

## 24-Hours is forever

Time is such a relative commodity. If your doctor tells you, you have twenty-four hours to live, one day is the blink of an eye. Sign up for a 24-hour mountain bike race and one day is forever.

September 24 and 25 Watonga's Roman Nose Lake played host the third annual '24-Hours Up the Nose'. A rocky vertically challenging eight-mile course, the event gained fame and favor with Kansas riders, when Central Kansas Mountain Bike Club member Cameron Chambers won its inaugural 24-hour race in 2003 with a comfortable margin.

Since my upset victory at last month's Cruise the Blues, my training had been limited to weekly trips to the Butcher, Baker and Candle Stick Maker for Marjie's peanut butter malts. Not exactly endurance training, but with a \$100 entry fee, gas hovering at \$2.80 per gallon and training rides that added more calories than they burned, 24-Hours was not exactly in my physical or financial budget.

The Monday before the race, I still was not going. Cash was tight and my race bike had probably seen a few too many miles for such a grueling event. While describing a 24-hour race to my auto racing friends over a few beers, Terry Malm said, "Heck, I'll sponsor you for that." I figured it was a sadistic desire to see what kind of stories I would come back with. Since Cameron was not racing this year, he offered the use of one of his title winning team bikes, headlights and volunteered to act as pit crew. So much for my excuses.

With cash from Terry and Kenny Malm, equipment from Golden Belt Bicycle and a serious lack of common sense, I spent Wednesday night washing and packing race gear. Friday night as I headed south to the land of red dirt, the realization of what I had signed on for started to sink in. 24 hours seemed like a long time.

Originally, I planned to spend Friday at a friend's house in Wichita, but as the pre-race jitters started, I knew I would not sleep. I stopped for a short visit and drove on. At 4:00 AM Saturday morning, I pulled into Roman Nose Lake, reclined the truck seats and got a few hours of restless sleep, filled with dreams of medivac choppers and next of kin.

A few hours later the hustle and bustle of a race coming to life had me stirring back to consciousness.

By 8 AM, registration tents were up, Red Bull representatives were filling coolers and pit crews were staking out pop-up tents along pit road. Through sleep-

blurred eyes, I spotted the camper other CKMBC racers had set up the day before. I was the only participant from Lindsborg for this race against the clock.

11:15 AM, riders gathered at the timer's tent for a pre-race briefing. The race starts at exactly twelve noon on Saturday; it ends at 12 noon on Sunday. Riders with the most laps wins their respective classes. Sleep if you want, but while you dream you may be losing places. Just the instructions had my eyelids drooping.

At 12 noon, solo and team racers started on the first of many laps. I made the first climb in the lead group and settled into a 24-hour pace running ninth overall, third among the soloist.

Lap one went by quick, in about 40 minutes I was cruising through the timer's tent for the end of lap one. As I checked through the tent, I gave Cameron a 'thumbs up' and kept rolling.

Lap two, no real problems, but the rear tire felt a little low. Cameron added some air while I took a quick break. I was feeling good, still running third. "You need to slow down," Cameron said. "24-hours is a long time."

Lap three, the climbs were getting a little tougher. The rear tire was going soft again. After a little hike-a-bike, I got some trailside help that got me back to the pits in fifth place.

Cameron installed a tube in the rear tire. I smoked a cigarette, loaded up on nourishment and went out for lap four.

By now, the climbs were getting a lot tougher. The rear tire went low again. My inept attempts as trailside repair only made it worse. As I ran down one of the descents rolling the bike along beside me, the bead on the rear tire exploded. The tube wrapped around the frame and disc brake bringing the rear wheel to a skidding stop. 24-hours is a long time.

I threw the wounded race bike over my shoulder and jogged the 3 or 4 miles back to the timer's tent. I radioed in to have my Sugar TI ready to roll. After a quick cigarette and a carb bar, I was on my worn, but familiar ride.

Familiarity is not always a good thing. Too much speed, too much front brake, and too little traction had me getting up off the ground after a little downhill. Sugar's drive chain was mangled and for the third lap in a row, I was limping in on a wounded bike.

By the time I got in, I had dropped to tenth place. Cameron had been busy working on some other CKMBC member's bikes but had a replacement rear

Story and Photos  
By Terry Spradley

wheel ready. I think I smoked two cigarettes, shoved a handful of something in my mouth while discussing how much my bum hurt as I rolled out of the pits on another lap.

Lap six things smoothed out. The loaner 29er was running fast, but the trauma of the earlier laps had taken their toll. I went down again. No damage to the bike, but the green metal T-pole that broke my fall received a nice bend from my helmet.

Lap seven, as I rode the trail heading for the climbing sections, my mind mulled over the fact that I had been on the bike for 7 hours and was still several hours from the halfway point. As the sun sank below the horizon, I reached down and turned on the bike's headlamp. 24 hours is a very long time.

By 11 PM, I was working on lap number 10. It had been almost 80 miles and twelve hours since I started out fresh and new. Now my legs hurt, both thumbs had open bleeding wounds from the bike's grip shifters and we won't even talk about my bum. I had all but fallen asleep on the bike more than once. I finished lap 10 shortly after midnight, My pit crew and I agreed it was time for a nap.

I woke up two or three times, but the sight of tired worn out bikers and crew members wearing jackets and long pants as they huddled around the fire did not inspire me to jump up and do another lap. Finally, shortly after 4 AM, I wandered through the pits of broken souls and broken bikes to check the leader board. Evidently, several others had a hard night; I had only dropped from sixth to eighth during my nap. In the misty darkness, Once again, I pulled on my full-coverage helmet, found my gloves and headed off into the night. 24 hours is a very, very, long time.

Riding through the darkness of the early morning is an experience. Through the wooded sections, you only see the circle of light projected from the front of your bike. You can hear other things, but you only see what is directly in that circle of light. On the high points, you can see the beams of lights from other riders cutting their way through different parts of the course. It was a surreal setting.

As the sun came up on the new day, I perked up a bit, but had little left for the trail. On my final lap, I caught up with CKMBC's solo female rider Kim Ellenz and her husband Daron, a two-person relay rider. Kim and I rode in together. Daron sped off ahead of us.

I ended up finishing eighth of out 12 solo finishers. Taking out breaks and naptime, I was on the bike for a little over 15 hours, flatted three times, crashed twice and rode just over 104 miles.

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Special thanks to my sponsors, Malm Construction, Lindsborg, and Golden Belt Bicycle Company, Great Bend.

Additional CKMBC member finishes:

Doug Palen, Glen Elder, second solo men, 23 laps

Kim Ellenz, Beloit, first solo female, 8 laps

Doug Chambers & friends, 4-man relay, second, 33 laps

Daron Ellenz, Craig Gasper, 2-man relay, fourth, 14 laps