

20 hours quicker! Pointers for a pacey PBP

Tom Nankivell

Having struggled through his first PBP just inside the time limit (Checkpoint, Spring 2007), this year Tom Nankivell hammered around in 67 hours. Here's how he did it.

Don't eat, sleep or poo! That's the clear lesson from my PBP if a fast time is your goal.

I didn't eat for all three days, at least not solid foods. Rather, this year, I switched to a maltodextrin-based sports drink powder as virtually my sole energy source. Without naming the brand, suffice it to say that it enabled me to hammer perpetually around the PBP route, never feeling hungry, queasy in the stomach or sensitive in the mouth, and always with the requisite energy on tap. The maltodextrin is important; if you're consuming normal sports drinks and gels with their simple sugars, you're using outmoded technology. And if you're eating solid foods, you're probably spending valuable time at checkpoints queuing and then sitting down to eat. Time adds up.

The other benefit of my liquid diet was that, in conjunction with minimising my fibre intake prior to the event, I eliminated the need to eliminate! Doing poos takes time. Queues for loos to do poos take time. Time adds up.

Limiting one's sleep stops also saves time. I actually got five hours shut-eye the first night at my pre-booked hotel at Uzel (at the 465 km mark), but rested only about 3 hours (again at Uzel) on the second night. I then backed myself to cycle all the way back to Paris. I suffered a couple of 'sleep waves' on that last day and night, but aided by caffeine and Kylie on my iPod, I pedalled through them.

And, thanks to some serious training over the previous year, I was able to pedal fairly fast. Guided by cycling coach Michael Hanslip, I had set about increasing my sustainable speed through a structured program of intervals, strength work, endurance rides and recovery sessions. I also upped my mileage: in the first half of 2011, I completed four 600s and a 1000, as well as myriad other Audax rides. And



Tom with the Pyrenees

when winter came, I spent three weeks training in northern Queensland to ensure that I didn't lose form before heading to France.

My pedalling speed was also helped by travelling light. The availability of an additional drop-bag at Villaines allowed me to carry less gear and ditch the rack and pannier I'd used in 2007. Out also went my heavy old 4xAA-powered lights, circa 2007, replaced with modern, featherweight Ay Ups. I also ditched my sunscreen, bum cream, chain lube, toothpaste, shampoo, nail polish and lip gloss in favour of a small, self-replenishing tube of multi-purpose Crème Randonneur! (Well, okay then, maybe not.) But with the other weight savings, with my body a couple of kilos trimmer and with no food in my system during the ride, I felt light on my pedals most of the time.

My faster pace allowed me to leave at 5.30 am with the 84-hour bunch and still make it to Uzel before 1 am, thus putting me on a mainly daylight cycling schedule. My progress was also aided by using a Garmin which, together with a pre-event reconnoitre of the route, cut down the risk of wrong turns and the need to

check maps and cue sheets. And like everyone else, I was helped by the more favourable weather this year, particularly after the first day's rain abated.

I also benefitted from the help and camaraderie of many other Audaxers during the year. Among others, I should thank Cassie Lowe for giving me the knowledge and confidence to 'go for it', David Adams for letting me use his Cairns abode as a winter training base, and Garry Skeers and the Wagga bunch for teaching me to 'stay on the wheel' during some great rides this year.

While much went right for me, the Audax gods also pitched a few curve-balls my way. A scratchy throat and not much sleep in the days before the start had me worried, and a couple of mechanicals and other incidents during the ride added an hour or two. But, for the most part, the ride went smoothly to plan.

Of course, there are many ways to tackle PBP, and not everyone wants to race around as quickly as possible; nor would everyone have the time or desire to take all the measures I did. In 2007, I was one of the tortured souls towards the back of the pack, not nearly as strong or well prepared, trying to drag my body and my machine around France. Battling the stress of the time limit coupled with serious fatigue, after almost 90 hours on the bike I was also suffering from aching hands and feet, painful saddle sores and limbs virtually pleading for amputation. Completing PBP in that way demands a fair dose of intestinal fortitude.

My 2011 'campaign' involved different sorts of challenges and a different reward. My superior preparation meant that the ride itself, while still testing, was in many ways easier to complete. While I know I could never emulate the super-human feats of a Matt Rawnsley or a Steven Lee, I know I can go faster. Is a one-sleep sub-60 hour PBP in 2015 possible? Time will tell.

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