

The climb to Pond Store and Old Tunica Road, "What is the big deal?" or "Sounds pretty harmless to me" I've heard them both. However, I know a hand-full of finishers that might have a different description of these two beasts. Sunday, September 10, 2000, St. Francis Hotel on the Lake hosted Healthy Perspective's Tunica Tango Road Race in St. Francisville, Louisiana. The course measured roughly 98-miles (if someone actually clocked it, let us know cause we really aren't sure), included a couple of dirt climbs, and was designed to make sure you hurt. Again and again and again! None of this pedal your bike around a flat four-mile loop about a million times for us. In the Tunica Tango if you miss your feed--we might never see you again. The rain on Saturday was just what the doctor ordered, it knocked the dust and sand off the dirt roads and made them almost manageable (more or less).

Jason Sager (Zaxby's) stopped back from Austin to edge out Eric Murphy (Red Stick Racing) and won the Tunica Tango in 4 hours and 33 minutes setting a course record. Since it is the first race, the mark was pretty low. And, we used highly sophisticated timing equipment, "Hey Jason, what's your computer read for time Bud?" One day, we might actually remember to start a watch with the race. Except that would complicate things because then we would have to look at the watch at the finish and actually write down a time. Way too many moving parts for us! Raphael Giangiulio (Mirage) took first in the B race with a third place overall finish.

We combined the A and B Race to form a single group on the road, yet riders were racing for prizes within their respective races. The race was long, hot, fast, furious, aggressive, and hard--exactly what a road race is supposed to be. Better yet, I got to watch most of it from wherever I felt like. One of the perks of being the promoter is that you get to con everyone else into doing your work so you can drive around and watch the action.

The pack rolled out from the hotel around 7:30 a.m. and behaved themselves for the first ten or twelve miles. Once they hit Irondale Road; a twisty, bumpy, slightly uphill, tree shaded section of pavement; someone attacked and broke the pack in two. Both groups hammered the length of Irondale. The front group just for fun and the back group chasing for dear life. "God, don't let us get dropped already" sort of thing. At the end of Irondale Road, there is a slight downhill that Ts into Highway 66. Riders must make a hard right turn on to Highway 66. We talked about taking it slow, we wrote about taking it slow, and we proved that if you don't take it slow--you end up across the road, in the grass, and fifteen feet off the road. Then, you have to chase back on. Right Herb?

Mike Lew saved the butts of the second group. He flatted on the Pickneyville Road, causing his teammates to sit up and slow the group down (although he wasn't planning on chasing back on). This allowed the second group to catch the back end of the leaders. On the Pickneyville Road Randy Legeai, Tom Harbout, and Kenny Cox motored off the front. The three worked well together, jammed over the rollers heading toward Woodville, and kept the pack 30-40 seconds back. Frequently, NOBC would head to the front of the chase bunch and try to slow it down. Just before Woodville the break was caught. Surges up the last few hills reduced the pack to about 18 riders.

On Highway 24, the smooth fast road to Fort Adams, Mark Manson tried his hand at a solo break. He spent 18 miles off the front alone and built up lead of 2.5 minutes heading toward the first dirt climb. At the climb to Pond Store, Jason Sager and Eric Murphy went to the front of the chase pack and blew it apart. Riders were strung out for at least one half-mile.

Back on the Pickneyville Road Jason and Eric reeled in Mark Manson. The order at the front shuffled a little with three in the lead and two chasing, then two in the lead. Or is it three? No it's two. Then five,

no seven, no four, chasing two. Noel Puentes, off the back, is chasing no one all the way to the gate of Angola prison. By Old Tunica Road--order was restored--Eric Murphy and Jason Sager were alone at the front. They climbed, and walked, side-by-side up the first hill. Then, Sager was off. He was pedaling smoothly through the muck and up the hills while Murphy struggled up each and every climb. Once they hit the tar, Jason was rolling; Eric was chasing. Within the last nine miles of the race Eric gave it everything and closed a 40-second gap. They climbed the final hill to the finish together. Jason surged at 300 meters easily taking first. Eric pedaled in for second. Then, a sporadic-stream of riders filtered in for the next hour or two--one rider at time. Looking at their faces, I was sure of one thing, "This is a race they will remember."

Promoters notes:

If someone knows what planet Mike Lew grew up on, please let me in on the secret. Mike looks me straight in the eye and says, "No, I'm not going to chase, my legs just don't have it." Then we hear Mike is lost and delirious going the wrong way on Pickneyville Road, riding the course alone, and he is an hour off the back. Guy Cross reminds us it's Mike Lew and delirious is a natural state (actually Guy was far more brutal). Finally, after the race in the parking lot as I'm asking Mike, "What happened?" he tells me, " I had a little problem with my rear hub, so on Old Tunica Road I had to carry my bike and run nine miles or so." God, help us if he ever actually trains.

If you raced, I would certainly like your opinion of the course. Would you ride it again? Don't worry, I mean next year. I think it's a great course, if used sparingly. But it's a pain-in-the-butt logistically. So if folks don't like it, let me know. Or, if you did like it, let me know that too. Either way, it will help us decide if we would use this route again.

For those that couldn't make it today, join us in February 2001 for Rouge-Roubaix III. It includes the two climbs from the Tunica Tango and the rest of the course is harder! It's not a race, but lots of fun in a death-march sort of way.

Jon