



2005 BATTLE STORIES

EPIC DAY	2
MY FIFTH LOTOJA	2
THE FEW AND THE PROUD	4
PICNIC?	5
DRAGONFLYS	6
USE YOUR IMAGINATION	9
ATTRACT A DATE	12
AN ARCTIC CIRCLE DAY	14
HOPING FOR NASTY WEATHER	15
ME, MY BIKE, AND THE LEPRECHAUN	21
BRUTAL	22
BIKE FOR SALE	27
PODIUM BOY	29
BOUND AND DETERMINED	30

EPIC DAY

After the 2004 LOTOJA, a riding pal of mine and I determined that we needed to ride LOTOJA together in 2005. We discussed the fact that a reasonable sized, manageable group of six or so riders would be ideal to finish in better time than last year. We started asking around and in June of 2005 about 12 of our friends and acquaintances got together to plan for LOTOJA. It blossomed into 18 riders ranging in age from 26 to 58.

Everyone was already in training but we began having group rides every weekend starting in late June. We rode centuries together, we had canyon rides during the week and had quite an email network going exchanging thoughts, training, nutrition tips and got to know each other in a way that was truly special. We planned our motels, shuttles and support using email as well as meetings around a few beers at a local pub.

We were all grouped together in the 5100 Cat V's (except 1 Women cat 4). On starting day we fielded 17 riders. We had a series of emails regarding the weather forecast and bantered about clothing and lighting. This group was physically ready, mentally ready and equipment prepared. Sixteen of us finished the ride. The one member of our group who did not, had a kidney stone attack but still made it to Montpelier.

LOTOJA was an experience that transcended all of our mutual goals. We created a bond with each other that will never fade and will bring a twinkle to our eye when we are facing the last moments of our lives. The group consisted of: Mike Watson, Steve Scott, Ray Bierman, Chad Eberhardt, Cody Haroldson, Sonia Maxwell, Dave Funkhouser, Ted Messer, Charles Loyd, David Fliam, John Drury, Erik Hassen, Mike Hassler, Jeff Stevens, Mike Robbins, Jeffrey Johnson, and myself.

Steve Gallenson
Sandy, UT

MY FIFTH LOTOJA

LOTOJA 2005 was my fifth start for this ride. I'd finished each previous attempt, finishing a little stronger each time. This year my training felt about as good as it had in the previous years. Two weeks before LOTOJA, an especially strong training ride left me confident enough to target a ten hour finish time. Strong south winds the Friday before the race combined with a favorable forecast that this weather pattern would last through race day didn't hurt my high hopes.

The weather forecast on the TV news Friday night was the first indicator things would not develop as I'd hoped. Good thing I'd remembered to pack a jacket, just in case I'd need it...

Saturday morning arrived gray, foreboding, and with the wind out of the northwest. I wore the jacket instead of a long-sleeve jersey and set out with my start pack, still hoping to dodge the weather bullet. No such luck. I was riding strong, staying near the front of my pack. At first the rain was an annoyance, but I decided to smile and push on. The climb up Emigration Canyon was going well – riding with several strong riders at an aggressive pace. I had a feeling I was burning up my legs, but wanted to stick with the group I'd fallen in with. But, goodness, my hands were starting to get cold!

I'm not sure how long the snow was on the vegetation by the side of the road before I noticed it. Could have been a while, since my sunglasses – now functioning simply as a tinted rain shield – were fogged, wet, and dirty. Visibility was better with them off while climbing; but the eye protection was vital on the way down from the pass.

That's about when the fingers stopped working and the uncontrollable shivering started. I've never been so cold in my life. Shifting required using the heel of my hand, not the normal subtle flick of the fingers. The descent was more frightening than many others at much higher speeds, between the slick roads and the uncertainty that my body would respond to my brain's requests to shift balance, brake, or react in any way approaching the usual speed and dexterity. It was also around this time that I became conscious of the riders in trouble around me – standing by the side of the road, huddled in small groups or warming up in support and emergency response vehicles. The first ambulance heading up the hill as I dropped out of the steepest stretch sent a different kind of shiver through me, and I was glad to be feeling slightly less cold. Those warm cars and the thought of calling it a day had me thinking twice about whether to keep turning the pedals.

Fortunately, my lovely wife Laura was waiting with long tights at the Montpelier rest stop. She'd seen the cold riders coming in while waiting for me to get there, and smartly grabbed them along with the standard water bottles and food. When I asked her to go back to the car for long-fingered gloves, I could barely hold my bike by myself and eat at the same time. Happily, some other friendly support folks held the bike while I got myself together a bit. By the time I'd been there 10 minutes or so, the shivering had stopped and I felt okay to continue. As it turned out, the worst weather for the day was over.

In four previous LOTOJA rides, I hadn't had any rain, flat tires, or crashes. The rain, you've heard about. This year I still managed to dodge any crashes, although there was a close call when a rider in the paceline behind me flattened and his friend, who was right in front of me, pulled over to wait with him. As the friend pulled over, he clipped my wheel and nearly sent me to the pavement. I'm not sure how it happened, but I managed to stay upright.

In Afton, I learned that there weren't too many in my start pack ahead of me. Somehow, between the pace up that first climb and the attrition due to the cold, I was on pace for a personal-best finish relative to my pack. Shortly after Afton, though, I got

my first flat. Happily, the support car was right there; but the wheel they gave me didn't match up to my gearing. I guess my 9-speed rear cassette is outdated? All they could offer was 10-speeds. It worked, but I was reduced to just a few effective gears; the rest clattering and skipping. But, hey, it beat changing a tube with near-frozen fingers. The second flat came just a few miles later, and it took a little longer for the support car to show up that time. And, yes, the second wheel was also mis-matched to my bike's gearing.

Nonetheless, the situation was good enough that thoughts of abandoning had left me shortly after Montpelier. The rest of the ride was occasionally wet, but otherwise uneventful. It was great to be back on the classic route through Snake River Canyon, and to ride that last few miles from Jackson out to the finish line. Laura met me at the finish line with a hug, a cold beer, and somehow impressed by my foolhardy adventure this day.

Then, at the awards ceremony Sunday, we heard some real stories of survival. Yes, LOTOJA 2005 was an uncomfortable, inconvenient, hard day in my life. I'm proud that I finished. But I don't know jack about true suffering and survival. I can only hope that the self-imposed hard work of my cycling experiences somehow helps to prepare me for the time when my strength as a person is truly tested. Many thanks to the people at Epic Events, in the communities we pass through, and those who shared their stories of real survival.

Sean McCandless
Salt Lake City, UT

THE FEW AND THE PROUD

The cold that morning was expected. I had done Lotoja in 2003 and 2004 and it was freezing both years. Most people just put on their arm and leg warmers and expect it to warm up eventually. In past years, there had been steam rising from the ponds and streams as we rode by the fields just northwest of Logan; however, one odd thing about this year was that it was slightly warmer and there was no steam — a foreboding sign something was going to be different this year.

As the sun came up, the clouds around the eastern mountains cleared but the darkness never lifted from the mountains to the west. The wall of black clouds raced to cover us. As we rolled into Preston, it started to sprinkle. I knew that this was going to be a wet race.

When our group started to climb up Strawberry Canyon it started to rain heavier and turn colder. Someone in my group had a thermometer on their bike. At the start of the climb it read 45 degrees. As we climbed higher it got colder and the rain became denser. Then the snow started to fall. Before we knew it we were in a snowstorm.

There was a 10% chance of rain, but no one had ever expected it to snow! By the time our group reached the summit, snow was sticking to my body and bike. The side of the road had a ¼ - ½ inch of snow on it. The temperature was 35 on top. By this time there were bike riders spread all up and down the road.

With no rain jacket and only leg and arm warmers to protect me, I descended off of Strawberry pass into Montpellier. The whole way down, there were guys that were walking their bikes because they were shivering so badly that they couldn't control them. I kept my mind focused on not shivering so that I could make it to down the descent faster. There was a light but freezing north wind that I fought all the way into Montpellier. I finally reached the much awaited feed zone, which looked more like a triage center.

Bikers shivered all around with big coats trying unsuccessfully to block out the cold. As my wife went to fetch some more clothes to try to warm me up, a kind Montpellier citizen gave me some hot chocolate. By this time I had shivered every calorie out of me. After guzzling down the hot chocolate and dressing up, I headed back out.

The rest of the day was followed by more rain and cold. Once I reached the Teton Valley, I was disappointed by the cloud covered Teton Mountains. I had always wanted to see the majestic peaks, but at least I would soon be out of the rain, mud and cold. At the finish, my awestruck team congratulated me and told me that over half of the racers had quit, including themselves. LOTOJA 2005 finisher's motto should be "The few and the proud, the finishers."

Jason Packard
Springville, UT

PICNIC?

My husband, Dale Ipson and his riding buddy, Ryan Shaum entered the 2005 LoToJa in the "picnic" division. This was Dale's first LoToJa and Ryan had competed in one of the race's earliest runs about 20 years ago. We weren't ready for such a cold day. Like most, we had checked Weather.com and thought it would be beautiful weather for the ride; boy, were we wrong! Next year, we'll be ready for anything sub-zero to heat-wave.

Anyway, our story...

After starting the race in shorts, then adding layers as we went (by visiting sporting good and variety stores at every stop. I even heard a guy offer a girl \$50 for a set of hand warmers, she turned him down... her rider needed them), Ryan and Dale barely made it past a medic at Montpelier who really wanted Dale to get into the ambulance because he was shaking uncontrollably. Dale begged, "I have to go with him, we're

together." She didn't have much choice except to let them through to continue on.

Ryan and Dale made it to the final stop just before dark only minutes before the cut off time, so we told them to grab their stuff and go -- even if they had to stop in a few miles to eat and rest for a minute. On to Jackson they went into the dark. We waited for them at the finish line in the dark (could you get more light next time?) and light rain while listening to the announcer, "Will the support crew of number such-and-such please report to the timing table." Would our numbers be called next? No matter how tough and determined you are, we're all at the mercy of the elements. We'd heard this before at Montpelier, "We're sending three buses into the pass. If you haven't seen your rider yet, we will pick them up in the buses." Our hearts sank, would they really ride this far and not make it to the end? Then we hear, "The last rider is 5 miles out." Was it them? We quickly calculated how long it would take if they were included in that group. They didn't come in. We waited... Finally, Ryan pedaled in with Dale only a few minutes behind. They were tired, but very excited about finishing. The guy in charge of removing the timing chips said, "Hey, where's your chip?" Ryan says, "I don't have one, I'm picnic." The Chip guy is bewildered, "You're picnic?" Yep, Ryan and Dale finished somewhere around 12 hours 40 minutes or so. I don't think it was a picnic!

by Jolene Ipson, accompanied by Debbie Shaum (Support Crew)
Washington, UT

DRAGONFLYS

I have yet to ride in the LoToJa Classic, and probably never will, but I have attended the event and supported my husband, Dave Sharp, for a number of years. As I sat there in the awards ceremony and was brought to tears by both the event this year, and the moving stories that were told, I knew I too, needed to share a story with you.

As you may recall, Dave (my cute hubby) won the event this year for the Masters 35+. In fact, he was the fourth guy over the finish line on that cold, rainy day. In my book, any guy that crossed that day deserves to have a lotoja legend written about the experience! But for Dave, and my family, it was very special.

Sixteen months ago our 16 year old son, Colby, died in a fall while hiking on the red rock of Southern Utah. As you can imagine we have been completely devastated from this horrible loss. At the time of Colby's death, Dave was trying to recover from a broken clavicle suffered in a CRIT race earlier in the Spring. It did not heal as it should and 3 weeks after burying our son, Dave went into surgery to have a plate attached to his clavicle to hold it together. By this time it was the end of June and certainly none of us were even thinking or cared about Lotoja.

It wasn't long, however, before Dave's cycling team buddies got him back out on the

bike. Cycling has always been his therapy and there is nothing he'd rather do than train for Lotoja with these wonderful guys. Someone came up with the idea of a team ride for Lotoja 2004, and so although many of the guys are in the Masters 45+, they all rode together in Colby's honor. They stayed together throughout the race, and although there were no records broken or awards won, it was quite a site as they all crossed the finish line with Dave right in the middle. Their support was so important for our family. It was a healing process for all of us.

This year Dave trained hard and was very excited about the race. It was a beautiful morning when they rolled out, and since I drove through Logan Canyon, I had no idea of what the riders were experiencing until Montpelier. As I watched so many 1's and 2's pull out of the race, I secretly hoped Dave would do the same. But, that's not his style. He rode right through without even slowing, grabbed his bag and was off. The rest of the race is better told in his own words. This is what he wrote to a friend later that week:

"I got away (alone) after Montpelier and hooked up with one of my buddies about 20 miles later and we did the team trial until about 40 miles out from the finish when my buddy blew up. Knowing that I had a chance for the win, I kept going as I wanted to dedicate that race and a win to Colby. I knew that I didn't have the legs to finish by myself but it was Colby's inspiration that kept me hammering away. I ended up...alone for the last 35-40 miles. However, I'm a firm believer that our little dragonfly skims the surface regularly and we humble water beetles can do a lot more than we ever could on our own when we see his wings hit the water. I was flying on (Colby's) wings Saturday and while in the grand scheme of things a bike race is nothing and dedicating a ride to Colby is so trite, it kept me going and gave me 5 hours of doing nothing but peddling, enduring and thinking of Colby. That was the best part of the race for me and then being able to raise my arms (heavenward) in victory at the finish to salute (my son)."

I realize that some of Dave's references to dragonflies and water beetles may seem strange, so I have attached our favorite little story regarding death. Truly, Colby is our dragonfly and in his honor we have created a beautiful garden in our front yard, complete with numerous dragonflies!

I thank all of you involved with Lotoja for the healing and inspirational event you provide. I don't know what Dave would do without it! One of our family's most precious memories is of LoToJa 2003 when we all supported Dave as a complete family. I vividly recall watching Colby running down the street at full speed in his flip-flops when we missed Dave at the first feed zone! It was a wonderful day!

Thanks to you all and we'll see you next year!

Jeanie Sharp
Salt Lake City, UT

The Dragonfly

Once, in a little pond, in the muddy water under the lily pads, there lived a little water beetle in a community of water beetles. They lived a simple and comfortable life in the pond with few disturbances and interruptions.

Once in a while, sadness would come to the community when one of their fellow beetles would climb the stem of a lily pad and would never be seen again. They knew when this happened, their friend was dead, gone forever.

Then, one day, one little water beetle felt an irresistible urge to climb up that stem. However, he was determined that he would not leave forever. He would come back and tell his friends what he had found at the top.

When he reached the top and climbed out of the water onto the surface of the lily pad, he was so tired, and the sun felt so warm, that he decided he must take a nap. As he slept, his body changed and when he woke up, he had turned into a beautiful blue-tailed dragonfly with broad wings and a slender body designed for flying. So, fly he did! And, as he soared he saw the beauty of a whole new world and a far superior way of life to what he had never known existed.

Then he remembered his beetle friends and how they were thinking by now he was dead. He wanted to go back to tell them, and explain to them that he was now more alive than he had ever been before. His life had been fulfilled rather than ended.

But, his new body would not go down into the water. He could not get back to tell his friends the good news. Then he understood that their time would come, when they too would know what he now knew. So, he raised his wings and flew off into his joyous new life!

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

My name is David Fisher. I'm 49 and this was my second Lotoja experience. We enjoyed fairly pleasant weather last year, but this year's ride turned into a survival mission. Here's a little story about our adventure...

Although a cold front passed through Friday evening, the forecasts had been pretty favorable, calling for overcast weather and little threat of rain until Sunday. We started at 7:20 am in Logan under mostly clear skies at about 50 degrees. I noted that quite a few riders had opted to leave the starting line in just biking shorts and jerseys rather than shed leg warmers and windbreakers along the way. I decided to leave my windbreaker on since our first feed stop was only 35 miles away and there wasn't any significant climbing to do. That turned out to be a good call because within an hour a huge mass of colder air and rain overtook us and things turned south in a hurry. By the time we got to the first feed stop in Preston, ID, anyone who didn't have a rain-proof cover on had been soaked to the bone and many were already suffering from hypothermia since the temperature had dropped to about 40 degrees. I was shaking badly from the cold, but hadn't been soaked through thanks to my shell. We lost a lot of time trying to sort out the group's issues and it looked like we were in danger of losing several of our team members at that point. Somehow we managed to pull everyone together to move on, but we lost two of them to the cold within the next 20 miles. Unknown to us, the race officials had called the race due to the extreme conditions (including snow flurries at the higher passes) and the fact that about 50 riders had been sent to local hospitals with various levels of hypothermia. Our two dropped riders got on a bus at the top of the first summit and were taken to the next feed zone where EMTs checked them out and put them in warm ambulances. Fortunately, none of our teammates had to be hospitalized.

After stopping repeatedly to deal with other team member issues, we realized that it would be impossible to hold everyone together since waiting in the rain and cold for even a few minutes was proving difficult. So I decided to move on with anyone who felt capable of going on through the long climbs ahead, knowing that we would get our body temperatures up fairly quickly. Five of us took off and made our way to the next feed zone in Montpelier where we were greeted by a group of ambulances and numerous EMTs who told us the race had been canceled and that riders could only continue if they had proper gear and could pass an EMT check. By that time, our team of 11 was decimated and only two of us could immediately continue. I convinced one of my younger teammates, 31 year-old Ryan Bacher, into going on with me since he was wearing the very same shell I had and was also drier than most. Several others warmed themselves in vehicles, hoping to continue later on. It's very difficult to describe how quickly the weather eliminated so many riders. Even those who were there had a limited understanding of the full impact of the emergency because riders were so spread out by then. It was amazing to witness how the community so rapidly coordinated personnel, ambulances, buses, and other transport vehicles, so that several of my teammates and many other riders could get through a very difficult

situation. Ryan and I were two of the lucky riders who were cleared to move on, but only after our pupils and pulses were checked by EMTs on the scene who were vigilant in making sure no one passed through Montpelier with signs of hypothermia.

Oddly enough, when we left Montpelier the weather cleared and we felt sheer joy as we climbed over the remaining two passes on dry pavement. As we climbed up to Salt River Pass, we picked up a 45 year-old rider named Brett Shaw whose team had also been scattered and we invited him to join us so we could all benefit from the extra drafting time. He eagerly accepted and turned out to be a perfect fit with us, settling into the same pace and sharing the point position as much as he could. It was chilly when we reached the top of Salt River Pass, but we quickly refueled our bottles, ate some food, and braced ourselves for the 18 mile descent into Afton, WY. It wasn't long before we encountered rain again.

Somewhere along that lonely stretch in Star Valley, I tried to make a flimsy deal with God. I told him I would try hard to stop my occasional swearing if he would give us some dry pavement for a while, but he wasn't hearing any of it; the rain seemed to come down even harder. I have to admit that I had it coming, but it sure made our work much harder. It became impossible to draft each other since the water and muck flew off our rear tires in a perfect arc into the face of the rider behind. That meant that we had to stagger ourselves to avoid the spray and we may as well have been riding alone.

My awesome wife, Kerri, and others had been providing support for us at each feed zone, consisting of changing our water and sports drink bottles, re-stocking our food supplies in our jerseys, feeding us on the spot, massaging cold hands and feet, trying to find extra gear to wear, warming our gloves over car defrosters, and giving us team and race updates, etc. They became even more crucial to our success when the race was officially called in Montpelier and we could only rely on our own support for the remaining 125 miles. They were incredible as they scrambled to help the few that could go on. They began to move ahead of us by shorter distances in case we crashed or succumbed to the weather and they were a welcome sight each time we reached the next town. And that's how it went, one town at a time.

I never really had it in my mind that we would finish the race in those conditions, but each time we reached another town, our crew encouraged us to go on to the next one - and we did. I was just trying to see how far we could go before being overtaken by the cold and rain. When I finally saw a sign that said, "Jackson - 68 Miles," a fresh wave of hope washed over me and I told Ryan and Brett that I thought we could actually finish the ride - and we made a pact on the road to do so. As I thought about the possibility of finishing, I got pretty misty just thinking about all that had happened during the day. I also thought about some friends with cancer issues who have had so much more to deal with than my stupid little ride. One of the gals supporting us has MS and has been largely incapacitated for the past 3-4 years. I can't even imagine the difficulty of her daily struggles, but her strength and others' strength and faith gave me a boost out there. I was incredibly grateful for good health and for a body that

functions as well as mine does.

Our stop in Alpine was about 50 miles from the finish and it was getting dark. I had hoped to be done by that time, but we were way behind schedule due to all that had happened. The rain was steady, we were very cold and tired, and we were turning to go up through a long canyon toward Jackson Hole in the dark. I'm not really sure what kept us going other than sheer adrenaline, but we quickly refueled and got back on our bikes. Shortly after turning up the canyon, Brett's wife pulled in behind us with their car and just slowly followed us for the rest of the way (nearly 2 hours), giving us the benefit of her headlights so we could avoid debris on the shoulder and potential crashes with each other. That must have been very boring for her, but it meant everything to us since the darkness and the spray from passing traffic made seeing anything difficult.

Somewhere near the top of that canyon, as we turned toward Jackson Hole, something came over Ryan and he began to pull away from us. I swore – woops - (more rain), wondering how he could leave us after all that work together. When we next saw our support team, they reported that he just gave them a thumbs-up and kept riding by. Once Brett and I got back on our bikes and headed for Jackson Hole, I started to ask Brett what he did for a living, etc., wanting to get my mind off of Ryan's disappearance. I was amazed that a first-year rider could have the strength to power through the finish of a ride like that, but mostly I felt a sense of abandonment. I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. Maybe he lost his mind and just had to get to the finish. Maybe he was hurting so bad that he had to cut his remaining time in the saddle. I wasn't sure, but I knew I'd find out before long. I just kept an eye open for a bike and a body in the ditches.

When we finally pulled into Jackson Hole, we saw our support crew waving and yelling at us, but decided to just press on and do the final 10 miles out to the finish at Teton Village. A couple of blocks past the car, we needed to turn left. The traffic light turned red and we pulled into the left turn lane to wait out the light. About that time, Ryan pulled up next to us and we learned that he had stopped at the car to warm up - and that all their waving and yelling was meant to stop us so he could rejoin us for the final stretch. It turns out that he had pulled away from us on the Jackson approach because he had become so cold that he had to turn up the pace to get his body temperature up. And once he got going, he just kept on pulling away. So we got our teammate back and began the most difficult stretch of the whole ride. It wasn't that the terrain was so difficult. We had one short incline to do, but we were so cold by that time that our feet and hands had almost no feeling in them. I told the guys not to make any sudden moves because I feared I would be unable to shift gears or even pull my brake levers. That ten mile stretch seemed like 25 miles as we kept hoping to see the lights of Teton Village, with heavy traffic spraying us and the temperature dropping to near freezing. When we finally saw the lights, we rejoiced for a moment because they seemed so close. They were actually still several miles off and those last few miles were absolutely brutal as the carrot dangled so close to us. Our pace had slowed considerably and it seemed to take forever to get there. Then finally we reached our

turn and headed down into the parking area of Teton Village where the finish line had been. It was now 10:15 pm and the official line had been dismantled at 9pm. But our support crew was there to cheer us and that was enough.

We were shaking so bad after stopping that our only interest was getting out of our clothes and into a warm shower. Fortunately, we were all staying in a rented home just blocks from the finish line, so we all got into the showers pretty quickly. I stood under the warm water for about 15 minutes before I could feel my fingers and toes very well. Eventually I got myself together, had something to eat, and asked about the others who had tried to go on. Only one other teammate, another first-year rider who is 14 years old, made the finish line at 11:30 p.m. When all the others dropped for various reasons, they rallied around this young man and took turns pulling him into the finish. They gave him all their remaining dry gear and followed him all the way in. We went over to the finish line to cheer him in when we got the word that he was coming. It was quite a moment when this 80 lb kid stumbled off his bike and fell into his mother's arms. With not an ounce of fat on him, I still don't know how he did it.

So there it is – LOTOJA 2005. If you're wondering about the moral of the story, use your imagination. I can only say that something like this really sharpens one's senses and makes one grateful for life, health, friends, grace and faith. It has also made me more sensitive toward those who are struggling with various afflictions and challenges. So my heart and prayers go out to many others who have huge challenges before them, known and unknown. I hope they will be met with faith, determination and grace, no matter what the outcome.

See you out there next year,

David Fisher
Sandy, UT

ATTRACT A DATE

As my friend Sterling and I waited to start in the last citizen group of cyclist for LOTOJA 2005, we could not wipe off the big smile across our faces. Sterling is 22 years old, and I am 21. Neither of us had ever participated in a bike race before, but here we were -- LOTOJA 2005. If you set yourself up to train for a Century ride, why not do two and then add on some more miles to equal a two hundred and six mile course.

When the rain came down before the first Feed Zone (around mile 15), our super cool looking jerseys and shorts only covered part of our body, not nearly enough to be comfortable for the low temperatures and high winds our bare skin bared out for the next eighteen miles. Our conversation leading up to the first Feed Zone was about the possibilities for the outcomes for all the other riders in the race. Two riders in our pack had dropped before the first Feed Zone; we knew there had to be more unlucky riders

ahead of us who dropped. When we both pulled up to the first Feed Zone looking like cold, wet dogs, my friend Catherine said to me, "You will wear everything that I tell you to." Sterling and I were so cold that we could not dress ourselves. Our crew asked us if we wanted to go on; we both said yes, but wondered how long we could hold on. The next 10 miles after the first Feed Zone were the worst in the race. We could not draft from each other because of the water kicking up into either our faces and our shoes. Riding cold and wet with them temptation of stopping at any moment tempted our thoughts to just quit and warm up.

Sterling and I for those 10 miles kept talking each other into staying in the race (mostly Sterling was keeping me there). Anything we could do to keep our minds off the race, we did it. Since we held up the rear in the race, Sterling and I were fortunate enough to be able to sing as loud as we wanted to keep ourselves moving forward. It was in those 10 miles that Sterling and I also decided that even if it was Sunday, we would finish the race.

When we came to the first Neutral Feed Zone our support crew met us again to give us all the food and encouragement to keep our spirits up. Sterling and I told a race volunteer that we had our own support crew, and would not need anyone from the race personal to follow us anymore. From then until it was dark, our support crew was always within two miles of us. And when it was dark, they were right on our tails beaming lights and cheers for us to keep going.

Eighteen hours later, 1:30 a.m. on Sunday, September 11, Sterling and I pulled into Teton Village. Cold and wet, but still with a big smile across our faces, we had finished LOTOJA. Our crew was there with sparkling soda to congratulate us on something that was not so physically demanding, but sheer mental diligence. What can I say? Sterling and I were determined to put a LOTOJA sticker on our cars. What better way to attract a date, right?

One thing that is definite with the experience that Sterling and I had is that it would have never been possible without our support crew. If our crew can sit in a car for 18 hours to cheer on two cyclist, they have to be some of the best people in the world.

The question that I get asked the most is, "Would you do it again?" Absolutely. LOTOJA is a neat race, and worth all the time. Even for eighteen hours in the rain.

Kaysha Gurell
Salt Lake City, UT

AN ARCTIC CIRCLE DAY

It seemed the typical fall day in Logan with a chance of rain -- just broken clouds when our relay team started. We "talked them into" wearing arm warmers, with our intent to swap riders on our relay team at Preston. Off they went, and we jumped in the cars to head for Preston.

We arrived, and there was a cloud bank rolling in from the west. We parked, got the bikes down off the racks, and started getting dressed. Then the rain began. Just a few drops at first, but the more we dressed, the more it rained. Finally, we donned our rain gear and headed down to the rendezvous point. As we stood there under the big willow tree, the rain continued, now a steady downfall. In came our two riders, soggy, but in good spirits, and glad they had taken the arm warmers with them. We swapped out ankle bands and off we rode. As I peddled out of Preston, I looked at the sky. No broken clouds now, but a solid, dark gray canopy. How foolish, I thought, to be out here starting to ride this next 50 miles in this downpour. But we continued on. There was no drafting, unless I wanted to drink the rooster tail coming off the rear tire of my teammate. So I dropped back a little. I managed to get the hood of my raincoat up over my helmet, and was glad to have it, even though it blew off coming down the hill into the Mink Creek turnoff.

Now we hit the rollers at the bottom of Strawberry Pass. Beautiful bottom land with the river soon gave way to maples, then aspen and fir. The rain continued, although sometimes giving us a little break. Even with the raingear, my partner, Chip Hawkes and I were soaked, especially our hands and feet, which quickly became numb with cold. However, we kept going, seeing many others who were in worse shape than us. One rider was barely moving, and was very wobbly. We asked if he was okay, and he said yes. However, the next SAG wagon picked him up. We saw a lot of riders dropping out, and the backs of the SAG wagons were full of bikes. Near the top of the pass, we stopped to stomp our feet and rest our backs and stretch and eat a GU or two. A very kind volunteer stopped to make sure we were okay, and said he was completely out of blankets.

Back on the bikes, and up to the top. Then it was down the other side, with what should have been the joy of coasting at 40 MPH, but which instead became a game of enduring the once-again hard-pounding rain and the increased cold from the higher wind-chill of the downhill glide, combined with our already-soaked clothes. Near the bottom we spotted some emergency vehicles, and a large pile of bikes. I thought there must have been a big crash, what with the wet roads and wet brakes. I found out later that it was a pick-up point for a large number of hypothermic bikers, who hadn't fared as well on the downhill as we did.

A beautiful ride through Liberty and Ovid, and into Montpelier, again with many concerned volunteers looking carefully into our eyes and asking us questions to ascertain our level of consciousness. Then it was strip the ankle bracelets off for our

third team to ride on to Salt Creek and more snow and rain. For me, I headed to my car to get out of my wet clothes and find some hot food before driving on. As I got out of the car at the Arctic Circle (an appropriate eatery, given the kind of day we were having) my legs cramped up, and I couldn't walk in. The cramps finally gave way, and I headed in. I was done for the day, having to return to Orem to conduct a wedding. Even with the dry clothes, I was shivering for 30 minutes afterward.

Just as I left Montpelier, I spied a friend (Bruce Bown) who was riding solo. He had just flattened his front tire, and was pushing his bike. His riding buddy hadn't been as prepared as he was, and they were dropping out. A woman from my neighborhood who is Cat 3 (Audra Jeske) was prevented from going on because she lacked the appropriate winter clothing for Salt River Pass. So many were dropping out, either on their own, or because they were prevented from going on due to the lack of appropriate clothes. Thank goodness some "cooler" heads prevailed, or we might have had some real problems.

I think this is one of the greatest rides out there. It was very well-organized and supported. Thanks to all the volunteers, who were extremely courteous and kind to us crazy riders. Thanks to the organizers for having the courage to say "no" when it was too dangerous for some to continue. This was my second year, and I'll be back again next year.

Lynn M. Stephens, SPHR
Orem, UT

HOPING FOR NASTY WEATHER

LOTOJA—200 miles (more or less) from Logan, Utah to Jackson, Wyoming. It is one of those things that you either love or hate. For most riders, it is a curiosity to be done only once, just to say you did it. Some even shun it altogether, arguing that it is not really a road race, just a glorified century tour—well, two glorified century tours ridden consecutively. But for the rest of us, it is the highlight of the season, and nearly all of our training after the first of July is aimed at preparing ourselves for this nine-hour event.

This year's event marked my 12th LOTOJA start. In the previous 11, the first of which was in 1992, I had finished nine times, eight in the Pro-1-2 field and once in the Masters 35-44. LOTOJA has been good to me over the years, which is certainly one reason I keep coming back. It is a race that does not favor any particular type of rider; even this year's hillier course did not favor climbers. So for me, a rider who does not excel at anything except perseverance, it is perfect. Put in your time, doing five to eight hour training rides all summer, pay attention to a few things like weather and proper fueling, don't give up, and you will eventually do well at LOTOJA. Coming into this year's event, my personal record included three top-10 finishes in Pro-1-2 and one in the Masters. The most memorable of these was a second-place finish to Postal's

Marty Jemison in 1997, a year in which he finished the Tour de France in the top half of the field. This race was memorable not only because I finished second, but because I spent over two hours riding off the front in a solo breakaway, amassing a lead of 12 minutes at one point before Marty decided that enough was enough. Oh yes, it was cold and rainy that day, the last time before this year that LOTOJA riders had really been tested by the weather.

The weather was about the only thing in common between the 1997 and 2005 events. In 1997, LOTOJA was still a small event; more riders come to Pocatello for the Gate City Grind these days than rode in LOTOJA back then. A typical combined field of category 1, 2, and 3 riders might have had 50 riders in it. A couple other similarly-sized groups containing masters, women, cat 4/5 riders, citizens, and tandems followed. The event now draws 1000 riders, most of them citizens and category 5 riders. Furthermore, over the past few years, the course has changed nearly every year to accommodate road construction. This year's course was the toughest ever: 206 miles from Logan to Teton Village with three mountain passes and a total of 7500 vertical feet of climbing.

The only uncertainty I had coming into this year's race concerned which category I should enter. I usually ride Pro-1-2 under my quirky philosophy that I would rather finish a Pro-1-2 race than place in a Masters race. This makes sense in other races throughout the season; the Pro-1-2 event is almost always longer than the Masters, and I obviously like long races. But at LOTOJA, everyone does the same distance. Moreover, the Masters field is always larger than the Pro-1-2 field, which nowadays is separate from Category 3. Because of the larger field sizes, the fastest time of the day sometimes comes from one of the Masters fields. Lastly, racing in the Masters 35-44 class this year would give me the chance to ride with fellow ICE members Chuck Collins and Craig Kidd. So, Craig, Chuck and I lined up at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday, September 10, 2005, in a field of 54 riders.

The weather forecast called for mostly cloudy skies with a 30% chance of showers, highs around 60, and light southwest winds--nearly perfect for LOTOJA. Most of us started with arm warmers and leg warmers and maybe a wind vest. While Craig and I cruised along in the pack, Chuck took an early flyer, arriving in Preston a couple minutes ahead of the field. Unfortunately, a police officer directing traffic around the race sent Chuck in the wrong direction, and he took an unintended tour of residential neighborhoods in Preston before rejoining the group. As we left town, we began to suspect that the weather forecast had somehow missed the approach of a major cold front. A strong northwest wind, accompanied by falling temperatures and rain showers, hit us immediately north of town. As we began winding our way up the Bear River towards the day's first climb, the rain grew steadier, but the wind was at our backs, offering at least the deception that it wouldn't get very cold or wet. Once on the climb in Strawberry Canyon, the rain increased in intensity, as did the riding. One by one, riders began to fall off the back of the group, while Craig and I stayed near the front. Dan Minert and Gary Porter (Autoliv), Jarom Zenger (X-Men), and Dan McGehee from Mesa, Arizona, forced the pace on the climb. A couple miles from the top of the summit, there was good news and bad news. The

good news was that it had quit raining. The bad news was that it had started snowing, and I don't mean a few little ice pellets falling out of a quickly passing summer shower. I'm talking about huge, sloppy wet snowflakes and enough of them to accumulate on the trees (and on our clothing) and limit visibility. To make matters worse, the top of the summit was flat, so we rode in the snow for a good 15 minutes before descending out of it. I pulled on my vest and zipped it up before my fingers lost too much dexterity. As we began the descent, our tight group of 20 or so disintegrated into small groups, as riders varied greatly in their willingness to hang it out on a descent in the snow and rain. I was feeling great, and I was there to race, so I accelerated to fill out a strong group of five, including Zenger and Craig, that was intent on putting some time on the riders behind us. We took turns pulling through in a strong cross-tailwind, but our progress slowed when a couple of the guys began shivering uncontrollably, barely able to control their bikes. We passed a Pro-1-2 rider with a flat tire; the bad news for him was that he would have to wait in the cold for a few minutes for someone to pick him up, but the good news was that he had a good excuse for calling it a day.

As we neared Montpelier, our group of about 20 riders reconsolidated, and Chuck roared to the front, having bridged up to the back of the peloton after dropping off near the top of the climb. At this point, it was clear that the cold, wet weather would accompany us the rest of the day, which meant that to even have a chance of finishing the race, more clothing would be needed. Without warm clothes, even the strongest riders would succumb to the cold and be forced either to abandon or to burn so much energy trying to stay warm they would barely be able to ride the last hour or two of what was shaping up to be a 10-hour day. As we approached the feed zone in Montpelier, many riders in our group had already made the decision to throw in the towel. The rest of us agreed to stop, allow everyone time to get more clothing, and regroup before heading up Geneva summit. Unfortunately, the Cat 3 riders, who had started three minutes ahead of us, arrived in Montpelier with us, adding substantially to the chaos that is always a LOTOJA feed zone but that was greatly enhanced on this day by the stormy weather. Instantly, the feed zone became a mass of bicycles laid down in the street, as riders attempted to find their support crews and whatever warm clothing they may have brought with them. Many riders were already hypothermic and were at the mercy of their support crews and volunteers, who wrapped them in blankets and sleeping bags and carried them off the road. Others who were not quite yet hypothermic but were getting there quickly, headed for the car on their own. The rest of us went about the business of getting food and clothing.

I rode the full length of the feed zone without seeing my wife, Sheryl, so I turned around and rode back through the zone again, just as she ran up with my full race bag. I shed the vest and fingerless gloves, and Sheryl quickly found the clothes I needed. After what seemed like 15 minutes (but was actually about five), I managed to put on over my existing clothing a pair of tights, my winter booties, a long-sleeved jersey and rain jacket, and two pairs of long gloves. Chuck did the same, and we were ready to go again. In the chaos, however, our field did not regroup. Riders left in pairs or alone, and nobody had any way of knowing how many riders were left in the race or where they

were. Gary Porter joined us, and the three of us started up the canyon. Gary soon pulled away, as Chuck took a while to get his legs back after the hard chase on the descent, followed by the five-minute break. We rode conservatively but steadily up the climb and grabbed some food and water Chuck had stashed at the top the previous week (reminder for the future: fig newtons that have been sitting in a plastic bag in the sun for a week are NOT suitable for consumption!). We deduced that about six or eight masters riders were ahead of us and that at least a few of these had not picked up warm clothing at Montpelier. Our strategy was to ride at a moderate pace to the top of the summit, at which point we would have about 100 miles left, and then begin working hard through Star Valley in hopes of picking up riders in front of us. In a race that long under conditions such as these, a lot can happen in the second half of the race, especially with riders riding by themselves or in small groups. We knew that just by riding a reasonable pace the rest of the day and finishing, we would be in the top 10 in our class and probably top 20 overall.

As we crested Salt River summit, we were joined by Al Thresher, a very strong Category 4 rider from Las Vegas, who had started a few minutes behind our Masters group. He decided to sit on the back as Chuck and I began trading pulls on the descent. In Afton, we got more food and water at the feed zone and picked up Bryce Cook, McGehee's teammate from Arizona. The thermometer on the bank read 40 degrees as we left town, and rain continued off and on throughout the afternoon. Just north of town, we picked up McGehee just as he was getting back on his bike after a flat tire. With four of us working together, we started to make time on riders ahead. We first caught a couple Cat. 3 riders, who tagged on the back. We then caught one of the Autoliv Masters, who was too fatigued to even hop on the back of the group. A few miles later, we passed Steven Fellows from Las Vegas and Gary Porter, who was fixing a flat. Although there is certainly some luck involved in avoiding flat tires, I was definitely pleased that I had chosen to ride a brand new pair of Vittoria all-weather 24c tires—the beefiest race tire they make. By our estimation, there could be no more than two Masters ahead of us at this point, although we were unable to get any certain information from officials or support vehicles.

We got tangled up in the Category 3 field again as we entered the final feed zone of the day in Alpine. In the confusion, Chuck was pushed to the pavement, but he got up quickly and rejoined what was now a four-man group of Masters consisting of McGehee and teammate Cook and us two ICE riders. The Category 3 field reassembled itself ahead of us, and a few other riders including some Category 3s and a Pro-1-2 rider who had been on the back of our group coming into the feed zone, disappeared. Thresher was on the back of the Cat. 3 peloton. As we entered Alpine Canyon, McGehee and Cook's support crew went ahead to get a time check for us. In a few miles, we learned that there were two Masters ahead of us with a 10-minute lead. I looked around at my companions to see what they had left and asked, "well, how hard do you want to ride?" I figured that 10 minutes was a huge amount of time to make up in the last 40 miles of the race, and I would not at all be unhappy finishing in a group of four sprinting for third place. On the other hand, I also figured that the two riders up the road were probably among those who had not stopped for very long in

Montpelier and must certainly be suffering from the weather. A bonk or flat up ahead, and we could be racing for the win. I had yet to push myself hard all day, and I was getting anxious to see what I had left. On the other hand, Chuck was beginning to fade, and I did not want to leave him after riding together for such a long time. On the first major roller in the canyon—the very one on which Marty Jemison had dropped me eight years earlier—Chuck fell off the group. McGehee went back to tow him up but came back and reported that Chuck didn't have the gas. He had, however, given us the go-ahead to see what we could do about chasing down the leaders. A few minutes later we received good news from the Arizona support crew: the two leaders had split up! We had gained three minutes on second place and a minute on first. I sucked down a caffeinated gel and got to work. We passed the category three peloton and had a clear road ahead. Thresher came with us, although he didn't do any work and tried to hang just far enough off the back that the officials didn't give him too much grief about working with riders from a different category (he did get a few warnings, however!). I was starting to feel stronger and stronger, especially as my companions began to weaken. My pulls became longer and longer and theirs shorter and shorter, until Cook couldn't come through any more, and McGehee, a large rider who looked like he could ride a mean criterium, could give me a little rest only on the downhills. At Astoria, McGehee and Cook's support companion screamed, "You're eating them up! Three minutes to second place, five to the leader!"

At Hoback junction, I hated to lose time at the stop sign, but I told everyone that we needed to stop or risk a time penalty or worse. In fact, just beyond the stop sign, Marc Yap from the Pro-1-2 field was stopped by the side of the road receiving a ticket from a Wyoming state police for running the stop sign. I was now driving the group, certain that we would see the second place rider any minute. Sure enough, just a mile or so beyond the junction, we saw a lone rider up ahead. It was Zenger, who was obviously paying the price for his aggressiveness early in the race. I knew we would catch him on the short climb after the river crossing just south of Jackson, but I also knew that if I was to have any chance of catching lead rider Dave Sharp (9th and 9th) I would need to make my move on the climb and leave Cook and McGehee. Without ever getting out of the saddle, I powered up the bottom part of the climb in my big chainring, a first for me on that climb. I passed a struggling Zenger a quarter mile or so beyond the river, having made up three minutes on him in only a few miles. I kept grabbing bigger and bigger gears, pushing myself hard for the first time all day. I crested the rise and started down into town, knowing that this was my best chance ever for a LOTOJA victory.

Unfortunately, the first traffic light coming into town was red as I approached it, and I had to slow down. Looking under my arm, I could see McGehee (with Thresher in tow) coming up on me. I knew I would have to stop at the light at least momentarily anyway, so I slowed and waited for McGehee. As we rolled into town, we got word that Sharp was two minutes ahead. We were still making time on him, but with only 11 miles left in the race, the clock was against us. The next two lights were green, but we were forced to stop at the big intersection at which we would turn left to head out

towards Wilson and the finish. We lost about a minute at the light, but I still held out hope that we could catch Sharp, especially because we would be riding into a headwind for the five miles from town out to the Teton Village road. I figured that two of us could make up time on a solo in the headwind. We put as much into it as we had to give, but McGehee was spent, and I was starting to bog down a little. When we turned onto the Village road with five miles to go, I was beginning to lose hope of catching Sharp, as we had not even gotten him in sight. Finally, as we passed the 4 km marker, we could see Sharp up the road approaching the 2 km marker. I could see that I was going to end up in a sprint for second place, so I slowed down and rode next to McGehee, letting Thresher go on ahead to take his Category 4 victory alone. With 1 km to go, McGehee got in my draft, an indication that he was game for the sprint. He looked like a great sprinter, but I figured that I had much more left in my legs than he did at that point. I waited until about 150 meters from the line, jumped hard, and unleashed a sprint that was embarrassingly strong for the end of a 10-hour race. Too little too late for the victory, but a solid second place nonetheless. Cook rolled in for fourth a few minutes later, followed by Fellows and Porter. Zenger somehow managed hang on for seventh, and Chuck rolled in for eighth some time later.

McGehee and Cook were pleased with their finishes, as they should have been. To have finished third and fourth in their first LOTOJA ever in weather that doesn't even exist in Mesa, Arizona is a huge accomplishment. McGehee was clearly moved by the experience and gave me a big hug at the finish. We all congratulated Sharp, who ended up with a time of 10:03:31, two minutes and 17 seconds ahead of me. My time was good enough for ninth fastest individual rider of the day (two relay teams finished ahead of me, so the official results say 11th). Chuck had a rough day, suffering greatly over the last 50 miles. He was in tears at having just gutted out the last two hours and finishing. As I had told him earlier, "just finish, and you'll be in the top ten." He did, and he was. When all was said and done, 30 of the 54 masters 35-44 riders finished, some as many as three hours behind Sharp. Finishing percentages were even lower in many fields; only six Pro-1-2 riders out of a field of 18 finished. About one half of the 1000 starters finished the race. Four of the five ICE starters finished; Kirk Hendricks and Mike McAteer wore ICE colors in the Citizens 45-54 race and finished in 13:04:29.

Needless to say, I spent the week after the race replaying it in my mind, knowing that there had to have been two extra minutes somewhere in there. Two lousy minutes in a 10-hour race! If only we had known earlier what the time gap was, if only we had not stopped for so long in Montpelier, if only... Well, as I always say, that's bicycle racing. How many times has the chase group come up two minutes short in the great European classics? Maybe next year. And I'm hoping for nasty weather!

ROB VAN KIRK
Ashton, ID

ME, MY BIKE, AND THE LEPRECHAUN

I had the first leg of the relay from Logan to Preston. We left town in near perfect conditions, mid 60's, no wind to speak of. As we headed north towards the airport, a few guys jumped off the front, but I was riding steady in the main peloton of the relay teams. I was feeling fine, but we were all looking to the northwest watching the clouds build and get lower and closer.

About the time we made it to Amalga the front hit. The blustery winds split the pack up a bit and I fell in with four or five others. Once the front passed we had the headwinds to deal with and we lost two of the guys in my small group who couldn't hold pace. The temp was dropping quickly as well.

About the time we turned north for the final leg into Preston, the rain started. I was with one other rider, a woman. We worked together for quite some time, then I noticed her shivering almost uncontrollably. We lost contact with each other and I pressed on. The rain was so cold that it began to gel on my glasses so I had to remove them to "see." I knew I was cold but didn't realize just how cold I was.

About two miles outside Preston I began to notice that my bike felt funny. It felt as if it were 12 feet long and only 6 inches tall... My tires were going around like tank treads. As I climbed the rise into Preston my bike changed to 6 inches long and 12 feet tall. I was now riding a clown bike.

I made the left turn into Preston and changed grip on my bars from the top to over the hoods. As soon as I grabbed my hoods a Leprechaun appeared on my shoulder and began screaming in my ear. "Don't move yer hands, if'n ya do, you'll all be disqualified"... In a heavy Irish accent. I rode into the exchange zone with my hands firmly on the hoods and him continually screaming in my ear.

At the exchange, my team caught me and rushed me into the team trailer, stripped off my wet clothes and warmed me up. Thankfully, I recovered within an hour and was on the way to Teton Village, trailer in tow.

We assessed my condition later and figured I was in the early phases of Stage 2 hypothermia. Okay, I won't do that again.

Anyway, that's my story and I'm sticking to it..

Looking forward to next year, and yes, we'll be three... Leprechaun and all, but dressed warmer.

Dave Fulghum
Sandy, UT
Relay team 08, Team Novara

BRUTAL

Mostly sunny, temps in the low 70's with possibility of afternoon thunder showers was the forecast for most of the week leading up to the 23rd annual LOTOJA race. We arrived in Utah on Wednesday and were greeted by temps in the 80's. We enjoyed watching my son Michael and the boys from UVSC destroy the USU men's soccer team 9-1 in Logan that evening. By Friday, the weather was starting to turn, as was the forecast for Saturday. Friday would have been a great day for the race as the wind was out of the south; no rain in sight and the temps had cooled to the low 70's. Friday night's annual carbo-loading at Calloway's was a great time. We discussed strategies and were eagerly anticipating the ride.

Steve Turner would start first at 7:15 with the 35-44 year olds. Mark Facer, Corte Haggard and I would start 3 minutes later with the first pack of 45-54's. Then bringing up the rear would be my son John with the first pack of 27-34's. Steve would ride at a comfortable pace and expect to be caught by Mark, Corte and I some where on the long climb up Strawberry between mile 40 and 60. John, riding with the strongest age group would catch us early on the same climb. If all went as planned we would be riding together up the last part of Strawberry and then John could make a decision as to whether he was going to hold back and ride with us or decide to race with his age group. Mark and maybe me could then decide to help John get to Montpelier at mile 80. So much for planning...

The weather on Friday night looked bad. The temp in Wendover was 77, a little to the west in Elko it was 64 and further west in Winnemucca it was 51. Cold weather was moving our way. At 6:30 AM on Saturday the rain band on the Weather Channel stretched from Snowville to Idaho Falls. As the five riders finished our breakfast and mixed our energy drinks I stated that I was not going to ride in the rain - a statement that I repeated often through the first 80 miles of the ride. At 7:00, we pulled out from ma and pa's and headed for the start line. Brother Bill was out to cheer us on - decked out in his team Quiksilver/Norda's team jacket. After the start Bill was on his way to Preston to be our support team with fresh water and energy drinks.

Steve was first off, followed shortly by Corte, Mark and I. The temp in Logan was falling to below 50. I was comfortable with my toe, knee and arm warmers, lightweight full-fingered gloves and vest. Steve and Mark were also wearing vests, Corte and John had on the team jackets. None of us had rain gear. Friday's wind out of the south was long gone and we were faced with a stiff wind from the northwest - right in our face or into our left shoulder all the way to Preston. Our group of about 45 riders was not in a hurry and we were content to let others do the work at speeds under 20mph. As we looked to the north toward Idaho, the sky was black and the rain was falling. It didn't look pretty -- 50% chance of rain looked more like 100%. At the state line, Corte and I stopped for our first bio-break, in part to avoid the lines at the port-a-potties in Preston. We were chasing back on to our group when I could see Mark had turned around to come back to help us chase on. This would not be the only

time Mark would turn around on the road to go back and help. We quickly rejoined our group just in time for the first raindrop at Franklin. The guys at the front had finally worn down and Mark and I worked our way to the front with Mark taking a short pull just as we entered Preston – Mile 35.

Bill was there as planned and we grabbed our drinks and headed off to do the climb up Strawberry. Mark raced ahead to take a pee-break. The temp was continuing to fall and the rain was now coming down hard. Oh boy, 45 miles to Montpelier and the first 25 were up and over a 7500-foot pass. I thought I should have grabbed Bill's jacket but decided that I was not going to ride in the rain and that if it was still raining in Montpelier I would quit. I can ride 45 miles in the rain – no problem. Corte was not happy with the rain, cold or the wind. He was struggling to hold on to my wheel into a stiff wind at 14 mph. He's too tall and I'm too short to knock down much wind. I was frustrated as a couple of large groups of riders passed us and we did not get on their wheels. Mark and I ended up riding ahead in search of Steve. Soon John pulled up along side us. He was off the front of the first group of 1200's (27-34) and had been riding with two guys from the 1200's that started 3 minutes behind him. John's group had caught the second group of 1500's (45-54) just out side of Preston and then they, in turn, were caught by the second group of 1200's so all three groups rolled into Preston together.

John wanted to keep an eye on the two guys in his age category so we upped the pace in the rain. We rolled by the Diamond R ranch in Mink Creek without lifting my head to look for Garland Rasmussen. He had offered us a Fat Boy ice cream sandwich when we rode up Strawberry a few weeks earlier and stopped in at the Diamond R to get some water. I did not need a Fat Boy at this moment. It was still raining hard; the temp was now in the low 40's and falling. Our toes and hands were soaked and frozen. The big part of the climb was still ahead. Mark, John and I were now moving at a pretty good pace considering the conditions and keeping an eye out for Steve up the road. We would not find Steve.

We passed a number of neutral support vehicles as riders were starting to use the CB or HAM radios in the support vehicles to arrange for someone to come pick them up. John complained that he was having trouble with his cleats. Soon he was free from his pedal. His SPD cleat was stuck in his pedal. He tried to continue pedaling but it was not going to work. After a mile or two we saw a support vehicle off the side helping a rider fix a flat. A second support vehicle stopped and we pulled over to see if someone had some vice-grips that we could use to pull the cleat out of the pedal. The guy was tied up getting his air compressor out to fix the other rider's flat. After a few minutes we got the guy's toolbox out and found the vice grips. I struggled to get a good grip on the cleat with my frozen hands but finally succeed in pulling out the cleat only to loose the washer and the two Allen bolts onto the side of the road. We finally found the bolts and started the process of getting the cleat installed.

Meanwhile, quite a crowd had gathered at the two support vehicles that were pulled off on the side of the road. One rider pulled up and took off both wheels from his bike,

put the bike and the wheels into the van and climbed in. There was no seat for him but he was not going to take no for an answer and sat down on the cooler. Another rider pulled up shaking like a leaf in a hurricane. Mark said to John and me, "that guy doesn't look right." Sometimes body fat can be a good thing. Other riders were asking and begging to find someone with a cell phone with reception. No luck. The support guys had to get on their radio's and call the HAM radio guys who would then make a call to arrange for the riders to get picked up. While this was going on John was standing in his wet sock while Mark and I worked on his cleat, each dropping the bolts with our frozen fingers. Finally after 20-30 minutes standing in the freezing rain John's shoes were repaired and we were ready to finish the climb. Still no Corte, I was a little concerned that he had not caught us during this long break to fix John's cleat. Montpelier was my goal. I had made the decision not to ride in the rain and I wasn't going to change my mind.

It was difficult to get going again. We passed many of the same riders we had passed on the way out of Preston. At the top of the climb John saw the two leaders he had been chasing standing under the lifted tailgate of the same support van that had helped us. They were huddled together covered with blankets. We don't know if they finished the race. Near the summit a photographer was standing on the side of the road snapping photo's while an unknown rider sat in the passenger seat of his car warming up with the bike leaning against the front bumper. At the neutral feed zone at the summit we saw our first Ambulance. There was quite a crowd on the side of the road.

Mark, John and I crested the summit and started the descent into Bear Lake Valley. It was a little dicing coming down the canyon mostly because the riders were all over the wet road and it was tough to get past them. Plenty of them were using their brakes more than we were. A rider I talked to the next day in Jackson said he had to ride with no hands because he was shaking so hard he couldn't stop from shaking his bike with his hands on the handle bars. The rain eased up a little as we rolled into Ovid. We passed another ambulance treating some riders for hypothermia on the side of the road. We had about 10-12 miles of rollers to get to Montpelier and since this was going to be the end of my ride I decided to put the hammer down as much as I could. The three of us picked up one rider and blew past several large groups of riders. I tried to take as long of pull as I could each time. No one was able to catch on to the back of our group as we blew by at 30+ mph. For the first time ever, John complained that I was going too fast. I was cold and I wanted to get into some dry clothes and get some food. As we flew into Montpelier we caught a group of about 10 riders and Mark followed some of them through a red light. Having learned our lesson the year earlier, John and I stopped. The white haired lady at the light was traumatized and frozen. She didn't dare come through the green light after watching a bunch of bike riders' blow through. I waved her to come through just as the light turned red for her. She made it through and we continued up the road to the feed zone.

Mass chaos. There were firemen, EMT's, fire trucks and ambulances everywhere. We saw my mom and dad along with our support team of Kristin and Beth. "I'm done" is

how I greeted them. They said Steve had rolled in a few minutes earlier and was in Corte's Tahoe warming up. Still no Corte. We rode over to the Tahoe and soon Mark and John were sitting in the front seats with the heater going full blast. Steve was in the back seat. I did a towel change in the parking lot and got in some dry clothes, socks and shoes and started to defrost. John pulled off his gloves and showed everyone his blue hands. "That doesn't look right." It freaked us out for a few seconds before I realized that the blue was the result of his blue gloves bleeding the blue color onto his hands for the past 3 hours.

After about 20 minutes Corte showed up. Frozen and wet like the rest of us. He had winter booties and gloves in the Tahoe that he should have been wearing. After hearing that I was quitting he decided to join me. For the next 30 minutes we found the warmest clothing we could find to outfit Steve, Mark and John so that they could continue. Meanwhile the public address announcer continued to announce every minute or two that there was snow falling at the top of Salt River pass and that no one would be allowed to continue if they did not have the proper cold and wet weather gear. As the riders who were going on rode past the timing sensor there was a line of firemen inspecting them and finally an EMT who stopped them and looked into their eyes to try to determine if they were suffering from hypothermia. Of the three, John was hassled a little bit because he had knee warmers and not the full leg warmers. He was wearing my lightweight gloves, which had dried out while the debate about continuing on had taken place over the past hour. John put on his Marmot windshirt and then a dry team jacket over the top and my new Castelli ear warmers. Mark was geared up the best. He scored Corte's full winter booties and warm gloves and had changed into dry shorts and jersey and he had his clear plastic rain jacket, which had been packed, with his gear in the Tahoe. Steve was also in dry clothes and had his rain jacket on. Too bad none of us were geared up for the rain at the start.

Now the rain was gone but the cold, wind and clouds remained as John, Mark and Steve headed up Geneva pass and onto the big Salt River climb. Now that Corte and I had abandoned, Kristin decided to go back to Logan with my mom and dad so Beth, Corte and I took off to drive south around Geneva and to hook up with the riders in the valley between Geneva and Salt River. An hour later the boys were spotted and began the long climb up Salt River. We pulled over at a pull out and John tossed us his Marmot windshirt. He later told me that my ear warmers were gone – Steve had offered to put them in his pocket on the Geneva Summit descent but they had blown out. Oh well. At the next pullout, John was off the front by a quarter mile or with some other riders while Mark and Steve had fallen off the pace. John tossed me his lightweight Quik jacket and said he wanted it back at the top. We pulled over on a couple of additional pullouts on the way up the mountain to cheer them on.

At the summit, John looked pretty good. It was still cool and cloudy, but the snow we had been warned about was gone. We waited about 15 minutes for Mark and Steve but when they didn't show up we pulled out to make sure we got to Afton, mile 125, before John so we could get him his lunch. As it turned out we made it to Afton well before John. When he pulled into Afton he looked pretty good but was cold. He took

my spot in the driver's seat of the Tahoe and warmed up. Corte was still in his wet clothes and finally changed into something warm in Afton. It was 30 minutes before Mark and Steve would roll in. While we waited I talked with Ron Monson who was waiting to ride his second leg of the race for the Logan Rotary Club relay team.

When Mark and Steve rolled in they were beat. They had battled much of the past 15 miles in the wind by themselves. Steve would have liked to continue but he was holding Mark back. He said Mark had u-turned on the steep section of Salt River to ride back and encourage Steve who was close to his max doing 5 mph on the climb. John was ready to throw in the towel but Mark was not. If you know Mark, you know he's not going to pay \$100 to get in a bike race and not finish -- he wouldn't be getting his money's worth. Mark was even begging me to get back in my bike gear and ride with them. It is something I would have considered except for the fact that the rain was once again on us and the temp was still in the 40's and falling. John agreed to go on. He pulled Corte's lightweight XL gloves on over my gloves and put a vest on over his jacket and pulled out with Mark into yet another driving rainstorm with no one to work with. I could have cried -- and I think John could have also.

They had 34 miles of rolling highway to get to Alpine Junction. It was about 3:30. The race bible says you need to leave Alpine Junction before 5:15 to get to Teton Village before dark at 8:15. That's on a sunny day. With the rain and the clouds it was pretty dark at 5:30 when Mark and John made it to Alpine Junction. While we waited we ordered dinner at Frenchy's BBQ. I was sitting in the Tahoe eating my BBQ beef sandwich while Steve, Mark and Beth sat inside Frenchy's across the street. Mark and John arrived at 5:30. Their faces were black from road grime. Mark ate 1/2 of one of my country style thick fries. John powered down 7 or 8 of the fries. I told them that they were 15 minutes past the recommend cut off. We had no dry clothes to offer them so of they went, frozen, wet and still 47 miles to go.

Race rules prevent support vehicles from driving the Snake River Canyon. Instead they are supposed to drive west to Victor and Swan Valley and over Teton Pass to get to Teton Village. We decided that we were not going to leave these two guys on their own in the dark and rain so we leap-frogged them all the way through the canyon. They were working with some other riders when they passed us half way through the canyon. After they passed us we pulled out and saw them stopped on the side of the road. Mark had his bike upside down and his rear wheel off. He had broken one of his bladed spokes and his wheel fell so far out of true it wouldn't go through his chain stay. We quickly replaced his rear wheel with one of Steve's extra wheels and sent them on their way. They continued to motor through the canyon with John taking the long hard pulls.

By the time they pulled into Jackson it was pretty dark. We pulled ahead of them and made the turn toward Teton Village, 10 miles to go. We pulled over and wait for them to make the left turn. I grew concerned because riders that had been behind John and Mark were making the turn and still no sign of John and Mark. I was starting to get even more worried when Steve spotted them rolling up to the light. Whew. John later

told me that Mark pulled over just before the light and said he needed to stop for a minute. John thought he needed a pee break and decided to take one himself. Mark didn't need to pee. He said he thought he had bonked. No kidding, 196 miles in the cold and rain. Mark sucked down a gu and drank some recovery drink and started peddling again. As they went by us a group of about 10 riders caught them and 3 or 4 of the riders had lights. John and Mark gutted it out in the dark and finished at Teton Village at about 8:30. Very dark and still raining.

Only Corte had planned ahead and had a room reserved in Teton Village (the rest of us had rooms in Jackson). That was great for John and Mark who were able to take a warm shower in Corte's room and get in dry clothes before a late dinner at the Mangy Moose at 9:30.

Final time for John was 13 hours 6 minutes. Mark's time was 13:12. John finished 17th in his age group (only 18 finished). His time was pretty respectable considering that he lost 30 minutes to a mechanical in Strawberry, one hour to getting warm in Montpelier, and another 30 minutes waiting for Mark and Steve in Afton plus unknown minutes of not being able to work with a group of strong riders if he would have stayed with the 1200 leaders. Mark finished 34th of about 40 finishers in our combined 45-54 group of 85 riders. About 45 riders abandoned along with Corte and I. Steve's Uncle, Pat English, took first in the Citizen 55+ with a time of under 11 hours.

All I can say is congratulations to John and Mark for finishing what everyone says was the toughest LOTOJA ever. Steve made a gallant effort but the rain and cold just took too much out of him. He did, however, win the race to Montpelier. Mark did his best to stay with him and keep him going but it was not to be this year. Corte and I felt great. 80 miles in the cold and rain was plenty for us. Corte is calling the 2005 race LOTOMO (LOGan TO MOntpelier).
See you next year.

Bob Emmett, Irvine, CA, Citizen 45-54
Mark Facer, Mission Viejo, CA, Citizen 45-54
Corte Haggard, Mission Viejo, CA, Citizen 45-54
Steve Turner, Irvine, CA, Citizen 35-44
John Emmett, Midway, UT, Citizen 27-34

BIKE FOR SALE

I dont know that I would want to brag too much about this years LOTOJA ride, other than to say that I was there. Anyone want to buy my bike? HA HA.

A promising nice and cool start, (lower 60's) turned into a wind and colder fall rainstorm. At about 30 miles, I had mechanical problems, badly torqing my chain and

limping into the 35 mile break stop to take out about 8 total links before continuing on (lost access to about 4 gears).

Must have been foreshadowing of what was to come, because for me, it essentially got worse from there.

The next 30ish miles into Feed Station 2 turned into an endurance and weather slugfest up only a 2000 ft. elevation gain, but new to the course this year. The earlier starters (Cat 1-5) got wind, rain and even some snow, leaving more rain and wind for the rest of the crowd. Everyone was wet and cold. Arm and leg warmers got cold and wet, Wet feet, hands, etc. Few were adequately prepared for all-out wet riding or racing.

You know those \$9.00 simple clear PVC rain jackets in Performance Bike or Nashbar mags? GET ONE!!! Simple and cheap, they will keep your torso dry and help keep you warm. Plus, it looks and rides better than the plastic garbage bags that some of us ended up wearing. Those wind and waterproof aero-shoe covers would be a good idea too, both are cheap insurance for a season of training and a planned "season-capping" ride of this sort.

At the 2nd feed zone, all available vehicles were being used to treat near or definite hypothermic bikers, with Idaho State Troopers transporting severe cases to the hospital, and a significant quantity of riders awaiting the arrival of school buses for transport to their support vehicles. I warmed up my fingers over a little propane BBQ unit, helped build a windscreen for the staying bikers out of empty Clifbar bulk-shipping cardboard boxes, and got back on the saddle.

I biked into Montpelier ID at 80 miles and 5 hours total ride time. Having planned for a sub-five hour century, and the minimal elevation to route distance, this was not anything for me to smile about. In Montpelier, Race Officials or those in charge of the loudspeakers informed all riders and support crews that the race was called/canceled for weather. My wife/crew support was there to experience a mass-casualty-like hypothermic treatment operation, with biker bodies literally laid out and spread all over the park. Local EMT's, Firefighters, and support crews were all trying to improve rider conditions and body temps.

Intermittent snow, sleet, rain and wind was on the rest of the course, and you could continue to ride into if you had support a crew, and adequate clothing. All Neutral race feeding stations and support was canceled, and support crews could now drive with the bikers from this point on (originally, LOTOJA support vehicles were kept at a multi-mile distance, or on a completely separate road course).

I turned in my race chip, changed and sat in my heated car seat, visited the local Artic Circle for some Hot Chocolate and solid food, and went home. Evidently 4-500 others did close to the same.

Now seeing the results, I was a bit surprised to see the finishing times posted in the 9:50's for relays, and 9:57 for single riders. True bikers, road animals, maniacs, or all of the above? I didn't even know that they were still keeping time.

My claim to fame is that I know, and have ridden with, the 6th place overall rider -- 9:57 for 206 miles. He beat me then, and now. He must be on some sort of juice. Yeh, that's it.

THANKS AGAIN!!!

David Blackburn
Eagle Mountain, UT
Citizen 35-44

PODIUM BOY

The day started off innocuous enough. Clear skies, temp around 55°. As I stood in the start group I decided my light arm warmers would be warm enough; and for a while, they were. The rain started about 10 minutes later and the temperature began to drop. Being in the Cat 5 group I never felt safe enough to take my hands off the bars, and after about 20 miles decided to just ride off the front with a few other guys. In Cat 5, there is certainly NOT safety in numbers. At the first feed zone, I got my thick arm warmers from my crew, as well as a vest. They offered more clothes, I didn't think it was that bad, so I didn't take them.

The rain got harder, the temperature got lower. I was told 40°. At the foot of the first big climb, a small group attacked and I went with them more out of a desire to stay warm than anything. By this time, I was soaked to the bone. I reached back to put on my thick arm warmers only to discover that I'd lost one somewhere long the way. One arm bare, I continued along and was surprised to find myself dropping everyone but two by 5K from the summit. The three of us continued through the weather. Rain turned to sleet which then turned to snow. Big heavy flakes began to accumulate and not melt off my arms and legs. I couldn't move my hands. I couldn't shift. I couldn't brake, and I couldn't hold a water bottle. Peeing on the bike felt warm and comforting. At the summit I was alone and thought, "I'm going to win my group!" Ten minutes later, I was wondering if I'd be taken to the hospital.

I went over the summit alone and started to notice people walking their bike down the descent. I wondered why, and then realized I couldn't really squeeze the brake levers. One guy from my group caught me and we coasted downhill together, unable to talk to each other. A little further, and the descent eased off and we were able to slow down. We then saw the ambulances and police cars. Race officials were pulling people out of the race that they didn't think were safe. They pulled us, and soon pulled

some of the other guys in our group as they came by. At first we protested, "We're in the lead!" After 30 seconds of sitting in the police car, we were quite grateful.

I couldn't get off the bike by myself. I couldn't take my wet clothes off by myself. I was shivering and convulsing uncontrollably. The paramedics came around and were checking everyone's pupils and some peoples temperature. Ten minutes later, the two guys were taken away in ambulances. After half an hour, they let me continue on. At the next Feed Zone, it was total carnage. People in space blankets, people in sleeping bags, people in firemen's coats laying on cots, ambulances everywhere. I got some dryer clothes, drank some hot chocolate, sat on the ground and had my crew rub my body until the medics let me continue on.

The snow abated, but the rain did not. It continued the entire race. It just rained harder. I continued on, lamenting all the cars I recognized as my friends' pass me, offering encouragement and continue on... with their bikes on top. I had a crash at some point, but didn't really feel it. I had a flat about 5K from a Feed Zone, but rode it in and had to wait until my hands worked to be able to change it. I got hot soup 60 miles from the finish... it was heaven and truly welcome. I finished at dusk. Many, many people finished after dark, and well after dark.

When all was said and done, 645 of the 1000 racers did not finish. I still have no feeling in two fingers on my left hand. It wasn't a bike race. It was simply a matter of survival and finishing.

Forest Dramis
Jackson, WY
Category 5

BOUND AND DETERMINED

A Story of Redemption and Transformation

"To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield."
Alfred Lord Tennyson

A Seed Planted in Fertile Ground

Last year, my friend Bill suggested that we ride the LoToJa, "the longest, one-day USCF-sanctioned race in the U.S." It is a two-hundred mile ride from Logan, Utah, to Jackson, Wyoming. It sounded like the kind of a challenge I could sink my teeth into.

Riding my \$400 mountain bike (which weighs 30 pounds), I began to train. Part of that training was to build up stamina by riding distances that included mountain climbs similar to those in the Lotoja. On 17 May 2004, instead of riding the Salt Lake Century

with Bill, I went to the mountains east of my home and rode 70 miles. I had a strong first half, but seriously bonked on my way home, and my dreams of Lotoja glory faded. I quickly realized that the Lotoja was not for me.

Later that summer, Bill suggested we ride the Cache Valley Century. I agreed. Bill rode his sleek new Klein Aura X and I rode my old mountain bike, the only bike I owned at that time. I struggled to keep up with Bill. There were times when I pedaled as fast as I could and still could not keep up. It was a painful ride, but I made it. When it was over, I was glad I was not doing the Lotoja. I'd had enough of long-distance biking. But I was also in the best shape I had ever been in in my entire life.

During the winter, Bill continued to pester me about the Lotoja. He told me that mountain bikes were geared differently than road bikes, and that is why I could not keep up on the Cache Valley Century. He urged me to consider getting a road bike and promised that it would make all the difference in the world.

Being a sucker for challenges, I continued to listen to Bill about how important it was to have a road bike. I began to look at my finances. "If I sold some old coins and books, and if I used my 2004 tax refund, maybe I could convince my wife that we really can afford a road bike without torpedoing our family finances." Such was my thinking, and it worked.

As the cross country ski season was coming to an end, and biking season beginning, Bill took me to the bike shop where he got his road bike. Foolishly, I tested a LeMond Alpe d' Huez, and I was hooked. It was a bit more than I could afford, especially since I had to buy shoes to clip into the pedals, but the dream of riding 200 miles from Logan to Jackson once again became a real possibility. I bought the bike on 26 February 2005.

A week later, Bill and I were out training. My first ride through Bill's neighborhood was great. I didn't even fall off the bike, which was something of a miracle since I was unaccustomed to riding with clip-in pedals.

Our next ride was a 50 miler in a rural area about 25 miles west of Salt Lake City. At that time, I knew nothing about proper riding nutrition. I thought a candy bar and a bottle of water would get me through the 50 miles we had ahead of us. At about mile 25 I bonked. I knew I had a lot to learn. Bill let me borrow his copy of Chris Carmichael's Food for Fitness, and I began to get educated.

The training continued throughout the summer, except for a three week interruption when I was working in Russia and Bulgaria. I rode in two centuries and one self-devised 140 mile route that included three big hill climbs, all in preparation for the Lotoja. By the time September 10 rolled around, I was as ready as I would ever be for the 206 mile race.

September 10, 2005: A Day That Will Live in LoToJa Infamy

Bill and I both registered for the Lotoja early. Since it was our first Lotoja, we decided to be part of the "Rolling Picnic" crowd. It didn't matter to me. I was just happy to be riding.

We spent the night before the race in Logan. You could feel the excitement in the air. Our hotel was full of riders and a big registration party was going on downtown. I arose early to stretch, fuel, and mentally prepare. It just so happened that Bill and I were in the last group to depart. We left at 7:43. For the first few miles, I had the distinct privilege of being the last rider in the 2005 Lotoja. I'm a slow starter.

About ten miles into the ride, it began to rain. It drizzled at first, which seemed like no big deal, but then it really started to rain. It also began to get cold. Luckily, I had just purchased an REI shock yellow windbreaker that week (on sale for only \$39.00) and I was wearing it. I rode the next 25 miles to Preston, Idaho, in a cold rain.

When I got to the first feed zone in Preston, I learned that Bill had already dropped out. Six weeks prior to the race, he had hurt his back. All the Motrin and chiropractor's visits could not put Bill's back together again. Because of the cold and an unfortunate turning of his neck, Bill re-injured his back somewhere between mile 10 and 20 and was picked up by the road crew. He may have actually been the first person to drop out of the race, an unfortunate distinction he likes to brag about.

At Preston, I put on my sweats and two more jackets – Bill's jackets that he would not be needing – and I headed out to the first big challenge: The 22 mile ride to the top of Strawberry Summit, all 7424 feet of it.

It rained the whole way out of Preston. I worried about the descent into Montpelier, Idaho. I was also shivering because of the cold. I gripped the handlebars as tightly as I could so I would not crash. As I began to climb up to the summit, I passed an older man who was using a shower cap over his helmet to keep dry (great idea!), and he asked, "Are we having fun yet?" Well, no, not really. But at least I was still moving.

At the summit a man came over to me and asked if I wanted to warm myself in his car. I said no. He then told me that there was a barbeque going near the food table where I could warm my hands. I was shaking from the cold, but not uncontrollably. After all, I had just climbed the first big mountain. However, I saw a woman standing in line for the bathroom who was shaking uncontrollably. Hypothermia had not occurred to me. I was only concerned about the descent.

As I was preparing to leave the summit, a school bus drove up. It was the first of three buses that was being used to evacuate riders suffering from the onset of hypothermia. As I was going down the mountain, an ambulance with lights flashing was going up. Somebody must have been really cold at the top.

I rode into Montpelier just as the rain was stopping. However, the sky was still full of dark clouds. At that point, I began to consider if I was really up to finishing the race. The rain had slowed me down. I was falling behind schedule. Also, I had lost a lot of energy shivering in Preston before I got my sweats and additional jackets on, as well as on the downhill prior to climbing Strawberry Summit. All those layers did not block the cold wind on the descent either. I shivered going down the mountain to Montpelier. I began to think, "If I can only make it to Afton, at least I will have climbed the three mountains and ridden 125 miles. That will be victory enough."

When I got to the Montpelier feed zone – war zone, actually, because of the ambulances, buses, and people walking around with dazed looks on their faces, some in tears – I was informed that the race had been cancelled. Riders could continue, but there would be no formal support. More bad weather was in the forecast and there was the possibility of snow at the top of Salt River Pass, the highest spot in the course. All who chose to continue were on their own.

Bill was at the feed zone wrapped in a blanket informing me of all the bad news. I was so tired of the rain and cold. My feet were numb. I was soaked to the skin. And I was really scared of snow. "Live to ride another day," I told myself, and I crawled into the van. Immediately, I felt the onset of regret, which only got worse as we drove the rest of the course into Jackson. All along the way, brave riders, seemingly undaunted by the weather, were continuing the race in spite of the rain.

After getting cleaned up in Jackson, Bill and I went to the finish line to meet and greet a friend, Nathan Heaps, who had finished the race. It was dark, cold, and raining. We celebrated Nathan's triumph, and all the while the acid regret was burning a hole in my soul. My journal entry for the night of 10 September reads: "FAILURE! Absolute failure. I got to Montpelier. They said there was snow on Salt Creek Pass. I lost my nerve and stopped. More tomorrow. I am too tired to write now."

There was no end to the internal weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth. Not even two glorious days spent in Teton and Yellowstone National Parks could ease my pain. I had failed. How could I live with that feeling of failure?

A few days later I looked at the Lotoja results site and noticed that about half the riders did not finish. That made me feel a little better, but I kept thinking about all the time, effort, not to mention money, that went into preparing for the race, all to get washed out in the rain. And then a friend of mine said, "Why don't you just go ride it yourself?" Of course! Why didn't I think of that? That single ray of hope shattered the darkness and I felt alive again.

For the next three and a half weeks, I kept up the rigorous training schedule I had devised for the summer. I was not pleasant to live with, as my wife and children can testify. I was either uptight about getting enough ride time or I was exhausted. And then there was that worm regret gnawing away at me, not giving me a moment's rest.

I talked my retired father into being my support crew. I told him we would be in exceptionally beautiful country and that I would pay for his entire trip. I reserved rooms at the Best Westerns in Logan and Jackson using my frequent-stayer points. (All together the lodging cost a total of \$6.00! Thank you Best Western!!!)

My dad is a champion snorer, so I booked us separate rooms in Logan, knowing I would need as much rest as possible. That night, 5 October, we ate at IHOP. I carbo loaded on French Toast, syrup, and hash browns. Back at the room, I laid out all my ride clothes and was in bed by 8:30.

October 6, 2005: A Day of Redemption

At 5:30 the alarm went off and I began my pre-ride rituals: Strategic fueling (banana, Cinnamon Frosted Pop Tarts, and PowerBar Endurance Sport Drink), stretching, and application of Chamois BUTT'r (one of the great inventions of our time – if you haven't used it, you should!). At 6:30 we were out the door.

I was hoping for a 7:00 start, but it took us half an hour longer to get to the starting place than I had anticipated.

Rather than start from Logan, I decided to begin a few miles outside of Preston at a place called Riverdale. I had already ridden the Logan to Preston segment twice this year, and, having lost about an hour of light between 10 September and 6 October, I felt it was better to begin at Riverdale.

It was cold when I got out of the truck. Temperature signs in Logan read 30 degrees. It felt colder in the canyon. Not being able to afford the fancy booties that fit over riding shoes (because I spent all my "disposable" income [is there really such a thing?] on my bike), I wrapped my feet in plastic bags before putting on my shoes. I wore ski gloves instead of my biking gloves. I also wore long johns, sweats, a t-shirt, and my shock yellow windbreaker. It was still dark, so I was grateful for the brightness of the yellow jacket.

The sun rose as I passed through Mink Creek. There was snow on the ground near the top of Strawberry Summit. My dad was supposed to meet me at the summit, but he misread my carefully-typed-up instructions, so I did not get a photo of me, half frozen, standing at the summit sign. The only disappointment of the ride.

The descent into Montpelier was fast and cold. I remembered riding my brakes the whole way down that mountain on 10 September. I was so thankful for a dry road.

One-hundred-and-seventy miles are too much for my mind to comprehend. In order complete the ride, I divided the course into five segments and set five goals.

The first, of course, was Strawberry Summit. I made it! No sweat – literally.

The next was Geneva Summit, a two mile climb east of Montpelier. I made it and felt great.

The third goal was Salt Creek Pass, the highest point in the race. I had ridden that mountain during the summer as part of my preparation, so I knew what I was looking at. There would be several miles of a steady climb followed by two and a half miles of a steep ascent. Six miles from the summit, I met Dad and loaded up on Tangerine PowerGel, "concentrated carbohydrate gel for immediate energy." I can't stand the taste of that stuff, but the caffeine and electrolytes make all the difference in the world, at least for a short while.

At 1:26 in the afternoon I reached the 7630 foot summit, having gone through a herd of sheep and all that they had left on the road. At that point, I had ridden 5 hours and 40 minutes, and I still felt pretty good. However, when I thought that I still had 100 miles left to ride, I began to get concerned. Back to the smaller goals.

The fourth segment was the ride through Star Valley, Wyoming, a beautiful valley that is about 50 miles long and fairly flat. There was no wind, for which I was grateful. The only real hazards are the rumble strips along the side of the road. However, the psychological hazard was the length of the valley and the monotony of riding those miles solo.

To be honest, I really cannot remember what I thought about all that time. Early in the day I had thought about problems at work or what I would do if I were a rich man. (There is a little bit of Tevye in all of us, I think.) However, that kind of thinking soon stopped and I seemed to merely concentrate on pedaling.

I met Dad at Alpine Junction, glad to be out of Star Valley. I was beginning to ache, but thought that the segment from Alpine to Hoback Junction was downhill and that I could coast most of the way. After all, I had just driven it on 10 September and it seemed to be a wonderful descent.

Well, it wasn't.

I don't know how it works, but there are places that look like they are downhill, but are really uphill. You would need to be a geometry professor to figure that one out. Such was the ride through the Snake River Canyon.

Snake River Canyon was incredibly beautiful, but there were times when the fastest I could go was nine miles an hour. My legs began to burn. My dad missed our agreed upon place of meeting, which was about 21 miles out of Alpine, and I began to seriously consider bailing out. My body was reminding me, "You don't need to do this. You've already done the three mountain stages. This is not worth it! Life does not need to be this hard!!!"

I got off the bike for a couple of minutes to rest. There and then I resolved to finish the race, no matter what. I made up my mind that it was no longer a physical contest; rather, it was now mind over body, attitude over affliction. That was the actual moment of triumph. I was still 35 miles from the finish line, but I had already crossed it in my mind. Only an accident would prevent me from finishing the race.

I arrived at Hoback Junction at 6:39. The light was fading fast. I attached lights I had taken off my mountain bike and, to my dismay, realized that my front light did not fit my road bike handlebars. It kept pointing down onto my front wheel. The week before the ride I had gone to REI and checked out lights that would attach to my helmet or that boasted of being virtual flood lights. How I wish I had purchased such a light!

About 20 minutes after leaving Hoback it got dark. I watched the moon rise up over the mountains. All the cars and buildings had their lights on. I was using my left hand to hold my light steady and hoping that there were no large objects or critters on the road in front of me.

A little over two hours later, after making one final stop at the Albertson's in Jackson (I actually went into the store for a few minutes to thaw out), I arrived at Teton Village. Six miles before making that destination, a sheriff pulled up along side of me, lights flashing, and told me that bikers had to be on the bike path. That was great, but, being closer to the lane of oncoming traffic, the headlights from the cars were blinding and several times I nearly veered off the path into the weeds.

Teton Village is a beautiful site after riding 167 miles. When I saw the lights of the village and knew I really was going to make it, all the regret, frustration, and anger faded and was replaced by a feeling of peace and accomplishment. I was bound and determined to finish the 2005 Lotoja, and I did. Redemption is possible in this life. You simply have to work at it.

Epilog

It is hard – no, impossible – to explain to my wife and other non-riders why I spent two days of vacation time and \$167.70 (not a bad price, really) to make the ride from Preston to Jackson all by myself. The race was over. No one would ever know the difference. Slowly, but surely, I think my dad began to understand part of it. At first, he would talk about “a bike ride.” At the end of the day, he was calling it a “challenge.” That is certainly a critical part of it, but not the whole story.

I sometimes wonder if I fully comprehend all the reasons why I trained so hard for all those months, why I rode 80 miles in the rain on 10 September, and why I went back and redid nearly the entire route. In moments of internal cynicism, I ask myself, “Is it vanity? Is it my own attempt to deal with a midlife crisis? Is it a fear of failure?” Perhaps those psychological reasons are part of it, but they do not even get near the whole story.

The best explanation I can come up with is found the paradigm of the rite of passage. You know how it goes: The young person goes out into the wilderness a child, confronts the dangers that exist in the wilds, slays the dragon or lion or whatever it is, and returns to society transformed forever into an adult. In a way, that is what happened on 6 October. I crossed a threshold and cannot think the same way about riding or about me as a rider ever again. And in the process, I found a sort of redemption – redemption for not having finished on 10 September, and the bliss of having survived the longest ride of my life.

Finally, the words of T.S. Eliot seem to sum up the entire experience:

“We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.”

And that place can be the soul of the rider.