

100,000 Bike Miles

Steve Hulme, Boise, Idaho, September 2004

In February, 1995, Greg LeMond came to Boise. *The Greg LeMond* - the guy before Lance Armstrong. Greg was the first American to ever win the Tour de France bicycle race. (He won 3 times, in 1986, 1989, and 1990.) He came to Boise to promote a bagel shop he had a financial interest in. I'm not a huge bagel fan - perhaps if there were no such thing as donuts, I'd feel differently. (Mmmmmmmmm.... donuts...)

I dropped everything to go see him - for me, it was akin to an audience with the Pope! It was a gray, wet day; I bicycled to the bagel shop and stood in line to shake his hand. A photo, taken by a fellow line-stander with my camera, documented the occasion. Greg was very gracious; he spoke to me like an old friend.

I told him I had ridden 50,000 miles. His jaw dropped incredulously. "Fifty thousand miles - in a YEAR?!??" I clarified - I'd ridden 50,000 miles since 1986. He was relieved. I was amused. He personalized a poster for me - "To Steve: Keep it up another 50,000!" That poster, and the photo, are immortalized behind glass - one of my cherished possessions.

Well, Pope Gregory might be interested to know that I kept it up for another 50,000. On September 1, 2004, the odometer clicked over 6 numbers, as I arrived at 100,000 miles. (Since January 1986, when I decided to incorporate bike-riding into my life as transportation and exercise, and started keeping track of my miles.)



What now? Well, I could store the bike on a hook in the garage, and get myself a car, and start driving to work. Umm..... NAH. Don't think I'll do that. I guess I better get started on 200,000 miles. I'm a little slower now than I was in 1986, but if I ever get to retire, that should give me more riding time.

O.A.Q. (occasionally-asked questions)

Q. How far is your commute?

A. About 8 miles, round-trip. (I try to ride for exercise/pleasure every day, besides the commute ride.)

Q. How many bikes?

A. 4 bikes.

- A Peugeot "Canyon Express" mountain bike, purchased in 1985 for \$450. (Nobody knew if mountain bikes would catch on at the time; the bike shop was full of "ten speeds," and one or two mountain bikes.)

- A mid-level Bridgestone road bike, bought on sale for \$400.

- A Cannondale road bike - I bought the frame and built the bike. (\$800 invested)

- My current, and possibly favorite, bike - a Cannondale touring bike. (\$900, retail \$1400; I got it from a guy who was doing a bankruptcy sale.)

The Bridgestone and the first Cannondale are both retired, but in my garage. They are like dear friends - I can't bear to part with them. I still ride the mountain bike, occasionally.

Q. Do you take a shower?

A. I consider myself very fortunate to work for an employer that provides a nice shower and locker room facility, and a secure place for my bike. (ALL employers should do that, but they don't, unfortunately.) Normally, my morning commute is cool enough, and at a slow enough pace, that I don't break a major sweat and so I don't need a shower. (The people I work with may have differing opinions.)

Q. Did anybody inspire you to ride?

A. My father regularly walked or rode a bike to his work. And we lived in a house that was close enough to work, schools, etc., to make that option practical... I'd never do otherwise. And I'll always be grateful to Betty. She and I worked together, and she rode a bike. And shared her enthusiasm for bike transportation. Without her influence, I might never have given it a try.

Q. Does your wife ride? Do your kids ride?

A. For all practical purposes, no. They've never caught the vision, despite my incessant, tedious sermonizing.

Q. Why do you ride?

A. When I started (commuting), it was mostly because of motor-vehicle frustration. We were a 1-car family, and we had to juggle our car usage. And when I drove the car, I *hated* sitting in traffic, looking for a parking space, etc. My friend Betty, who rode a bike, didn't have to deal with ANY of that. Nowadays, the reasons I ride, listed roughly in order of importance, are:

- Joy. My commute is frequently one of the emotional highlights of my day. (How many motorists can say *that*?) And even on the very worst days, I get a sense of satisfaction for having completed the ordeal.

- Economy. What does it cost to own and operate a car? Back in 1995, the AAA said 41.2 cents/mile. The IRS allows 37.5 cents/mile. The bike is *maybe* 4 or 5 cents/mile, if you include special clothing and such. Those hybrid cars advertise 50mpg - I've gotten 100,000mpg (so far)!

- Community. By that, I mean I'm doing my part to minimize air pollution and to make the infrastructure work. (As I ride along and see rows of cars, SUVs, and pickups going by, virtually all of them carrying one person, it seems so impractical! How can we be clamoring for more blacktop to carry our traffic and park our vehicles, when what we have is being used so impractically?)

Q. Is bicycling on the road safe?

A. There is a calculated risk in everything we do. Getting out of bed, or taking a bath, has a slight element of risk. Statistically, traveling by car is one of the more dangerous things most people do. Riding a bike on the road can be very safe, if the rider is obeying the rules, paying attention, and riding predictably and defensively.

Q. Have you crashed?

A. DUH!! Crashing goes with the territory, although I've been fortunate to have had relatively few crashes, and no debilitating injuries. I haven't crashed for a few years now, and I intend to keep it that way. I've been in 3 collisions with cars. One was my fault; the other two were the fault of the driver. 2 times, I've been *really* glad I had my helmet on. Which leads to the next question.

Q. Helmet?

A. Always! Religiously.

Q. Can you drive a car?

A. I haven't driven a car to work since September, 1997. But as Rain Man said, "I'm an excellent driver." I've driven professionally in the past; I have a Commercial Driver's License. I love to drive, but I hate heavy traffic. Ever so occasionally (2 times in the last 12 months) on beautiful days, I ride my motorcycle to work. (I ride it for pleasure, as well.) My wife will sometimes let me use her minivan to run errands in. (It would be difficult to live without a car in 21st Century America.)

Q. Ever consider bike racing?

A. Do I *look* like a bike racer? Hahahahahahaha! But seriously... I wouldn't be averse to a time trial situation. I don't care for the notion of clanking rims with other bike riders, however... the ground is too hard, and I heal up too slowly nowadays.

Q. How fast can you go?

A. My average speed these days, over flat terrain without a wind factor, is probably 16-18 mph. (Down a couple mph from my younger days.) I can ride as slow as you can walk. I attain 30mph almost every day, riding down a hill on my way to work. The fastest I've ever ridden was 54mph, descending Mt. Charleston, just out of Las Vegas.

Q. Do you ride all year round?

A. Yup. On *really, really*, bad days (slippery roads), I've been known to put my bike on the bus rack and take the bus, in the hopes that things will be better at going-home time.



(The commute, January 2004)

Q. (Usually asked on a cold or wet day) How can you *do* that?

A. I put on the appropriate gear, straddle the bike, and start pedaling.

Here are some related questions that I find myself asking:

- When I listen to the "slow and go" traffic reports on the radio every morning, I think to myself, "How can they *do* that?"

- When I look at the car ads in the newspaper, that advertise cars for *only* \$249 or \$299 a month, I think to myself, "How can they *do* that?"

- When gas goes over \$2/gallon, and people just keep on buying it, I ask myself, "How can they *do* that?"

- When I'm enjoying my ride home from work, which frequently includes breezing past long lines of cars waiting at traffic signals, I think to myself, "How can they *do* that?" (By the way, I *do* obey traffic signals... but there's rarely a long line of bikes to wait behind.)

- When people are sitting in their cars, in traffic, on even the most picture-perfect days, I ask myself, "HOW CAN THEY DO THAT?!?"

Harley-Davidson motorcycle riders like to say, "If I have to explain, you wouldn't understand." That's true... perhaps it's even *more* true of bicycle riding.

STATS:

Fewest miles in a calendar year - 2195 (in 1986; year 1)

Fewest miles in a year since - 4421 (1999)

Most miles in a year - 6589 (1996)

Most miles in a calendar month - 1062 (July 1994)

Fewest miles in a month - 2 (January 1989) (Girly man!)

Most miles in a day - 102 (6 October, 1991)

More facts and opinions: <http://home.rmci.net/bikeboy>