

Cheaha 2005, give me a triple
"The Fisher Report"
By Greg (Bulldog) Fisher

I would preface this report by saying this ride is the most difficult thing I will ever do in cycling. Most of my ride friends would say the 150 mile "Ride of Love" is more difficult. I beg to differ.

I will have to say honestly that this is not one of my favorite rides. I personally don't like out and backs, however they do make for an interesting ride experience. One would think that after three years, I would have this ride down and I wouldn't get anxious or nervous about ascending the great hill.

Cheaha 2005 would be my third trip to the great hill. I seem to always do this ride on a different bike. The first year was old down tube swift Cannondale which is a man hole cover now. The second year was a slick little Specialized Aluminum triple. This year would be my own tried and true Trek 1000 triple.

Every year I am always nervous about doing the ride. I sit around and fret over the climbs and the descents. I wonder if I can go the distance or mentally and physically poop out. All this usually starts a couple of weeks before the ride.

A good friend of mine is tickled by my Cheaha anxiety attacks and tries to calm me down and tells me to relax. Tell that to the cat in a room full of rocking chairs. He always says, you just can't enjoy this ride can you. I try to, I really do but it like trying to be taller, and that ain't gonna happen either.

We all have our own nemeses, those things in life that rear their ugly head to challenge us and sometimes make us better or cause us utter defeat. My nemeses would be the great hill (Cheaha). This mass of rock and trees and unforgiving climbs that this year attracted 517 riders. This ride isn't a buddy ride unless your buddy is of equal ability and strength and state of mind, which is very rare.

Great challenges are never easy and this year's ride was no exception. This ride is hard enough if you are good condition and have trained. It is even harder if you have suffered an injury. The Tuesday before the Sunday ride I would be doing a weekly ride on a local flat road a lot riders train on. I have ridden this road countless time without incident. This would change in a blink of an eye. I was riding with my riding buddy Larry and saw someone we knew.

What I was about to do, I strongly recommend you never attempt this.

When I saw the fellow I knew I began to u-turn without looking back. I had just begun the turn when I heard look out and then **BLAM!** I felt something hit me really hard. Little did I know but there was another rider behind going at a high rate of speed. I never saw him. I went down like sack of potatoes landing on my backside really hard and jarring my back.

The fellow that hit me somehow stayed on his bike and ran off into a ditch. When I landed, I just slumped over on the pavement bellowing like a cow giving birth. Larry quickly got to me and put his hand on me and told to be still. He thought I had broken my hip.

As I lay there I hear someone calling 911 on a cell requesting an Ambulance. As I am laying there, the first thoughts after the shock was what about Cheaha, well so much for priorities, how was I going to do that ferocious ride after this? When I came to my senses I started thinking about the Ambulance and who was going to pay for it. That would be me and with that, I sat up and said give me a minute and with that I got up and back on the bike. I rode back to the starting point about 11 miles in great discomfort. I got home and took a handful of Advil. My right side of my backside felt like I had a baseball stuck in my back pocket.

This event would further add to my ambivalence about doing the ride. I was assured by many of my friends that I could do the ride and one was wagering pitchers of beer that I would make the ride. While I was somewhat encouraged and flattered by all this, it didn't seem to calm my spirit. I thought about all then came to me. Would God help me up the great hill? For those of you who know me and my riding skill who say a resounding yes. In my church we have an E-mail prayer request bulletin board kind of a thing.

I sent an E-mail requesting prayer about a bike ride I was doing Sunday and I was really concerned about doing the ride and I was injured on top of that.

You would think that after sending the request I would instantly be transformed into Mr. confidence, invincible and ready to kick Cheaha butt, well not exactly,

Larry and I usually ride on Saturday about mid morning and get a spot at the Piedmont Hilton or the Clyde H Pike Civic center. I was sitting on my bed with my face in my hands saying oh what I will do. My wife told me if you don't go and try, you will never know if could do the ride or not. Larry would soon arrive and I would continue to struggle as I was on my way to face the great hill.

Sunday morning would come around about 5 AM. I was still uncertain about doing the ride. I would get up and dress and make myself go upstairs to eat the great breakfast the support folks prepare. I have to make myself eat breakfast.

Finally the moment was here; the time when over 500 bike riders from all over the country gather for the start. After a few words from Mike Poe, the ride's director and prayer, we started the ride to tune of "Sweet Home Alabama".

We would go though the town of Piedmont on way to the great hill. This pretty flat compared to Cheaha. Everybody motors to gain some time lost on the climbs. It is easy to tire on this 20 mile run and get winded on the first climbing.

It would be here that I would attempt to ride with a fellow from my club. This wouldn't work out as I lost track of him at the third rest stop.

I would divide this ride into segments. Get to the third rest stop, then to the park and finally to Adam's gap or the turn around point. I would then proceed with the difficult task of doing the large climbs from Adam's gap back to park. The only way to accomplish this monumental feat is one pedal stroke at a time. I know this sounds hokey but it is true. One pedal stroke works on the next one, of coarse a triple ring helps a great deal. I must admit I had forgotten how ferocious the climbs on this mountain where.

Everyone except the pros grind along till you get to the steepest climb on the ride.

This would be the one below the third rest stop. You can see the climb before get to it.

It is Huge and you see folks climbing and they look like they are in suspended animation. I dig into the triple, pray and focus. If you keep pedaling you will reach the top and a nice reward at the rest stop.

