

## Vermont 200-on-100 – June 23, 2018    Sprinter to Endurance Rider?

Had you asked me a year ago if I would ever have considered riding my bike for 14 hours, I would have said you are nuts! A year ago this past weekend, friends of mine, Marcia and Stephanie, rode the 200 on 100 from the Canadian Border with Vermont down Route 100 to the Massachusetts border with Vermont, around 213 miles, and with more than 13,000 feet of climbing. The evening of their ride I was at a concert in Boston with my husband Tim and friend Jen. I thought of what it might be like to be on your bike that long. That was something I could just not get my head around.

After their ride, many of us were inspired and made comments like, “if you do it again, let me know, I am in!” Caught up in the excitement and envy of having accomplished something so impressive and awe inspiring, I found myself longing to do it myself. So I was one of the people who expressed interest in doing it in 2018. Well, my opportunity came a few months later during the winter months of 2017/2018 when Marcia sent out an email to those of us who had expressed interest. We had to confirm if we were truly in for this event within a few weeks. I talked it over with my husband Tim, whom I knew would be interested, as well as with my coach, Robin Farina of Revolution Coaching. After much discussion, we decided to commit and go for it. How did I reach this decision? 1) I was able to do this after several years of serious injury, surgeries, physical therapy, and overcoming PTSD from past accidents; and 2) I was not getting any younger and didn’t want to miss out on this opportunity. I was also very concerned with having to ride the trainer for countless hours during the NH winter months to which Robin assured me that she would not support that kind of time indoors. So, we were in! Tim and I were on our way to train and prepare for this epic event that would take place in a half years time.

My training was continuous, having never stopped riding nor training after finishing the Mt. Washington Hill Climb last August 2017, but the long rides didn’t start until April when the weather allowed for it. I rode my first training century the first weekend of May and from that point on, it was 100-150 mile rides every weekend (with the exception of a weekend with a 60 mile, fast gravel ride) until two weeks out from the 200 on 100. I definitely surprised myself with this newly acquired ability to ride my bike for hours on end and liked how my body was changing and leaning down. My clothes fit better and my pants were falling off of me, which were nice perks!

Tim and I would be riding the 200 on 100 with 4 other riders: Marcia, April, another Tim (we nicknamed him TMC), and Paul. We all got the opportunity to ride with one another throughout the two months leading up to the event, but we all only rode together once, two weeks before the big ride, which was a great day on the bike and sealed the deal that we were going to make a great team!

As it grew closer to the big day I was definitely nervous. Tapering the final two weeks was mentally as well as physically tough on me. My body went through waves of not feeling well, even vertigo the week before. I had never before trained for such a big event, starting so many months out. The mental toll in preparing for this event was rough on me at times. My confidence definitely built up when I completed my longest ride with my teammate April, also a client of Robin’s. We rode 140+ miles on Memorial Day Weekend, at 8:40:00. Little did I then know about the differences in riding that versus an additional 6 hours!

Fast forward to Friday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>, the day before the 200 on 100. The plan was to meet at Marcia's and her husband Gary's house. There would be six of us riding the 200 on 100, with two vehicles carrying all of our gear, nutrition, and bikes, and a support team including Gary and our amazing mechanic Erin, who has years of professional race and neutral support experience. TMC's parents were driving the other vehicle and had driven up from North Carolina to assist us. So we all convened at noon, proceeded to load ten bikes (four of us had back up bikes), extra sets of wheels, gear, food, and water and piled into the two vehicles to begin our trek to the small, Canadian border town of North Troy, Vermont. We arrived around 5 pm, got ourselves settled, and ate together in the backyard. Erin then proceeded to check over all of our bikes and get their support vehicle ready for the next long day – bikes, extra clothing and gear, food, water, bottles. Most of were in bed by 8:30 pm. I lay in bed and tried to mentally prepare myself for the unknown that lay ahead the next day.

My alarm went off at 3:40 am. It felt like the middle of the night. We stumbled around, got ourselves fed, dressed, and outside to get on our bikes to ride the 0.7 miles to the start of the 200 on 100, just in front of the Canadian Border. We took a team photo, the event coordinator said some words of encouragement, and we were off! There were about 50 riders in total as we rolled off to start our daylong journey down the spine of the state of Vermont (and without cellular coverage for most of the route). Each rider or group was completely self-supported with their own vehicles; there was neither neutral support nor typical century-ride lunch stops.

We started out at a brisk pace in the group of 50 riders and while it was nice to be going 20 mph, we knew this was not a pace we could maintain and, after about 30-45 minutes, settled into our own group. The countryside was beautiful – cows were running alongside us early on, we were surrounded by rolling fields of green; the weather was overcast but not raining... at least not yet. The temperature was 55F when we started. The sun peaked out at us a little bit, but it mostly stayed overcast, or worse, the entire day.

I covered my Garmin with painter's tape, as I didn't want to fixate on the mileage, ride time, nor time of day. I found this from previous long rides to be very liberating. I was riding my bike all day until I finished and didn't need constant reminders of how far I had gone or how much I had left to go. We did stop once at a store, at about 3 hours or so into the ride, to use the bathroom and grab some food. This would be the only stop throughout the day using an actual bathroom – the rest of the day would be using Mother Nature's restroom. Not too long after that only "real" stop it started to lightly rain. We stopped to grab our rain gear from the vehicle and then continued on. We really aimed to keep the stops short to prevent our legs from seizing up.

On the first climb I felt really good, found my pace, and settled in. We were rerouted off of Route 100 onto Route 12 to Montpelier for about 40 miles and eventually made our way back to Route 100 in Stockbridge. There were also a one mile and four mile stretches of dirt gravel roads that we rode to avoid heavy traffic areas (luckily they were dry). The first half of the ride was good, we were still together as a team of six, eating and drinking regularly. But then as we grew closer to Killington (mile 120), the first of the bigger climbs in the second half of the ride, the weather and dynamics of the ride changed significantly. The rain starting pouring down, the winds picked up, and the temperature began

to drop. The two biggest climbs also still lay ahead – Mount Terrible (mile 149) and Mount Snow (mile 186).

Luckily I was wearing a cycling cap that stopped the rain from pouring onto my face and stinging my eyes. It was nearly impossible to see as the rain fell in bucket loads. I could see the red taillights of my teammates. It was nearly impossible to eat or drink during this stretch of extreme rain, with our wet jackets and heavier gloves. We also had to worry about the flooded roadways hiding the numerous holes and craters. We called out what we could, but we all hit holes. Luckily nobody went down nor flatted. One crater really hurt me, and my right elbow was numb and in pain for several minutes due to the impact.

Even if we had wanted to stop riding and abort, there was no easy option for us to do so. This was probably a good thing mentally, but the reality was that with six riders and one support vehicle driving along with us, there was no way for all of us to fit into that vehicle with our bikes – there were already four spare bikes on the rear rack. Had there been an emergency, a rider would have piled on/amongst all the riders' foods and liquids in the back seat. Calling for back-up support to our TMC's parents, who were now somewhere ahead, would be difficult without cellular coverage. After Mount Terrible, Paul and TMC pulled ahead to keep warm, while my husband, Tim, stuck with April, Marcia, and myself to support us to the end. He rode with each of us at different points and was our hero, my rock!

Mount Snow broke me. Mentally, I hit my limit when that ~2000 vertical feet climb never seemed to end. Every time I turned a corner I just saw the road continue up and up. I lost it! I was almost at the summit when I hit an emotional wall – I heard myself yell and scream and curse at the mountain. I started to tear up and hyperventilate. This was not good. I composed myself enough to make it to the top where Erin came up to me and talked me off the edge. He said all the right things to get me moving forward. I still wasn't looking at my computer but figured we still had at least two hours to go (30 more miles with 1000 feet of climbing, which I didn't know at that point, probably for the best). My body was exhausted and lower back was seizing from all the climbing efforts. I did break down and take two liqui-gel Advils before Mt. Snow as I could barely get on and off the bike to go to the bathroom during the short stops.

My husband was an angel! He stuck with me the final two hours, all the way to the border. Fortunately, from the top of Mt. Snow began, essentially, a 15-mile descent and rollers into Williston. But the last 15 miles included the final 1000 feet of climbing (starting with a steep wall) and this section, to the Massachusetts border with Vermont, would become my biggest challenge of the day. I had several more outbursts of "I am done!" and "I cannot ride any further!" and "I want to get off my bike!", to which my calm-natured husband said, "ok, go ahead, stop, get off your bike." That is funny now but not in the moment. There was no vehicle to climb in to and I had to just finish. Erin found us within the final 6 miles. I was struggling, mentally, feeling that the ride would never end. Tim was still close to me, but then he had to stop to refuel because he was about to bonk. Erin assisted sopping wet and shivering Tim and then came back up to me. Erin drove his vehicle near me for the final three miles to make sure I finished – what an amazing, committed support he was! I was in a dark place inside myself at the end, and it was also getting dark outside. The narrow, rural road, rain forest-like with greenery and trees

covering the road like a canopy, with lessening light was making me feel very anxious. Tim was not right with me at that point but he eventually caught back up to me. Then... I saw our team ahead: Paul, TMC, Marcia, and April, all cheering. It was surreal. I was about to get off of my bike when everyone yelled, "keep going!" The border was just a few feet beyond the "crowd," marked by a hidden, rusty sign at the change in pavement that marks the border from VT to MA. It was an insignificant marker at the end of a significant day. And so I completed the 200-on-100; 213 miles, 14,000 feet of climbing, in almost 14 and a half hours spent on my bike! I collapsed into the arms of my teammates, sobbing, finally able to release all the emotions inside of me that had trickled out in bits earlier on. I was done! My body was done for sure, but my mental and emotional state of mind had been pushed beyond its limits. To say that this was an epic adventure doesn't do it justice. This was beyond anything I ever thought that I could do.