

Bessies Creek 2016 race report

By: Kenneth Jessett

The weather in south east Texas was kinder to us this year, all those protestations, pleadings and downright swearing finally paid off – although I accept and understand that the debt to the God of wind and cycling will have to be paid in full one day. I just need to find a suitable and uncomprehending mortal to lay all the blame on and pacify the Olympian deities with a suitable sacrificial candidate.

The wind did kick up a bit on the Saturday around ten, just to remind everyone that we are on the Gulf Coast with its prevailing and gusting south east wind - but otherwise the weather was kind and forgiving.

Seventy five racers turned out for the weekend and records were broken, some substantially and some marginally.

In the Gulf Coast 511, David Baxter, starting for the 36 hour at seven Friday morning, took advantage of a night's sleep to smash the previous record for a standard bike by a good two hours, covering the 24 laps of the 21.3 mile loop required in an astounding 29.24 hours. Looking almost as fresh as when he started, David told me his nutrition was entirely liquid for the length of the challenge.

All other GC 511 racers choose the longer 48 hours for the race, and Rusty Yeager starting at 7 Thursday night into a full moon, followed the leader covering the course in total elapsed time of 33.49 hours - and this after suffering a mild episode of sickness and a forced break off the bike.

Alan Johnson - training for the Race Across the West in June on his recumbent, turned in a very respectable time of 43.32 hours and beat his own previous record by an hour to set a new record for the event.

Michael Hunter finished the 511 miles in a respectable 44.08 hours and John Evans retired after riding 383 miles.

Raymond VanEtten on his yellow HPV trike, variously called the banana or the yellow torpedo, made it home in 42.43 hours following a very long nap in the middle of the race. Totally enclosed in the HPV, Raymond entered his own world inside his 'box on three wheels'. Actually, he could just have easily taken naps inside it.

Kelsey Regan on a standard bike won the women's division, riding the 511 mile course for a new women's record in a very consistent 42.37 hours.

The 24 Hour race kicked off at 7 Friday evening into a balmy airless night with dusk just falling and a sky full of vigilant stars.

Brian Alger qualified for the RAAM by racing 400 miles on his standard bike followed very closely by Richard Nicholson with 391 miles and Steve Barraco at 389 miles. With three racers this close, it was exciting for all of us to watch the event unfold as the night turned to day, and the wind kicked up to remind the racers this really was the windy coast.

Alison Carey set a new record for a standard bike in the women's division of 378 miles eclipsing the previous record and qualifying her for solo entry into the Race Across America. Alison was followed closely by Amy Russell, the previous record holder, coming home with 362 miles which also beat her previous record for the event.

In the recumbent division, Ben Tomblin romped home on his Cruzbike amassing 421 miles and just missing setting a new record for the event. Watching Ben on his front wheel drive Vendetta recumbent drifting through the neutralized parking area, was much like watching a gangly new born foal finding its legs for the first time, but once racing along at 20+ MPH on the open road, this machine becomes an extraordinary vision of beauty and elegance. It would be reasonable to petulantly exclaim here, "I want a Vendetta", but the fact is I have one and to my chagrin have yet to master it. But one day I will and then watch out!

Ben Tomblin is joining Alan Johnson and Ed Fleming (who did not start) in racing the RAW this year.

RAAM solo finisher Maria Parker smashed all sorts of records on her Cruzbike recumbent with 458 miles, the furthest anyone has ridden in the history of the 24 Hour event and this was 5 MPH faster than any man or woman on any kind of two wheeled machine at this event. I have no doubt we will see more of this special type of recumbent bike on these ultra-distance endurance races in the future.

New this year was a couple of trikes, one in the 24 Hour race and one in the six hour race.

Bob Page scored 327 miles in the 24 Hour race on his racing trike - and what is particularly impressive is that he is 70 years of age. Watch out you youngsters! Any vision of an old lady riding a trike with a basket on the front going to the grocery store is dispelled entirely when you see these trike racers out on the road.

Larry Eads and Lisa Anderson won the two person mixed division romping home with a very impressive 383 miles.

Thomas Niccum won the **12 Hour** male standard bike division with 224 miles – an average close to 19MPH- and closely followed by Wesley Wilmer with 219 miles and Joe Sitterly with 215 miles – another fine race to watch unfold.

In the recumbent race Rich Putich counted 235 miles followed by Tim Oujezdsky at 170 miles and Bob Price with 107 miles. Tim told me he is planning to try for new UMCA approved 100 mile record for his age group this year. Good luck to Tim!

Stephanie Page set a new record of 213 miles in the **12 Hour** female standard bike division. These women are fast!

Team Ron – Ron Harvot and Ron Singleton entertained with 225 miles in the two male standard team division, Allison Jones and Elaine Rowe riding as Handlebar Harlots raced 213 miles in the female standard category and Martin Hukle and Carol Ambuhl made it home with 218 miles in the mixed standard team category. The four member mixed standard team Chain Grinders – Stephen Williams/Jane Lee/Marlana Nel/Sam Kersey - gave us 192 miles.

Dan Plutto comfortably won the **Six Hour** standard bike category racing 113 miles with Roger Heard second at 98 miles and Steven Wiens third at 95 miles.

James Parker set a new record for the recumbent division on his Cruzbike running up a total of 139 miles for an average speed of 23MPH. That makes it three firsts for the Cruzbike invasion this year.

On the second trike at the series, Steven Jackson romped with 97 miles and Rhonda Green on a standard bike won the female category with 81 miles.

Of particular note, Mechtilde Willumsen came to the races determined to beat her previous two loop record and easily overtook that old record with three loops this year for a distance of 64 miles. We look forward to Mechtilde coming back next year to try for four loops - when she will be in her 75th year.

Racers' at this year's event came from: Nebraska, Indiana, British Columbia, Georgia, New Jersey, Arizona, Ohio, New York, Manitoba, Wisconsin, Virginia, Florida, Oklahoma, North Carolina, Louisiana, Illinois, Nevada and Texas.

All in all, it was a very exhilarating, challenging weekend of racing, rounded out with a dinner at the pizza joint and raffle prizes won across the board. All of the racers appeared to have had a good time, rode hard and fast and went home happy, and that is our measure of an extremely successful event.

See everyone next year.

Kenneth Jessett

Race Director

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