



Day Three: U.S. 36 between Last Chance and Byers. Part of a line of thunderstorms that built late in the afternoon. The rain that can be seen falling (especially to the right of the road) and accompanying lightning appeared never to have gotten closer than four or five miles away. Photo by Dan Brekke.

The Last Chance...

The Last Chance Randonnée has seen worse weather in previous years but that was little consolation for the 34 randonneurs fighting gusting winds as they rode out and back from Colorado to Kansas this past September. Support crew Margo Bonner described near zero visibility conditions in Kansas as tunnels of dust engulfed the road. Winds at the finish in Louisville, CO were 47 mph, gusting to 62 mph.

The Last Chance Randonnée is named for the town of Last Chance, Colorado through which it travels. The route extends from Louisville (between Denver and Boulder) in the plains of eastern Colorado to the farm fields of Phillipsburg in western Kansas.

For John Mazzola (Cedar Crest, New Mexico) it was his first randonnée. Being an accomplished mountain bike racer, John easily detected a competitive spirit among the Last Chance riders, many of whom had time goals. However, as the miles and days went by, he said, you eventually became more concerned with your own performance and less concerned with what other riders were doing.

Camaraderie extended to the support crews as well. Brevet rider Liz Mazzola crewed for her husband, John, and anyone else who happened to ride into the checkpoint. When she wasn't supporting the riders, Liz used her time to soak up the local culture. She learned from the

locals how to make silage (winter feed for livestock) and the difference between ranchers and farmers. Between checkpoints Liz took pictures of John Deere tractors which dwarfed her Air Stream trailer.

What impressed veteran randonneur Ken Bonner (Victoria, BC) more than the gusting winds and farm implements was the warmth of the Kansas people. Once a rider enters a restaurant or store in that state, it's hard to get out as people want to know where you're from and to where you're going. It seems each randonnée has its own challenges. —Susan Plonsky

Susan is Arizona RBA, and a Last Chance 2005 finisher.

The Last Chance / Dance?

BY JOHN KRAMER

Getting There: I flew to Denver on Frontier Airlines and took the Super Shuttle from the airport to the hotel and back. Travel was easy, Frontier was on time, and they only charged me \$50 each way for my bike. The round trip ticket to Denver was inexpensive as was the hotel (by Seattle standards). The TSA inspected my bike box and removed my bike to access the wheels in the lower compartment. The baggies containing my pedals, skewers, chain and stem were askew and one of the restraint straps holding my bike inside the box was undone. I had to ditch the chap stick that I was using for my wind and sun burned lips at the security checkpoint. The enemies of our homeland might be planning to blow up an airliner with a chap stick. I had a middle seat on the flight back and sat next to a 15 year old girl who spent the entire flight trying to get as far away from me as she could. I decided I better not tease her as I was a sun burnt biker with funny tan lines, a six day old growth of gray beard and a funny bike hat. So I used my credit card to watch the movie "Nacho Libre" with Jack Black that caused me to laugh out loud from time to time which only caused the young girl to rest her forehead between her thumb and forefinger and try to shield her eyes from my general direction with the palm of her hand.

The Road to Nowhere: Rule one: Don't change any of your major gear before a big ride. So I bought a new pair of Sugoi RS Flex shorts for the ride with a deeply padded Chamois. This is exactly the type of short that I have avoided in the past as the builtup chamois causes abrasions to the skin around the edges of the chamois. But the Style Guy says yes to the blue Sugois so what could I do? Now, despite the Style Guy's abuse, I can say with great certainty, the 3D type of chamois still causes abrasions to the skin around the edge of the chamois where the leg moves across the saddle. Usually I use some Carmex at night to kill any pains, and by the next morning, after a 4 hour break, I am ready to go. I just used my normal dose of Lantiseptic this time and was able to get by without any Tagament dressing. I probably should have used some Carmex after showering though. My normal shorts are less expensive Sugoi without the fancy chamois and a pair of Castelli's and Body Geometry Specialized. The abrasions that I got the first day didn't get any worse but they did remind me of all the stupid stuff I do.

My secondary Schmidt E6 light fuzzed out the second morning. I replaced the bulbs several times and was not successful in restoring its operation. I was reminded that I forgot to put a thin magnifier card in my emergency kit. The bulbs are impossible to read and if I was really smart, I would color code them with a dab of testers model paint. I rode most of the ride with a single E6 and Petzl Myo headlamp. I noticed several other riders discovered the Myo as well. I have since gotten the secondary E6 to work again but the cause of the problem is still unknown. I used new Huteson carbon comp tires and had three flats. The carbon comps might be cheap but they sure don't resist thorns very well. Finding a thorn and changing an inner tube is easy with a carbon comp; they are easy to deal with. I abandoned my hydropack and used three water bottles. The hydropack caused me some problems on the VanIsle so I ditched it. I started the ride with my Oregon wool Jersey. I had to ditch the wool jersey on day two as it was too hot and the moisture that the jersey was collecting was not evaporating but was wicking to my cycling shorts where it started to give me crabby pants. So I reverted to my wool undershirt which worked well. The jersey cut is not generous for old guys like me with big bellies. A shop cut would probably work fine, but the combo, not so good. The only thing old guys like me get with a compromise like that is a big white belly poking out from under the front edge of a wet stinky jersey. It is just sure to humor the doe-eyed high school girls working at the Dairy Queen. I'll have to send the wool jersey to my 10 year old nephew. It should fit him fine after two hot water washings. I wore my summer SIR jerseys the last two days and they were very comfortable. I was shocked to see how much the Cascade 1200 jersey has shrunk since last year just hanging in the closet. Now it's almost a full size smaller!

Help Me Rhonda: My strategy for these long rides is to ride for 18 hours, stop for 6 hours to eat, shower, sleep and eat some more; rinse and repeat. The Last Chance fit this model very nicely so I had a

pretty good ride even though I was one of the slowest riders on the route. Some of the riders were UMCA people using the randonnée to qualify for RAAM. There were special controls called checkpoints set up so that support crews could legally provide support to the riders. One type was



Day Two :Veronica Tunucci riding the final stretch of Day Two, between Oberlin and Atwood.
Photo by Dan Brekke.

called a personal checkpoint and the other was just a notation on the cue sheet that support was permitted. There were personal support checkpoints every 30 to 50 miles but always where commercial services were also available to riders who did not have personal support crews. So it was a fast group of riders, mostly interested in UMCA stuff. We had a great dinner at the ApresFinish and the food was excellent too. I got a chance to see the other riders.

The last day was looking pretty good. I rounded by the first three days with only a couple of minor problems. I had plenty of time, had a good night's sleep and a good breakfast. After the fog burned off around 10:00 a.m. and I could once again see out of my eye glasses, the sun came out and it looked like a great day to finish up the ride. But the weather can change rapidly, which may be one of the lessons of the Last Chance. The route turned into a fairly ugly looking rain storm with high head winds 15 miles before Platteville. The sun went away and the temperatures fell about 15 degrees. I got used to riding using the drops with my head down on this ride. I noticed the big mud clumps on the road were actually toads, out enjoying the day in their own special way, soaking up the rain. So that was my entertainment for the next several hours, watching for toads and practicing evasive maneuvers. I wished those toads a safe journey amongst the passing automobiles. I was glad I brought my rain jacket and helmet cover. I have ridden in wind before but never by choice in wind this strong. The final run to Boulder and John Lee's house had huge head wind, shoulders littered with falling tree branches and heavy vehicular traffic. The wind was strong enough that it would not be possible to walk the bike and I was feeling pretty lucky to have ample body mass to keep my bicycle on the ground. It was slow going but I finished the last 103 miles in less than eleven hours including breakfast and lunch and a really good burrito at Platteville!

He Ain't Heavy, He's Just Phat: There are some interesting sections on the Last Chance mostly because you have to invent interest in something to keep yourself from going automotive.

For example, the winds allowed me to ride some of the slowest miles of my entire biker life. I was enlightened by this opportunity. So I had plenty of time to think about all of the stupid stuff I have to think. I thought a lot about thinking about nothing but I was not able to think about nothing for any length of time so I counted The White Stripes and wished for my mp3 player. I ditched my mp3 player on day two as I didn't want the extra weight but I was sorry later when I discovered new interpretations for the concept of slow. I think the Last Chance is a good chance to review the Sysiphus myth. There are sections that are not flat but undulate endlessly, unrelentingly, maddeningly, with chip seal and without, with shoulders and without, with cross wind and with head wind, with snakes and with more snakes, a virtual cornucopia of up and down with rider supplied variety to boot.

Jack White, No Stripes, Cold Mountain: I also enjoyed the rattlesnakes warming up on the pavement just after sundown. Many times they were already dead, kilt by an automotive but many times they were moving. So it was interesting to think how to evade them if there was an overtaking automotive. You don't have a lot of reaction time at night with a bike light. Would they strike before your bike crushes their back? What if your bike tire didn't crush them? Would they go for your tire or your leg? What would happen if you were going slow up a steep hill? What would happen if they flipped up into your spokes? I hate snakes. As if "Snakes on a Plane" wasn't bad enough Ack...Snakes on a Brevet...Phft! Is it okay to kill something if you're afraid of it?

On day three, the Atwood control



Day Three: Westbound, a few miles east of Cope, Colorado, on U.S. 36. The winds had slackened at midday, and occasionally the riders had a nice following breeze. Photo By Dan Brekke.

ran wakeup calls at 01:30, a very bad time of day for me. I was not able to recover from the lost sleep so all day I felt sleepy and slow and I stopped several times for ditch naps. I would not recommend "Ditch Naps" on Last Chance. There are fire ants, and those toads and the rattle snakes that must come from somewhere. But everywhere looks the same so the snakes could be everywhere! I stopped once at a rest stop, possibly the only rest stop on the entire route, and slept in the wind on a picnic table for about 10 minutes before waking up freezing cold. The next stop was a closed weight scale building where I could get out of the wind and had a large parking lot buffer from snakes and similar things. The other naps I just stood over my bike and put my head in my hands and startled myself awake just before falling over.

Thunder Road: When there is a massive side wind, the box shaped semi tractor trailers ripping by at 75 mph produce a wind shockwave that is seriously disruptive. A semi coming from behind can produce a vortex that wants to suck you into the trailer wheels. This is a most uncomfortable feeling with different combinations of passing semi tractor trailers approaching and overtaking on sections of road

without shoulders. For the most part, the drivers were professional and courteous and probably understood the effect of the vortex created by their trailers so they gave you the lane to buffer out the shockwave. I suppose there are truckstop stories about the deer or the dog that got sucked into the trailer wheels and crushed to bloody bits. It seemed to me that a large percentage of drivers would pass you and leave you lots of room. Not to get down on the truckers in the POW and BC, but the guys that won't give you an inch on the road regardless of the oncoming traffic would be dangerous here and probably anywhere. I think the roads were remarkably good compared to my home conditions. The shoulders were wide and I observed almost no broken glass and no broken booze bottles, wine coolers or beer bottles. Maybe the wind blows it up north to the Bad Lands or Canada. There was some road construction and chip seal but the Last Chance had the best pavement of any randonnée I've ridden.

Home Coming: The best part of a long ride is getting home and greeting the wife and getting hugs and kisses and congratulations and all the food you can eat for free. And also greeting the boys who come racing around the corner, running and jumping, acting up like comedians, squeaking and chirping with sparkling eyes, making funny noises and demanding hugs and tickles with their tongues hanging out and their tails wagging. It is a good feeling to be home.



Roadside Attractions....

Milk Man? Dan Brekke, who recently rode the Colorado Last Chance 1200km Randonnée, snapped this picture on Day 1. He wrote: "Finally revealed: whereabouts of lesser known comonarch of the realm of dairy delights (in Last Chance, Colorado, U.S. 36 just east of intersection with Colorado 71.)" For more of Dan's pictures, see the Last Chance articles that begin on page 17.