

HardTales in the Wild

French Kissin in the USA - September 2003

It's been a while since I told a story, so I thought I better update those that I haven't spoken to in a bit.

The trip to the US started with a monster party at Paul and Kate's wedding in Brisbane. It topped off a week of absolutely no friggin sleep but was well worth the wait.

Figuring I would get some sleep on the plane I grabbed my bike box and headed for the airport. I was meant to pick up my Hawaii ticket there, but managed to forget in my excited slumber.

Settling in to my oh-so-spacey economy seat, I glanced across to see a beautiful little baby in the row next to mine. It was sooo cute. Then as the plane built up speed along the runway, the gorgeous creature let out the faintest little whisper and I thought "it must be frightened, the poor thing, bless.". Then the whisper became a whimper, then a cry, then a friggin full blown wail that didn't stop for 19 bloody hours! So much for sleeping!

Touching down I ran for the Hertz bus and awaiting recliner chair of my hire car. I was knackered but over the moon to be on the ground and away from that bloody baby. The drive was relatively short, only 8 hours and I found Tahoe pretty quickly. The only problem was I was a day late for the start of Primal Quest (the biggest adventure race in the world right now) and had to somehow find the team I was supporting. With no maps and no idea where to start (flying by the seat of my pants again) I rang Fatty who promptly tracked them down on the live web cast. Agghh, the joys of modern technology. "You had better get there fast bro, they're in second place right now" was his advice.

As I sprinted to where I thought they might be (now it was 2am and I was running on SFA sleep) I stopped at a servo for Redbull and bumped into Jason Middleton (the captain of team Earthlink, one of the race favourites), "what are you doing?" I stupidly asked. After a brief and painful synopsis of what went wrong, he steered me to the next transition and I was on my way again.

Cutting to the chase, I hooked up with the rest of AROC's support crew and finally the team. There will be a completely separate story on that, so keep posted. Needless to say they came second and it was a pretty amazing week, albeit without much sleep! The Primal Quest after party was a blast and Tom even tried to line me up for a root with Rebecca Rusch from team Montrail. She is so cool that she has her own shoes, the Montrail Reeba. Alas I was boxing out of my weight class, but I would have put up a hell of a fight anyway, the girl is rippling muscle!

The Saturday after the race had been won, but before all the teams had finished, Gary Farebrother, Megan Christie (The Max Adventure Crew) and I set off to do a 12 hour Adventure

Race. Lining up alongside Steve Gurney and Lisa Jhung, two of the worlds finest adventure racers, I thought myself in for a fun day. Hitting the water in about 20th I lost a bit of ground to the leaders but was not passed until about 2/3rds into the paddle when I stopped to aid a capsized double. That was my first mistake. With no skirt on the kayak I was in, it didn't take long for the 3ft swells to fill the cockpit and my 'sealed' bow storage compartment and sink my craft. It was a dismal swim to shore and I lost around 45 minutes in the process. When the bathtub sank for a second time, I figured my race was done (it's a mental thing).

Sulking like a little girl I finished the race, but I don't think I raised a sweat after that point. At one stage I stopped on my bike to help a confused and lost looking team, that was my second big mistake. I copped a 1 hour penalty for using an illegal trail map book as the bastards dobed on me when I showed them a trail out of where they were! The race wasn't a total waste as it was good nav practice.

The next week saw lots of training which culminated in a race on Sunday. It was the California State round of the NORBA Cup Cross Country Mountain Bike championships and I raced my stumpy little legs around pretty much the same mountain as I had raced the week before ;o) It was a rocky and dusty track that left little room for error and passing was a trick attempted only by the bravest of riders (or the stupid ones like me who confuse ambition with ability). Descending one monster firetrail at around 65kph the rider in front of me was screaming at the guy in front of him to move out of the way. The front man kept screaming back, "it's not safe to pass!" As I swept down the inside of both of them, still out of the saddle and sprinting on the verge of out of control, their screaming became a blur of scraping metal on gravel and shrill cries of pain. Breaking hard for the 120degree left hander that dropped onto nasty single track, I didn't look back. On the last lap I passed a guy who was creeping up a long hill, gears clunking and grinding. The filthy gash on his thigh and his blood stained arms led me to believe that he may have been the one screaming.....he was.

The race had started slow with me being completely dropped by the bunch on the first climb, but I maintained lap times within a few seconds of each other over the 3 lap (9 miles a lap) race and stormed across the line in 5th place in the Expert class and 20th outright. Was I happy? Not totally, but it's a start.

Next week I have Xterra Nevada and that will be a killer. I have been swimming in the lake and it is sooo bloody cold. As for the bike leg, the quickest time I have completed the 32k circuit is 2:14. That may give you an idea of how hilly it is. The first 4 miles are straight up and I am yet to manage more than Granny gear! I need to knock another 1/2 hour off that time to be competitive. It's all in the hills, if you can climb you can win!

Straight after Xterra I am off to bed as I have another 12 hour adventure race starting at 2am on the Sunday morning. Cool. There will only be one or two races after that before heading to Maui for the Xterra Worlds.

With my legs in the boot and my torso on the backseat however, sleeping in the Corolla is wearing thin and I have started looking for a place for the next month.

To all of you still working, my condolences.

Angry Man

