with a mass start with over 100 riders trying to set their personal best for the 200 and 300 mile distances. The midwest was warm that year with the afternoon temperatures nearing 100 degrees. I was able to finish the 300 mile event in under 15 hours and get to bed before 10:00 PM. My crew repacked the car and got a few hours of sleep also. Then we were back on the road at 5:00 AM and heading for home. I arrived back at my house after sundown having completed riding 920 miles in less than three days and still sleeping at night. It was a good simulation of what I imagined riding across the country could be.

A few months later I had heard of a new event called the "The Bicycle Across Missouri" (BAM). It was organized by my friend Bob Smelzer who had ridden Paris-Brest-Paris the year before. He came back to organize a similar event in the United States. Although "BAM" would be only 540 miles it would be the longest nonstop event I had ridden so far. My dad and I drove to St. Louis, Missouri over Labor Day Weekend to see what riding across the state and back would be like. Breakfast in the predawn darkness was at a Denny's Restaurant. I noticed a cute dark haired women dressed in bike clothes was sitting at a table with a bunch of guys. I was wondering if a women was going to ride BAM. There were about 36 riders who started the ride and one of them was my boyhood hero Kevin Kvale who has set the Transcontinental Record with his brother five years earlier. I wanted to see if I could keep up with him and the collection of other serious long distance riders who had come to Missouri to join the ride. The pace was spirited the first 100 miles through the hilliest section of the route. I was with a group of six riders who were riding strong up the hills and I was barely hanging on. I rode my black TREK bike that unique because in the late 1970s TREK was hand building frames with Columbus tubing in the United States. The event rules were similar to a brevet where we had to stop and get our card signed every

75 miles. At about 150 miles our group came into a checkpoint and we made an agreement to depart in three minutes. I waited while we filled our waterbottles and grabbed some pocket food. After five minutes the other riders were not ready so I left figuring they would catch me on the hills ahead. After an hour I was still by myself. It would have been nice to have some company to ride with during the night but I wanted to try and ride the 540 miles nonstop and I didn't want to prolong the ride by waiting around. I didn't know where anyone else was behind me. I continued to the turn around point near Kansas City and started backtracking to St. Louis. After 30 minutes I saw the next rider coming toward me. It was Kevin and then several other riders. I figured I had about a one hour lead and I had still planned to ride nonstop through the night. I kept thinking the group would catch me the next day. After riding 500 miles I was so tired that the final 40 miles took over 3 hours. I finished in mid afternoon in about 32 hours. I was completely exhausted and BAM was another good test for me of just how hard it would be to ride across the country in 12 days. Riding BAM was a life changing event for me which I didn't realize it until several months later.

A week after BAM the organizers send us a list of the results and a short biography with the hometown and address for each rider. Less than half of the entrants had finished. The last rider to finish before the 60 hour cut-off time was a woman. Her name was spelled Susan Notorangelo but I couldn't pronounce it. I decided to write her a letter and ask why she had decided to ride an event as difficult as BAM. I told her I was planning to try to break the transcontinental record the following year and I was interested in what motivated her to set goals. When Susan received my letter she took it over to her boyfriend's house who was an avid cyclist. He encouraged Susan to ask me about joining my crew for the record attempt. During the next few months we exchanged long letters and even had some phone calls about getting ready for the Transcontinental Record. Sometime during that winter the Los Angeles to New York Record was expanded to the Double Transcontinental starting from New York. I still hadn't met Susan in person but she said she had time during the summer of 1981 to go on the whole record attempt.

In mid May of 1981 I was doing a 24 hour track record attempt at the Northbrook Velodrome near Chicago. It would be my final tune up ride before

the Double Transcontinental. Susan wanted to see the track record so she rode her bike 350 miles from St. Louis to northern Illinois a few days before the track ride. I was impressed that she was that spunky to ride back and forth from St. Louis.

Susan arrived a day before the track record attempt and she helped me get the final details ready for the ride. By this time I think she has broken up with her old boyfriend and we hit it off well. At that time in my life I could have had any girl I pleased, but I didn't please anyone so Susan was my first girlfriend. Our relationship would continued to grow in the months ahead with many stressful and emotional experiences during the Double Transcontinental Record Attempt. We had a lot in common physically and mentally and I relied a lot on her organization and motivational skills. The 24 hour track record went okay considering it was a cold rainy weekend in May. I was riding my 1960's chrome Raleigh track bike with a 42 x 13 gear. The previous record was 369 miles. I did 392 miles in 20 hours and felt it was a good effort to get ready for the cross country ride two weeks later. Now I had to get my head ready for the racing across the United States.

During the final months before the record attempt my thoughts ranged from feeling invincible to wondering what I had gotten myself into. I had a friend named Jerry Powers who was 40 year old and owned some successful businesses in town. He started calculating how much the Double Transcontinental would cost. He added up all the costs for motorhome rental, gas for three vehicles, some food for the crew and various other supplies. The record attempt was going to cost at least \$10,000. Two weeks before we were scheduled to begin the record attempt we had about half of the funds we needed. Jerry started talking to his friends with business around town to collect more money for the trip mostly as \$50 to \$100 donations. We had a meeting with the crew and we decided to start riding from New York and see how far we would get.

We also had some equipment sponsors. There was an upstart company called SPECIALIZED that wanted to promote their new line of tires. They were willing to give me 30 tires and tubes for the event. Also Bob Shaver was starting a company called ShaverSport which made clothing. He made me a dozen jerseys and shorts. I had two bikes which I got while working at a bike shop for two years. Most of my other equipment was a mix of other

things I had collected. My arm warmers were made out of wool tube socks. I had two pairs of shoes and one pair of tights. All my cycling clothing would fit in two milk crates.

End Part III