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Seattle to Portland Double Century

*Last Year's Winners
Invite You Along for the Fun*

Rob Templin

Everyone strained to catch a glimpse of the Northwest's most famous celebrity far below. It reminded me of the jagged remains of a broken tooth. My traveling companion, Pete Penseyres, and I were on the wrong side of the airplane and had to strain harder than most to see the still-puffing Mount St. Helens. "So that's the reason Seattle to Portland was cancelled last year," Pete commented with a

1982 Seattle to Portland

This year's double century is scheduled for the last Sunday in June — for more details call the Cascade Bicycle Club's hotline: 206/522-BIKE. Or write to the club at P.O. Box 12774, Seattle, WA 98111.

certain respect for the snow-covered volcano thousands of feet below. Seattle to Portland is one of the biggest cycling events in the Pacific Northwest, and the previous year's edition had been rudely interrupted by the unruly behavior of, as one local put it, "Our most unwelcome guest."

But this year the volcano would behave itself, allowing some 500 cyclists, ourselves included, the challenge of a fairly long ride in a most scenic setting.

Riders have several options for covering the 200 miles. Many would make this a two-day social affair, a chance to meet new cyclists or renew old acquaintances. Others make this double century a one-day "jaunt." Pete Penseyres and I, riding a Santana tandem that drew approving looks from the Northwest riders, had decided to ride in the United States Cycling Federation (USCF) time trial category.

Lloyd Tamura, owner of a chain of bicycle shops in the Seattle area, hosted us for our brief stay in the "Land of Rain." He also lined up two crack mechanics,

Robb Eyre and Dave Graham, from his shops to escort us over the 200 miles.

When we lined up for our 5:58 AM start on Saturday morning, our biggest concern was how not to get lost. Although the organizers had one of the best route books I've ever seen, leaving Seattle and entering Portland can still be tricky. About 100 time trialists were sent off in one-minute intervals while everyone else who was doing the ride as a one-day event could leave between 4 and 6 AM. The two-day riders had left the day before and would spend a night at midpoint.

During the early, confusing miles, several riders who had started behind us almost caught up. Navigating the correct course traditionally befalls the "stoker," and much to Pete's chagrin, I wasn't always successful. But once out of Seattle proper, the country opened up, and everyone was moving. The day was turning into another typical Northwest production with low clouds hugging the tree-covered hills that skirt the course. Mercifully, the promoters had charted the

route through the flats of the valleys. Riders could also be thankful that it wasn't raining; not yet, at least. In the first Seattle to Portland ride two years ago, it had rained hard for most of the day.

By the ride's one minor climb, the one-mile "Tacoma Plateau" grade at 36.6 miles, a speedy tandem was closing in fast, with a fragile 40-second gap separating our bikes at one point. "We'll have to wait 'til later to appreciate this," Pete shouted, referring to the wooded fairyland blurring by us as we upped the pace. Twenty miles later a more comfortable margin allowed us to enjoy our surroundings, a raw wilderness once heavily traveled by Indians, fur trappers, and missionaries.

Since drafting wasn't allowed for the time trialists, Pete and I had to forego the camaraderie of riding in a group that helps to make the miles and time seem to go faster. However, our anti-social behavior didn't stop the others from shouting encouragement when we came by, a lift we needed when the miles started to take their toll.

In the guidebook's "Points to Ponder" section, cyclists are told "in the early morning mist you might mistake a log for a dugout canoe being paddled up the Du-

wamish . . ." Maybe, but my imagination was conjuring up more worldly things, such as eating a pizza. Meanwhile, steady head winds forced us, and everyone else, to ride nose-to-the-stem to cheat the winds as much as possible.

By the 140-mile mark, shortly before crossing the massive Columbia River, it appeared the wind was winning the battle against many of the riders. Seeking sanctuary, scores of cyclists retired to the comfort of one of the many aid stations (or fruit stands, or markets) that peppered the 200 miles. But crossing the river means more than just a physical transition from Washington to Oregon; it was an important psychological barrier that, once broken, meant success for most. What are 50 more miles after you've already squeezed 150 from protesting legs and lungs?

And to help rekindle the ebbing desire to complete the final miles was an enemy-turned-friend. The wind was now cooperating with a much welcome tail wind. To the motorists traveling U.S. 30 (paralleling the Columbia River into Portland), the hundreds of cyclists making their way east must have resembled a two-wheeled land version of migrating salm-

ons making a slow, but determined, final journey upstream to home and rest.

As we neared the end, rustic communities like Columbia City, Scappoose, and River Junction signalled the approach of Portland . . . those and the mileage markers that counted down the last miles in seemingly cruel slow motion.

After eight hours and 53 minutes of riding, we pulled into city hall, the first of the one-day riders, glad this stop would last awhile. We had stopped four times (including one tire change) with a total, off-the-bike time of eight minutes. It was now time to relax as the sun made a welcome, last-minute appearance.

Riders began to trickle in, wearing expressions of accomplishment, joy, and exhaustion. In the number two spot, single rider Randy Rooth looked particularly happy. He had turned in a fine performance with a nine hour, 28 minute clocking, beating quite a few tandems in the process — not bad for a single rider going it alone against the wind.

Indeed, every cyclist that day deserved to feel proud. Many termed this their most difficult cycling endeavor to date, and even the road grime on their faces couldn't disguise those feelings of elation.○