

Part 27

I was back on the bike at 6:00 AM. The sun was burning off the morning fog. I was looking forward to riding the remaining hills in daylight and being able to coast down the grades at full speed. Our current route would jog north on Rt. 220 toward Cumberland, Maryland. There we would rejoin Rt. 40 which we had ridden 23 days earlier. Our final 300 miles to New York City would backtrack through Harrisburg, Pennsylvania and several county roads through the Amish countryside. Considering I was very tired I was enjoying my last day on the bike. By late afternoon we had less than 200 miles to go. The traffic was getting busy and if I hadn't remembered the route from departing New York I would have expected to arrive in the city any minute.

I rode into the night and arrived in Allentown, Pennsylvania near midnight. John Schubert was an editor at BICYCLING MAGAZINE who had their headquarters nearby. A month ago before we started our record ride, I had stopped by and had seen John at his office. He had followed our progress across the country during the daily phone interviews. I think he was amazed that we actually returned to the east coast. When John appeared on the side of the road he was dressed in his cycling clothes. He said he wanted to ride with me the final 100 miles to New York.

My dad had been making plans for us to get permission to ride through the Holland Tunnel which goes under the Hudson River into Manhattan Island. Going through the tunnel would be shorter than going over the George Washington Bridge. That would save us about 15 miles of getting to the finish at city hall. I needed to get through the tunnel before 6:00 AM when rush hour started. They

would need to close the tunnel and pump fresh air through the tunnel for about 15 minutes before I could ride through. I knew I didn't have too much time to spare if I was going to ride 100 miles in six hours.

I rode with John as we got on the New Jersey Turnpike. We had permission to ride on the wide expressway which avoided many of the smaller towns and traffic lights in New Jersey. I was feeling pretty alert and it was nice to ride with John side by side and talk about bikes and his work at BICYCLING MAGAZINE.

We were counting down the miles when my dad pulled up beside us in the other van. He had been on the phone with the Holland Tunnel Port Authority and they were expecting our arrive. They said everything was fine if I arrived by 5:00 AM. My dad was upset with the time change. We still had 50 miles to go in two hours. There wasn't anyway I was going to make it in time. When my dad told me the news I said all we can do is try to get there by 5:00 AM. I knew I was going to break the record of 12 days and 3 hours but now we were trying to see by how much.

I picked up the pace from 20 mph to 25 mph. The night was calm and road was slightly downhill to the ocean. John said he couldn't hold that pace and he dropped behind me into my draft. The remaining miles flew by on the turnpike. The traffic was light at 4:00 AM. The road signs to various New York City locations marked our progress into the city. Susan and my dad had driven ahead to the entrance of the tunnel. These were the days before cell phones so there was no way to tell them where we were on the route.

The minutes were counting down. It was 4:45 AM and I was still 6 miles away. At 5:00 AM Susan saw the lights of our support car coming down the road. She convinced the Port Authority to let us through the tunnel a few minutes late. We rolled up to the entrance as the Authority cleared the tunnel of traffic and fumes. After fifteen minutes an escort car arrived with yellow flashing lights on the roof. Their driver said "Let's roll" and we proceeded into the tunnel with our three support vehicles following me.

It was still dark with a faint glow of sunrise over New York City ahead. The tunnel is downhill going under the river. I didn't have any trouble keeping up with the escort car at 20 miles per hour. The second half of the tunnel is uphill and I needed to stand up to maintain my pace up the climb. As I came out the other side I was in downtown New York. It was still several blocks to City Hall. I rolled up to the steps of City Hall where we had been 24 days and 3 hours earlier. There was a USCF Cycling Federation Official waiting for me to record the time. It was 5:35 AM and the city was still quite. We had set Double Transcontinental Record. Our time from Santa Monica was 10 days, 23 hours and 35 minutes. We had broken the one way record by over a day.

There was a strange sense of anti climax as we stood in front of City Hall. We had been in motion for over three weeks with a deadline and goal for each day. Now we were finished. It was good to be finished but it was kind of a let down to have it all end. What would we do next. We didn't have any plans beyond City Hall. I hadn't eaten anything most of the night during the final time trial to the finish. The crew brought out a folding chair and table and I ate some French Toast my Mom made in the motorhome parked along the curb.

The city was waking up. A security guard asked us to pack up and move. We loaded up our vehicles and drove back over the bridge to Staten Island to Susan's Aunt's house which was our headquarters 24 days earlier. I took a shower and went to bed by 9:00 AM. At

noon Susan had scheduled another teleconference call with newspapers and magazines from around the country. She had been updating them with our daily progress and the following had been growing during the past week.

I was still blurry eyed and my mind was foggy when Susan woke me up and told me I had to come to the kitchen table to answer questions from reporters. I don't remember much about the news conference except one phone call. It was from John Marino who's cross country I had just broken. John congratulated me on setting the record. Then he started telling me about a cross country race he was organizing for the next year. The race would be between John Marino and John Howard the recent winner of the Hawaii Ironman, and Michael Shermer who had recently set a cycling record from Seattle to San Diego. Since I had just set the Cross Country Record John Marino asked if I would like to join the race.

Six hours earlier I had thought my goals for cross country racing had been met. I didn't think I would ever ride across the United States again. Now in just a few hours later my life changed again.

"Sure" I said. I could see my crew members around the table cringe when they realized we would be crossing the country again next year. Little did we all realize what we had gotten ourselves into. The Great American Bike Race would

start a whole new era of goals and develop the new sport of long distance cycling.