

The Echola Metric 2007
By Carol Livingston

I got up early this morning, had some leftover lasagna for breakfast ... pasta is carbs, ya know. I donned my long riding pants, pulled on a jersey, and zipped up a snug, light-weight riding jacket. I filled my two water bottles with Gatorade, nabbed a couple of Odwalla Bars, swallowed a Musinex-D to keep me from sniffing and snorting like a cocaine addict, and off I went to meet the group from my bike club at the school in Coker.

The peloton took off at 8:00 heading up Sam Sutton Road to Upper Columbus Road. My usual riding buddies, Deanna and Laurie, weren't there, so I sorta figured that I would be riding alone at the back of the pack. I had my cell phone and a map, but I had not had the opportunity to drive the route the day before like I sometimes do. But as I've mentioned before, I've learned to be self-supporting.

The biking gods must have finally noticed me and decided that I have been training hard enough to deserve some visible sign that I am improving (or else the magic number is 2,000 miles), because today I stayed with the peloton even as they climbed Lake Arnedo Hill. A couple of the riders even remarked to me that I was riding very strong today ... but just in case, I'm planning on eating leftover lasagne for breakfast before every long ride from now on ... lol!

After that climb, the peloton sped up. I was drafting behind Pixie, who was drafting behind Dodie, who was letting the peloton slip away. I'd never had a chance to ride with the two of them before, because before today, the Lake Arnedo Hill had been a little tough for me. This is the third time I've topped it, and it seemed neither as long nor as steep as before. The three of us rolled along Upper Columbus and made the turn at the Echola Cutoff where Bulldog caught up with us. The four of us then made another turn onto Lower Columbus, and then rode through Elrod and on to the small store in Buhl.

The biking gods offered up yet another sign to me at the Buhl store, because we caught up with the main peloton there, who had stopped for a short rest. The little girl in me wanted very badly to jump up and down and say, "Look at me! I'm sorta keeping up today!" But instead, I tapped my way into the store to use the restroom. We'd gone about 22 miles so far and had another 42 miles of rolling hills to tackle. Bulldog shared some of his cookies with me.

A few minutes later, the peloton took off again heading up Sipsy Valley Road. I thought Pixie, Dodie and Bulldog were right behind me, but as I lost the peloton and looked back, they were nowhere in sight. I had never ridden on this road before, and I was a little unsure of where the next turn was, so I pulled off at a church to wait for them. As Bulldog likes to say, "If you don't know where you're going, don't get out in front." They caught up with me very shortly, and we continued on to where we needed to turn right on Romulus Road.

After a while, the road surface turned to chip-seal and got about 4 feet narrower. Ahhh ... we had entered Green County. We got to a crossroads at a place called Jenna, and Pixie, Dodie, and Bulldog wanted to stop at a small church. They wandered around behind the church to relieve themselves. I was kinda glad I had taken care of that back in Buhl, because something about relieving myself behind a church didn't set right with me ... lol ... and I wasn't sporting any toilet paper.

After that, we followed another chip-seal road back to Tuscaloosa County. As we crossed the county line, the pavement improved and the road got wider again. We were cruising along, when all of a sudden, the main peloton rolled past us going the opposite direction ... apparently someone did not read the map correctly. Not that it really mattered; we were making a loop on these roads. The difference was, that coming the direction they came, they had to climb the hill near Bethel Church and we would get to coast down it, Which we did.

We rolled into another little country store in a community called Ralph. This place also served barbeque. I tapped my way to the toilet here. On the way out, as I was paying for another bottle of Gatorade, I noticed that they were selling tee shirts that said, "You can smell our butts for miles" ... lol! Back outside, Dodie and Bulldog were looking at my bike and spinning the rear wheel. My tire had gone bad and had a good-sized mishapen lump on it. Bulldog said, "You're gonna have a blow-out soon." They asked me how many miles I had on my tires, and I told them a little over 2,000. They told me it was time to buy new ones then.

Dodie was going to swap his rear wheel with mine for the remainder of the ride. We still had another 18 miles to go. But Bulldog said for me to ride his bike and he would ride mine. I said, "But we'll have to switch shoes too!" He told me to look down ... that we both had the same style of pedals and clips, so our cycling shoes would attach to either bike. He lowered his seat a little for me, and we took off back on Sipse Valley Road again.

Pixie and Dodie then began having a hilariously good time at Bulldog's expense ... you see, he was now rolling along on my very pink "Barbie Bike." He's a good man, and obviously completely comfortable with his masculinity. He even let Pixie take a picture when we finally got back.

You know, it's kinda uncomfortable to ride a bike you're not used to. Even small changes in posture and position take some getting used to. But what really got to me was the seat. Almost immediately, I began to remark, "How do you stand this? This seat is hard as a rock!" Bulldog said, "It's supposed to be a gel seat." I was like, "This is the hardest thing I've had between my legs in I don't know when." That got everyone laughing ... lol.

We got back to Romulus Road and made another right. I would ride for a little while and then stand on the pedals to get some relief from the saddle. Not only my rear, but my neck, shoulders and lower back were feeling the effect of being on a different bike. Fortunately, we had only small hills to climb on this leg and one BIG hill to coast down. I got up to 39 mph going down that hill. Bulldog told me this was the Lindsey Hill

metric in reverse, and that next year sometime I could ride this route the other way.

But down the hill we went, over some railroad tracks, and back to the school in Coker. We rode 64.5 miles today. Pixie got her picture of Bulldog on my bike and me on his ... I think she plans to use it as the picture of the week on the bike club website ... heheh.