

START HERE

BY KIP MIKLER



pain is your friend

Half-stepping into the world of endurance riding

DON'T KNOW HOW THE ENDURANCE freaks do it. Never mind the ungodly physical effort it takes to win these races, it's the mindset that amazes me. The ability to just ride, no matter what.

Shortly after joining *Bike*, I got the chance to race this summer's B.C. Bike Race, a seven-day haul from Victoria to Whistler. I had never done anything like this, but at my first staff meeting I was introduced as the "cross-country guy." So I figured racing 300-plus miles across British Columbia was part of the job description.

The first thing I learned about preparing for an event like this is that it's a lonely road. My friends had better things to do with their weekends than wake early, suffer through five-hour training rides, then collapse into a couch coma the rest of the day. When the e-mails started flying on Friday afternoons, the ones planning sweet weekend shuttle rides, I had to look away.

A training plan was posted on the B.C. Bike Race web site: Eighteen hours per week? Back-to-back, six-hour days? Right. Like most working stiffs, I made do by commuting to work, sneaking in 6 a.m. weekday rides and going big on the weekends.

I spent my June Saturdays alone in the Santa Ana Mountains, riding the burliest climbs I could find. I had always wondered what exactly went through the minds of endurance racers like Chris Eatough during their countless hours of training. I can't speak for others, but my solitary thoughts, untethered from life's usual distractions, ranged from lucid and hopeful to dark and borderline deranged. Usually by the four-hour mark I was reduced to simple ideas: Need In-n-Out Burger. Don't crash. Double-double, chocolate shake.

A couple weeks before the race, I finished a hard ride about an hour short of the recommended six hours. My mind was Jell-O, but my legs seemed okay. Head back out or pack it in? I contemplated the question as a stinging mixture of sweat and cheap sunscreen poured into my eyes. Screw it, I'm no Eatough. Chocolate shake it was.

Eatough and his Trek-VW partner Jeff Schalk won the B.C. Bike Race; I was just happy to live to tell about it. You can read about the misadventures of Team Bike on page 44. For those who prefer the pain in short, intense doses, we also celebrate the start of cyclocross season with a look at Jonathan Page's lonely road to becoming the greatest American 'cross racer ever. Or if you'd rather skip the suffering altogether, check out our story on the massive descents available at Baldface Lodge, where the grins far outnumber the grimaces.

One last warning: Endurance racing is painful, but it's also addictive. Seems we have an opening for La Ruta de los Conquistadores. Me, me, pick me! 