

Juan Lopera's Mt. Washington Ride:

By the numbers: 1:09:41; 9th in age group; 36th/600+ riders; 7.6 miles, 12% avg grade with 22% max on the last 50 yards, over 4.5K ft elevation gained; avg speed 6.46mpg; 1:07 or 97% at Z4 HR; 281 NP; IF/TSS: 0.97/ 108; 76 rpm avg.

Recap: Accomplished my personal goal of sub 1:10! This was an awesome awesome experience. It all started with emails from two teammates who were willing to transfer their bibs since they had last minute commitments that conflicted with the race. I ended up taking Dan's bib (thanks Goldman!) about two weeks before the race day. Then I had to figure out how to get my bike the proper climbing gear. The amount of logistics almost made me turn down the opportunity to the race – so glad I didn't back down. Bruce Cohen offered to lend me his derailleur and 32 cassette. My bike is compact so my lowest gearing would be 34/32, which was not ideal according to some of the people I talked to who had done the climb. I eventually bought a 34 cassette to have more teeth to climb. I had to figure out which of my bikes to use. I quickly realized that my new F8 Pinarello, which is my lightest bike, by about 2.5 lbs, was not going to work because it has electronic components and I had a mechanical derailleur. Carlitos, my mechanic at Wheel Works, took care of me and set up my Paris Pinarello bike by Tuesday, which gave me enough time to test the bike on a hill training day Wednesday, additional rides on Thursday and openers Friday and do some minor additional equipment changes (switching paddles and saddle). Always critical to test new equipment well in advance of race day – as Tom Keery found out.

This was my first time doing this climb so the big question was: what time was realistic? I knew that a “top notch” elite time required sub 1:10 so I needed to figure out if my FTP watts/kg would get me there in that time. I found an awesome little online tool to run my numbers using two methods: (1) based on my FTP and (2) based on another local climb I had done which for me was the Wachusett. Both calculations estimated 1:05 to 1:08 was possible. That gave me the motivation I needed. Although after running into Erik V. in the parking lot and finding out that his first time doing MWHC he was above 1:10, I was feeling less optimistic about my chances. The link to the calculator is:

http://www.northeastcycling.com/neclimbs_hillcalc.htm

Now I needed to figure out how to pace myself. Do I aim for my FTP, which is by definition, the most you can do an hour? I decided (with consultation with Carmi) to start at about 5% below FTP for an effort over an hour and increase the effort throughout the climb based on how I felt. I set up a course on my garmin to help me pace. The file consisted of three two-mile segments, one 1-mile segment and the remaining 0.6-mile finishing segment for the total 7.6 mile course. Each segment reminded me (through beeping) if I was below or above the desired wattage. This worked out very well for several reasons: (1) pacing at my own level while ignoring everyone else around me, (2) to split the pain into segments and having a sense of accomplishment every time I completed 2 mile segments and (3) to increase my power towards the end – for example, my last 0.6-mile segment was my highest power at 300.

Jenny and I drove up late on Friday to avoid traffic but ended up going to bed very late – past 11pm and getting little sleep since I was up by 530 to have enough time to register and warm up on the trainer. I lined up for my 8:40 start wave, which was the Blue Bib 20-39 age range and was 5 minutes after the Red Bib wave, which had the “Top Notch” riders. Once the cannon went off and we got going, I was quickly with the front leading Blue Bib group of about 10 of us. That included my teammate John Jantz who is our rising 545 rockstar 23 year old climber. I stayed to my desired pace and John took off at a much faster pace. He ended up getting 13th overall, amazingly, ahead of EV who was 15th overall. About 2 miles in, I was the third up the climb from my starting wave. John and this amazing tiny Argentinian climber girl

Victoria Di Savino were way ahead of me within the first few miles. She was actually on John's wheel for a while climbing off the saddle non-stop. I thought she wouldn't last but I ended up only passing her on the finishing 50-yard 22% climb. I was feeling encouraged when I started passing a bunch of the red bib riders who had started 5 minutes before. The climb was relentless and there was very little respite. I transported myself mentally to the mountains I have climbed back home in Colombia which appear to have no summit – they just keep going. My pacing felt very manageable and I knew I was working hard but didn't want to look at my heart rate to avoid getting concerned – just focused on finishing the current 2-mile segment at the target power. I suppressed the suffering by taking in the amazing views, smiling at all the rangers along the course and providing words of encouragement to the red bibs I passed by – most replied back with similar words but many were suffering so much they could barely look up, panting desperately.

With about a mile to go I started feeling confident about 1:10 but knew I needed to pick up the pace. The last 0.6-mile segment, my garmin called for 300 wattage and I'm glad for having that reminder since the steep sections, towards the end, made me feel less confident about 1:10. Getting to the last few yards to the finish is an amazing experience – all the people screaming, seeing Jenny with our dog Luna, was so uplifting and seeing my teammate Tom ahead who started in the first wave and also seeing tiny Victoria, provided a nice final carrot to chase. I had enough in the legs to push the wattage to about 400 for the remaining yards. I got to the finish and clocked at 1:09.41. I was gassed and was thankful for the lady who covered me with a blanket and got me a Gatorade.

I felt very good about my performance and pacing – I did not push myself too far into the red and found the time manageable so I feel there is opportunity to do even better next time. Oh yeah, definitely worth many next times! I'm hooked! Most awesome racing experience this year. Closest two it was Devil's Kitchen in Catskills.