

WEST TEXAS WIND

By Richard McLamore



"Are you *trying* to drop me?!"

Lobbed into the cross-wind over a growing gap on a section of fresh chip-seal by my son, this question mixed equal parts fear, desperation and determination.

We were entering the last 10 miles of what was probably his first "real" ride. It's not so much the distance that makes a ride "real." It's the terrain and/or the intensity of effort, of course. That meant "doing some hills," as Bill Hadley used to say. And that also meant doing a solid hour or so into the wind, since both getting to the hills, and riding the first section of them, took us into a headwind. It was relatively gentle, though, because the sky was overcast and the rain was intermittently sprinkling.

This wasn't the first ride for the kid to ride a hill—he's made it up some of the steepest hills we have on offer around here—and even tried to jump me at the top of a couple of them. But it was the first time to ride a climb longer than a mile-and-a-half, and the first time to have to deal with a stretch of road with extended climbing (and a couple of descents). I'd promised that I wouldn't drop him in the hills, and I didn't. He found a good rhythm and rode as hard as he then thought he could.

Like lots of riders, I guess, he has a hard time sustaining an effort if he doesn't know how long he'll have to keep it up. And on a couple of the climbs the road twists around enough that it's hard to know where it's going to stop if you haven't ridden it before. (And remember, the McLamore household is a bike-computer-free zone for a while, so we gauge distance by things like mailboxes, power poles, and dead deer carcasses these days). So, I'd encourage him with "you're doing great, it's gonna ease off a bit once we get under the ridge."

It's funny how having to describe a section of road can make you see it differently—the top of Two-Mile Hill is not, as I've thought it was for a long time, at the fluorescent yellow school-bus sign, but another hundred yards down the road at the entrance to Vulcan Materials facility. Anyway, despite a flat that the sealant worked on up to 70-80 psi, but would fail again at any higher pressure, we made it past the descent of Rest Stop Hill and up to the top of the nasty little climb after it.

The clouds, however, looked menacing off in the direction where we were headed, so we decided to turn around and go back. This meant climbing Rest Stop Hill with next to no recovery from the effort of climbing its troublesome little sister. Rest Stop Hill is less than a half-mile long, and what makes it hard to climb is the descent into it: finding the progression of gears to get you smoothly from 35 mph to 12-15mph is difficult. More so if your derailleurs—front and rear—are shot, as were the kid's. His front derailleur was in such bad shape that waiting for it to shift up to his big chain ring was like sitting on hold for customer service with a major computer corporation. (That problem has now been solved . . .).

Rest Stop Hill acquires its name from the fact . . . that . . . duh . . . there's a rest stop at the top of it, although the rest stop is not *really* at the top, but it's close enough. Rest Stop Hill, this day, was the site of lesson number one of what a "real ride" is. Those yellow and black curve arrow warning signs mark about the last 300 yards of the climb: I gauge my effort by lying to myself that if I "make it to that one I can ease off" and then jumping the last 100 yards or so to the rest stop. Somewhere in the middle of the signs, the kid went anaerobic, but not anaerobic enough that he couldn't still complain. Being the sensitive father that I'm not, I told him to focus on the signs and that we'd almost made it. I think he wanted to kill me.

Except for a few little blips, the rest of that stretch of 277 is

downhill, so we had some fun and recovered. But we needed to stop at a store—and the ones at Coronado's Camp and View were both closed for the Fourth of July holiday weekend—so we needed to make it up to Caps. With a couple of miles to go—and rolling with the tailwind—I asked if the kid could go a little harder for about 5 minutes. "I'll try," he said.

So, I increased the pace a bit. The idea was to ride hard to the store, which, at the pace we were going, was probably less than 5 minutes up the road. But about two-thirds of the way there, Quin blew up. And he was not happy about it. "Why can't I ride that fast?" I didn't tell him that part of it was because his bike needed new stuff (which it did), but told him the equally true: "because you've never really gone *hard* before. It hurts like that for everyone."

We stopped at the store and I made him eat—since another reason for his blow-up had to do with not eating enough, and we started the last stretch. Without telling him, as we started on Antilley road (which HAS to be one of the worst stretches of chip seal in the state now that the county "fixed" it. I mean, really, was running a groover over the fresh chip-seal absolutely necessary?), I sped up a little. And then a little more. And then increased to fast as we hit the last half-mile before our turn back towards home. Quin actually lasted a little longer than I thought he would before he yelled.

And after giving him a couple of seconds to recover, I told him "of course I was trying to drop you, welcome to your first real ride."

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