

The Race of Truth: The North Atlantic Time Trial Championships August 8, 2004

by Mikael Hanson

Within the sport of cycling, the time trial is often referred to as the 'race of truth', as it is the purest form of cycling. Gone is the crowded peloton, the lead-out train, in fact there are no team tactics what so ever. A time trial is simply you, your bike, and the clock, which can be the toughest foe of all.

A few Sunday's ago I competed in the North Atlantic Time Trial Championships in northern Connecticut. I have to trace back to my college days to find the last time I raced in a 40km time trial without doing a run immediately after. Needless to say, my PR of just under 55 minutes would likely not be challenged on this fine August day, as I can't seem to fit in those 300+ mile weeks anymore! But, I was praying for at least a respectable showing from my thirty-something legs.

As I drove north along CT Route 8, the surrounding countryside became vaguely familiar. I knew this area from last winter, as it was a frequent destination for several of my cross-county ski outings. However, with that realization I also knew that the odds of the 40km course being perfect flat were next to nil. I pulled into the narrow parking lot and was immediately greeted with a bevy of time trail bikes. It was like a TT swap meet, with every brand represented. Leading the numbers were your newer Cervelos and Treks (popular among those who follow the masses), but I did happen to see a few vintage gems like a Look KG 196 (same as my ride) and a GT Vengeance, that looked right out of the 1996 Olympics.

After a 20min warm-up on the trainer, I donned my long sleeve solid blue body suit, my matching blue lycra shoe covers and headed over to the start ramp (remember, a large amount of racing success is mental, so looking fast can help - well at least it doesn't hurt!). Ten... Five, four, three, two, one... Go! Screamed the official. I launched myself up the road and quickly jettisoned my speed to 28mph (which was accompanied by a spike in my heart rate to the mid-160s – where it would stay). I was feeling good over the opening few miles and quickly caught the two souls who started ahead of me, passing them in silence as I kept my focus on the task at hand.

At roughly the 10km mark, I noticed my speed starting to fall off and heart rate creep up toward the 170 red-zone. I was having trouble holding even 24mph and a quick check of the rear wheel revealed no flat tire or rubbing brake caliper– what was going on? I hit the 20km turn around well behind schedule at 32:30, and only then did I figure out why I was traveling at a pedestrian pace. Not only did we have a modest head wind for the outbound leg (not picked up by me due to the ear plugs I wear in TTs), but had I bothered to refer to a topographical map, I would plainly see that the first half was net uphill in a big way (talk about your false flats).

With the wind now securely at my back and the road gently falling away from me, my speed returned to that coveted 28, 29, even 30mph as there was some serious ground to make up. I monitored my average speed to track my progress. It slowly climbed from 23 to the mid-24s with 10km to go, but I needed more. Ultimately my return leg would be several minutes faster than the out bound journey, but was not enough to break that key 60 minute barrier (as a point of reference, the winner posted a time of 54 and change – now that is flying!). My final time was 1:01:31 (32:31 out and 29:00 back), which left me in 5th place for the Category 4-5 division (a mere 1 second out of 4th and 30 seconds out of a medal). However, as I was coasting beyond the finish line, I couldn't help but think that if I still had to run, say 5 miles, I could do it (albeit slowly). This, my friends is the curse of the Triathlete – a true jack-of-all-trades, yet master of none. Think I will go for a swim now!