

Paris Brest Paris 2015 in Under 84 Hours

BY BOB HAYSSSEN

My planning for PBP 2015 started in September 2014. I've always been interested in long distance cycling, and I did my share of road races, criteriums and time trials, winning a few age group state championships along the way. But these events began to seem like so much time and effort for not much riding. I guess I wanted to make the juice worth the squeeze.

On a whim I went to Delavan, WI, on an early Saturday morning in May of 2014 to do a 200K brevet. At the time I didn't know much about brevets; I just wanted to get in a long organized ride and see if I could get a spirited ride going with some of the other participants. Three other riders from our local cycling club happened to be there, two of whom had done PBP. It turned out to be a great ride, with some fast segments, and lots of talk at the controls about PBP and long distance riding in general. I sort of clicked with the whole scene and ended up doing a 400K and a 600K in June out of Delavan with this group. There was much talk of PBP 2015; it sounded like a great bike adventure. I was quickly hooked.

I started scouring the internet for everything PBP-related. One of the most helpful finds was a PBP-specific spreadsheet that allowed inputs for speed, time at controls, sleep time, distance, sunrise, etc. Over the next 10 months I reworked the spreadsheet dozens of times. After all the slicing and dicing, I came up with a 77-hour finish time: aggressive, but doable. As John F Kennedy said, "Not because it

was easy, but because it was hard."

I also looked at my ride schedule for the rest of 2014 and beyond. I rode a 1000K brevet in Florida in October. The vast majority of the riders planned to do PBP 2015, which was a little intimidating since many of them had completed PBP before. Still, the brevet was a good confidence builder.

When PBP first piqued my interest, I thought I would ride it totally unsupported. This would be in the real spirit of PBP, and many riders do the ride this way. However, as I read more and chatted with others, my plan began to sound more onerous, especially for a first-timer. In the end, I booked three on-course hotels with a drop bag at each. This would be comfortable, and it would give me an incentive each day

to keep moving to get to the nice clean hotel shower and bed.

I completed my qualifiers in late June. I qualified for an early registration date and picked the 84-hour start at 5am, on Monday, August 17th. I paid the \$35 entry fee, and that was it. I was entered in PBP 2015. It had been a long road to get to this point, and the excitement began to wear off. I was losing interest and trying to think of excuses not go. Unfortunately, I was going to begin this adventure with a half-empty glass attitude.

The bike check-in, registration, start, and finish area were at the brand new indoor velodrome complex which seats 6,000 spectators. It is a wonderful facility. Sunday morning was check in for those taking the 84-hour start;



Author enjoying successful PBP.

—PHOTO MAINDRU PHOTO



there were no lines! I simply walked through every station. Sunday evening I watched about two hours of starting waves. Because of a good case of nerves I only got about 2 hours of sleep.

Once the ride started, however, it didn't take long for my outlook to take a 180-degree turn. I was here. I had made it. This was the biggest amateur cycling spectacle in the world, and it was legendary. So much time had gone into planning. Now I was eager to see how it would turn out. My first day was two hundred and eighty miles to my hotel. Four hours after the start I noticed I was going way to fast, so I forced myself to slow down. I even had a great dinner at one of the controls. The first day was driven by adrenalin and the excitement of the event. I got to my first course hotel around 2:00 am, showered, slept for about three and one half hours, had breakfast, and left just before sunrise.

The second day was out to Brest, and then a return to the same hotel, for a total of about two hundred and seven miles. Brest is a large port city and has a much photographed bridge. It is a beautiful sight although I didn't stop for photos. I rode to the Brest control and quickly got back out on the road. By this time, however, I was suffering from acid reflux symptoms.

My gastrointestinal discomfort on long rides goes back to my early 300K rides in 2010. I have tried everything but can't seem to comfortably eat past 300K. When I got to my hotel early Wednesday morning I knew I should eat, but I just couldn't. After a 3-hour sleep, and an attempt to eat something I left before dawn.

It wasn't long before my black period set in. Poor nutrition and a long 55-mile segment to the third day's first control made this my PBP hell. I started to have bad thoughts, thoughts about quitting. I was once told that if you are seriously considering quitting, just stop for fifteen minutes, have something to eat and drink, and your outlook will improve. I didn't stop. I just kept pedaling. Somehow I made it through the one hundred and forty-five miles that miserable third day.

The last day was only about one hundred and thirty-eight miles. By this time, controls were getting crowded as I caught up to the 90-hour riders. Riders who had had erratic sleep stops were taking naps in very creative places, many simply sleeping alongside the road. Others snoozed on park benches, in ATM lobbies, on sidewalks, and the floors of the control cafeterias. It was a sight to behold. Daylight finally came and we were all on the home stretch.

Another local village decoration.

—PHOTO BOB HAYSSEN

The last three hours were a parade to the finish. Some riders were barely moving, while others were riding briskly. I felt pretty good.

The finish was rather uneventful. I rode over a chip-timing mat, parked my bike, and went into the velodrome to hand in my brevet card. I was done. I rode back to the hotel and went up to my room to sleep.

My goal was to finish in 77 hrs. I finished in 76:56, about 1775th place out of 5950 riders. The first rider to finish, a German, finished in just over forty-four hours, unsupported. Most of the fastest riders have a support van that meets them at each control. Technically, a brevet is not a race, but it is difficult to not compare results.

If I ride PBP again there is not much I would change. My bike and gear were a bit heavy but I am not sure what I would not carry next time. My ride, sleep and eating schedule worked well, except for my gastrointestinal problems. I overestimated the time needed at the controls and underestimated the amount of climbing and the resulting reduction in speed. Had the weather turned or had I experienced a



Typical hearty control meal.

—PHOTO BOB HAYSSEN

major mechanical problem I might have a different outlook.

It is hard to convey the level of citizen support given to riders. Almost every village had a convenience store, bar, or restaurant open at all hours. Families set up tents and tables and offered free coffee, water, cookies, soup, crepes, etc. Children were on the side of the road cheering for riders and asking for hand-slaps. PBP is a big event in France and the people show overwhelming support. I don't know of anything like it in the US, except maybe Ironman Hawaii, but PBP goes on for almost four continuous days. Cycling is part of the French culture.

My PBP was a wonderful experience, but I don't know if I will do it again. It would be tough to beat the trip I had. To those who ride it in the future I say, *allez and bonne route!* 🚲

Coach John Hughes

Ancien P-B-P '79, '87, '91, '95, '99

Course Record BMB '92

Rocky Mountain '04

Planning an SR series or 1200K?

Information for Randonneurs

WWW.Coach-Hughes.com