

Lon Haldeman's

1981 Double Transcontinental Record

Start Part 6

We made our share of mistakes but by the fourth day we were now in a good routine. Getting back on the bike each morning was the toughest part of the day. The aches and pains of just sitting on the saddle was a tender area. I was using an original Kool Gear Saddle and a Brooks Professional Saddle. I had not started using the Brooks B-17 model seats that would save me on many future cross country events. I was still learning what equipment to use on multi day races.

My knees were not used to getting out of bed and turning 175 mm cranks. My legs were stiff for the first 20 miles each morning until I got warmed up. Fortunately after 50 miles I was usually feeling pretty good until sundown. The middle nine hours of each day were my most productive and I tried to knock off 150 miles between late morning and dark.

My father had arranged for police escorts across the major cities. This took a lot of work and coordination to arrange and predict my arrival times. About 30 miles or two hours before we arrived at a city my father would confirm my arrival time with the police. I remember entering Indianapolis as six police motorcycles waited for me. They immediately sent two motorcycles to the next traffic light. They stopped the cross traffic as me and my support car and the other four motorcycles maintained a 23 mph pace. Then two of

the remaining four motorcycles leapfrogged to the next traffic light and stopped cross traffic again. Two of the original police bikes stayed 50 yards in front of me. The other two police bikes who were left behind us sprinted to the front again at the next light. This leapfrog escort support was repeated for over 50 traffic lights across the city. I had been riding at a comfortable 17 mph before I got to the city. Now I was sprinting through every traffic light to stay with the 23 mph escort. The whole process was quite exciting but very tiring to maintain for 10 miles on tired legs. As I reached the far side of Indianapolis I waved goodbye to the police escort. I was relieved to continue at my 17 mph pace again. The mental rush of the escort would stay with me for several hours.

I was making good time riding across Illinois on Route 36. The cement road was flat and straight heading west into the horizon. As we neared the state capitol in Springfield our route merged onto the interstate. We needed to find another way across the city. I stopped on the entrance ramp with my support car and we looked at a map. Just then a police car arrived and made sure we didn't get on the interstate. We ask what were our options and he suggested a route on side streets through town. These were the days before google map so the officer tried to make a rough sketch of the streets we needed to take. The whole delay took at least 30 minutes before we were on the road again.

Once we found our way across town we were heading out past the flat cornfields again. We were going to cross the large Illinois River at Pittsfield,

Illinois. My dad had heard that the bridge was closed and under construction. He went ahead with the other two support vehicles and made arrangements for me to have permission to walk my bike across the long 100 meter bridge while the vehicle drove around the 30 mile detour and caught up with me on the other side.

The problem was that neither me or my support car heard the plan for me to walk across the bridge. These were the days before cell phones. When we arrived at the closed bridge and saw the detour signs we turned north and started following the detour to the next bridge crossing which was 15 miles away. My dad was waiting on the other side and couldn't understand what was taking me so long to walk across the bridge. There wasn't anyway for either support crew to contact each other. By the time I rode 30 miles on the detour it had taken me over two hours. Everyone on both sides of the river was upset about the lack of communication. It was our second long delay for the day. We all learned a lesson and tried to keep our focus on moving west.

As I neared the Mississippi River into Missouri the flat lands were now behind me. The rolling hills of the Ozark's lay ahead. I was really tired and sore. Fortunately I had traveled the first 1,000 miles in less than five days. Some of my stiffness was going away. I tried not to think about how far I had to go to reach the Pacific Ocean.

Missouri was probably one of my favorite cycling states. The thick forests and rolling hills made for interesting and beautiful riding. As I neared the town of Mexico, Missouri on Rt. 54 I was met by some friends from my midwest cycling events. I was surprised to see them and it was the first time I had met any riders on the road. We had known each other from riding the Litchfield Double Century since 1977 and riding the 540 mile Bicycle Across Missouri event in 1980. It was great to see them and chat a while as we rode about 20 miles until sundown.

*We said goodbye that night and I continued riding into the night. The traffic was light and the humid midwest air was cool and refreshing for a change. I pedaled until 10:25 PM and slept in the motor home parked in a desolate supermarket near Kingdom City. We were refining our daily schedule and I was learning how to stay on the bike longer during the day. After five days I had traveled 1,158 miles.*