

Century Virgin  
With my Pals to Palmetto Ride 2007  
By Carol Livingston

Well, there's another cherry lost!

I rode With My Pals to Palmetto for my first century today, which means that I cycled my first continuous 100 mile ride. My bike club has about one century per month, with other 50-65 mile rides on other weekends. When I began to cycle last July, I had no idea that this type of endurance road riding was within my capabilities. I had marveled with awe at the ability of some to ride long distances with hills that rolled like giant waves.

Just like last weekend, I got up early this morning, but this time I had no leftover lasagna and had to begin the lengthy process of boiling noodles ... and then I had to find something to put in to it to flavor it. I was kinda in a rush this morning. I had been out of town for a couple of days on some personal business and had no Gatorade or cash money, so I needed to make a run by Winn Dixie on my way to the start of the ride. I ended up eating slightly undercooked pasta for breakfast.

I put on my crash test dummy jersey (stock photo ... I forgot to take a pic of me today). I donned my long riding pants. Socks and pink crocs finished off the outfit. Of course, this was my attire when I went to Winn Dixie for the Gatorade and the twenty dollar bill ... but I've shrugged off pride on my way to or from a ride now.

I got to Mt. Olive Baptist Church at about 7:45. Since the weather was so warm, I decided to not take any Musinex D ... I didn't want anyone to start a doping scandal about me ... heheh. My usual riding buddy, Deanna, was there. I saw Pixie and Bulldog, but not Dodie. I began to unload all my stuff. I filled my two water bottles with the newly purchased Gatorade. Larry walked over to give me a map. Deanna came over to tell me about the new bike she had on order.

As we were talking, I decided that I was NOT gonna wear the long riding pants, and pulled them down to take them off. The sudden rush of cold air around my groin froze me in my tracks instantly ... I blushed and looked down ... and PTL ... I had actually remembered to put on short riding pants also. I told Deanna about my sudden fear that I was naked when I pulled down my pants and she chuckled at me. I stuffed all my Odwalla bars, fig newtons, map, money, and cell phone in the pockets of my riding jersey. Helmet on ... gloves on ... shoes on ... arm warmers on ... and I was ready to go.

About the first 22 miles of this ride was Bulldog's Birthday ride in reverse. I don't know what it was about me today ... maybe because I was not warmed up ... or maybe I should have taken that Musinex D ... but the first few hills were leaving me huffing and puffing. By the time we got to Mormon Road, Pixie, Dodie and Deanna were long gone with the front of the pack and I had begun to lag behind Larry and Bulldog.

But that was cool. I had more time to read the church signs along the way.

I saw this one out on Mormon Road:

<<http://pedagogicalbabe.multiply.com/photos/hi-res/upload/R1zjLwoKCoEAAGKOWAU1>>

I hadn't had a good day on Friday, so this sign spoke to me.

Bulldog and Larry were waiting for me at mile 22 at the end of Morman Road. By this time we had left Tuscaloosa County and were in Fayette County. We made a right turn onto highway 12, then a quick left onto highway 35. Bulldog began to remark how this was Americana at its finest as we passed shack after shack ... real fixer-uppers he called them. Incongruously, the next shack on the left had a shiny new silver Audi out in front of it and I began to laugh out loud:

Larry had gotten ahead of us, but suddenly, there he was on the side of the road, so we made a quick stop to yank his chain ... heheh.

Overall, I felt I was mentally and physically ready for this ride and I was deliberately pacing myself so that my body felt no real pressure. I took the hills in low gears, coasted anywhere I could stay about 17 mph to save my legs, and paid close attention to hovering below any output that would rank as "feel the burn" ... you know, the old Jane Fonda workout tape?

What happened at about mile 30 was that I passed another church sign:

<<http://pedagogicalbabe.multiply.com/photos/hi-res/upload/R1zj4AoKCoEAAGUgmtw1>>

I began to dwell on the personal business that I had spent the last two days taking care of. I just started crying as I rode along. I sobbed and sobbed, but thought, well, there is about four miles until you get to the first rest stop and no one is around to see you ... maybe you'll be over your crying jag by then. But I think Bulldog must have a second sense about when I'm struggling. He'd already begun to slow down, and when I caught up, he took one look at me and told me to stop on the side of the road:

I told him what was troubling me and after a few minutes, I had settled down. A man in a pickup truck stopped next to us to see if we were okay. By then, all was well, and we took off for Fayette. At mile 34, we caught up with Larry at the Chevron station.

Apparently Deanna had had enough of riding with the "Rocket Riders" and had decided to wait for us slow folks to arrive. The four of us sat in a booth and shared Bugles and philosophy. After a while, we took off north through Fayette, past a very pretty courthouse:

<<http://pedagogicalbabe.multiply.com/photos/hi-res/upload/R1zIUaokCoEAABduTCQ1>>

We took a left on highway 96, and then another left onto highway 37, or as it's known locally, Luxapallila Parkway:

After a while we made a left onto possibly the most picturesque road of the ride, highway 23. There were antique chicken houses, flocks of guinea hens, a couple of horses that were running gloriously across a field ... and you won't believe this, but at mile 43, we saw Jesus walking on the water:

(Okay ... he was made out of plywood.)

Mile 50, the halfway mark, had us in Kennedy and into Lamar County. Riding out of Kennedy, past Ed's Outdoors, we encountered a steep hill. I began to take it just as I had been taking them all day, planning my ascent speed to match the best time to begin recovery ... I am a mathematician and know all about saddle points. However, just as I thought I'd crested it, the road turned to the right and the hill doubled in length. I kept going, but this hill had the effect of knocking the stuffing out of me for a while since I did not get to recover when I had anticipated recovery.

I think Deanna had the same problem there as me ... because neither of us pushed past 13 mph for next several miles and we were traveling on relatively flat surfaces. We were still 20 miles from the next planned rest stop, and I'm telling you that there was NOTHING out here ... not even a deer processing plant. I pulled out an Odwalla Bar and began eating it. I drank a lot of Gatorade. Larry and Bulldog were waiting for us at highway 17. Larry told us that this was a fairly busy road and we should stay single file, which we did. I heard Deanna say behind me, "We've got to start going downhill at some point."

Before we knew it, we were at mile 58 and had arrived at our destination ... I was With My Pals At Palmetto:

Looking at the scene, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. But Larry was seemingly stoked and cheerfully passing around packets of GU Energy Gel. The packet said Just Plain Superior Energy and Maximum Recovery. Okay.

Personally,

I think Larry was trying to distract us so that we wouldn't notice that our planned destination was a gas station that had not sold a gallon since the Carter administration:

Highway 59 had been recently repaved ... can't imagine where Pickens County got the money to pave eight miles of road to nowhere. Deanna and I had settled into taking the flat sections around 15 mph, cresting the hills at around 8 mph, and greedily coasting at whatever speed the biking gods offered us. While this was my first century, it was her second.

At mile 66, we made a right turn onto highway 159. Our next rest stop was at mile 73, and the rest stop was actually on this road, so I was encouraged. Somehow or another, we were back in Fayette County, but quickly returned to Pickens County. This was a hard road to ride ... chip-seal and hilly. Somewhere in the past 10-15 miles, I had begun to put my triple crank on the middle crank and the rear gear in its lowest gear when I got to anything that looked like a hill ... and then I simply pedaled without looking ahead. I stared at the road in front of my tire. Bulldog was still standing on his pedal to crest hills. I hadn't done that hill climbing technique much today at all. Larry was nowhere to be seen.

But at mile 73, we caught up with him. He was leaning on the gas pump in front of the Zion Mall. Smiling. They were also selling onions, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes in front of the Zion Mall. Inside the Zion Mall, they were selling everything imaginable ... I cannot begin to describe the range of merchandise they were selling at the Zion Mall. I cannot begin to describe the Zion Mall. You simply have to see it for yourself:

I asked for directions to the bathroom. Bulldog walked me past a rather suspicious looking radiator, a couple of tables and chairs, through a door ... and into a church sanctuary. I stopped dead in my track to take this in. I mean, Alice in Wonderland gets tea parties, gardens, and kings and queens and I encounter a church that looks more like a lean-to with a concrete floor? Well, I suppose wherever two or more are gathered in his name. But, hey, give me something to eat and drink.

Which actually happened ... more or less. After relieving myself, I asked the proprietor if he sold Gatorade. He actually had two bottles of the original yellow stuff I prefer. I walked over to peer at the food offerings in the cooler. I saw something on a plate wrapped in saran wrap. I took one out and asked the proprietor what it was. He told me it was biscuit pudding and that he would heat it up for me. It smelled heavenly ... a take on bread pudding, actually ... and if this hadn't been a church/store in a very dry county, I would have asked for some buttered rum sauce. Upon discovering my discovery, Bulldog and Larry made a mad dash for the cooler to get the last two plates.

Thus rejuvenated, we set out for the last 23 miles of the day's trek. This ride today had never gotten any less hilly, and Upper Columbus Road wasn't about to make our day any easier. We passed the Echola Store, managed to get our tired butts out of the Sipsey River Valley ... and I discovered that Lake Arnedra Hill is a 29.6 mph hill going down it.

About mile 93, who shows up, but Dodie ... offering to SAG anyone back to Mt. Olive Baptist Church who wanted it. Larry, Bulldog, and Deanna stopped to talk to him. I rolled right past the lot of them ... I had NO intention of stopping. I was afraid that I wouldn't be able to get started back up. After about another two miles, Larry caught up with me. Smiling. He asked, "Is this your first century?" I said yes. He said, "Well, then, I'm honored to ride with you" ... took off past me. Then Bulldog passed me. I asked him where Deanna was. He told me about ¼ mile behind.

Mile 97 at last appeared on my left and promised to take me back to my car if I had the reserves to crest some naughty hills around Lake Lurleen State Park. I dropped down into my granniest gear, stared at the road in front of my tire, and pedaled slowly. Bulldog waited for me at the top of the hill. I asked him if I had to climb any more hills. He told me, one. Even on the flat road now, I stayed in my granniest gear. Getting back to my car without getting off of my bike and walking was my only goal now. Maybe I could have ridden faster on this last leg of my journey, but why? Deanna caught up with me. I told her that we had one last hill.

A few quiet minutes later, Deanna said, "Please tell me that that stop sign is across the street from the church." I told her, "Yes."

8 hours, 5 minutes of near continuous cycling ... 102.98 miles.