

Dirty Kanza 2009

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It was the evening of Jan 11th - when my cell phone rang. It was Kevin Doggett - he had been out on the internet and realized it was opening day to sign up for the Dirty Kanza and he was worried that it would fill up. I said, "Kevin - this is crazy - 205 miles - we have never done that many miles on paved roads. This is on dirt / gravel roads in the Flint Hills - What are you thinking?" There was a long pause and then he made this bold statement "We Can Do It". I shook my head and said "OK - sign me up, why not - I don't have anything else to do on May 30th". So that is how this adventure got started!!

We trained a lot during the winter and spring working on our endurance and spending most of our time on our cross bikes out riding gravel roads. I also spent a lot of time thinking about how we were going to finish this ride that Kevin had signed us up for. In March - Kevin decided that I had a good point in my statement that we had never done 205 miles on a bike - so he decided that we should ride to Lawrence, KS and do that 200 mile ride that we had talked about for years... So back in March - six of us completed our first 200 plus mile road ride - it was on pavement, one way, and we did have a tailwind to help us for a good part of it. After this ride Kevin became more confident - I kept telling him there was a few things we should think about: 1 - Paved roads aren't the same as gravel / dirt roads 2 - One way trips with the wind aren't the same as big circles through the Flint Hills of Kansas. 3 - Road bikes are a lot lighter than a cross bike equipped with over 6 lbs of water, 3 spare tubes, five CO2 inflation cylinders, a spare tire, and a rear rack to hold everything we would need 4 - Road tires (23 series) with 100 psi have a lot less rolling resistances than a cross tires (32 series) with 70 psi 5 - And one last small detail - the temperature is usually cooler in March than on May 30th (and it was) I know what you are saying - it is only 5 things - "You Can Do It". Side note - so do you know where that line came from "You Can Do It" - I will refresh your memory.... Do you remember the movie "Water Boy" - it was a funny movie, but do you remember the goof guys (Ya the ones from the swamp lands) - that is where that line came from... They were talking to the Water Boy - it was a movie, it was not real, in real life he could not do it, but it was a good line... Smile!!! So before we knew it - we were heading up to the Dirty Kanza - it was Friday May 29th and we arrived around 4 pm in Emporia, Kansas. Our buddy, Steve, went up with us to be our support driver. Oh ya - I forgot to mention one small detail about this ride... There was no supported rest stops and only 4 towns on the whole route that would have supplies. There was also a statement on the registration form that I will always remember it went something like this: "If you sign up for this ride and can not finish - Don't call us, we will not come and get you. If you can not complete this ride - do everyone a favor and do not sign up...". So Steve was our point person and with that I want to say "Thank You" - You were part of the team and you had a role in helping us finish!!!! On Friday night - We ate Pizza with our friends and then headed back to the hotel to get some sleep... The bikes were ready and the alarm clock went off at 4:45 am and we headed over to McDonalds - The Breakfast of Champions... We got back to the hotel and made our final preparations - then we headed to the starting line. At the starting line it was different for me, usually I can look around and see riders that I think I can match up with and some that I ask the question "can they really do this". This day was different - I looked around and everyone seemed like they were younger and stronger. I was worried - what am I doing here... Today the other riders were measuring me up and saying does he really think he can finish this ride... Soon the race director said "go" and we all rolled out of the parking lot and onto the city streets of Emporia. There was a lot of talking at first and everyone stayed in the main pack - soon we were turning right and heading toward downtown at a pretty good speed... As we left town we made a hard right turn onto a gravel road and the front runners took off. I settled in behind a few guys and soon we had a pace line riding down the gravel road - I never knew how big it was to scared to take a look behind me. I was just focusing on the road ahead of me and the back wheel of the rider in front of me, but reports later said it may have had up to 30 riders in it. Things were going good until we hit the first big challenge, the first big hill, as we climbed it took its toll on the riders and the pace line fell apart. When we reached the top of the hill, only 6 riders were still together. Kevin and I settled into our new group and continued on toward our first check point in Cottonwood Falls We were headed south and the wind was in our face - we knew we had 40 miles of this wind, but we also knew later in the day we would be heading North toward Council Grove and that wind would really be nice to have at our backs... So that kept our spirits high. What we did not know was the wind was going to shift during the day and would be in our face most of day!!! We rolled into Cottonwood Falls ahead of schedule and my second meal of the day was waiting for me at the local cafe. You have to love small towns and Blackberrys - I had Googled the restaurants in Cottonwood Falls the night before and got the telephone number for the only Cafe. So when I was about 8 miles from town - I made the call, yes the call, to my new favorite Cafe in Cottonwood Falls, Emma Chase Cafe, and ordered some grilled chicken and mashed potatoes and gave her the time I would be rolling into town. She asked me what I was doing and I told her I was on my bicycle and in a race against time - I would be in a hurry! I also asked her where the cafe was - she said on Main Street. I did not have a map of the town, but I did know the first check point was at the Casey's Store. She gave me directions and then said "do these little ribbons mean anything to you" - I said oh ya they are route markers. She said just follow the ribbons they are on the street signs in front of the Cafe. She took my order and had it waiting for me at the table when I walked in - she said you must be the guy on the bike that ordered the chicken. I smiled and said yes - I ate the mashed potatoes, one piece of chicken, and downed the large water. The other 2 pieces of chicken went in my ziploc bag and into my jersey pocket. The fourth piece of chicken - I shared with my friend Kevin... We spent about 16 minutes in Cottonwood Falls -checking in, getting the next map, restocking water bottles, and eating my food - so when we rolled out of town we were ahead of schedule by about 44 minutes. We had completed 61 miles, had 144 miles to

go., and we were ahead of schedule. The next section was to Council Grove and it was around 42 miles - we picked up the pace and by time we rolled in town we were 90 minutes ahead of schedule (current time aprox 2:30 pm). Tired, but ahead of schedule - that was a good thing. Remember the wind - you know that south wind that should have been helping us on this section. Will it had shifted out of the north and had been blowing in our face. I know what you are thinking that sucks, but you have to remember we are dreamers (that is why we signed up for this ride) and we thought well at least we will have a tail wind on the 4th section from Alma to Emporia which is 65 miles mostly south and would be mostly in the dark. At Council Grove - I had chicken strips, mashed potatoes, but they put some kind of green veggies in the container. It was not a good thing - whatever it ways smelled awful and I almost lost it. I tried to force down some of the food, but the smell was killing me. I finally grabbed the chicken and put it in my ziploc bag and tossed the veggies in the trash. I kept watching the time and it was going by to fast - we were loosing precious minutes. I finally told Kevin I was going on - he had decided to change jerseys and he also had to get his spare light, out of his bag. So I left about 3:15 pm, and rode about a quarter mile down the road when I realized I had forgotten to get my clear glasses out of my bag. So I turned around and went back - knowing I would need those glasses when the sun went down. One thing I learned this spring - always wear glasses when riding on dirt and gravel unless you want something in your eyes. I was probably only 2 or 3 miles outside of town when Kevin caught up with me. This was a tough section for me - it was hot and I was bonking. I had not eaten enough food in Council Grove - I continued to force down food during this section and we stopped at least 3 times in the shade. They were short stops, and I used the stops to switch Gatorade from my rack to my empty water bottles. I was carrying two extra bottles of Gatorade strapped to my rear rack, this gave me over 80 oz of fluid on my bike - I needed all of it between each checkpoint. At about 120 miles - we went down this one lane farm road, and we thought this might get interesting. What we did not know was how interesting it was going to be. Soon we found ourselves on Lil Egypt Road - yes this is the road all other roads will be judged by, from now on... It was crazy - I have never seen anything like it!!! I just remember turning right and then seeing a big downhill that scared me it had gravel the size of my fist and ruts that were very deep. I grabbed my rear brake lever and slowly proceeded down it - I mean my right hand was tightly gripped on that rear brake lever. Kevin was slightly ahead of me and I slowly descended the hill - almost like a mountain climber slowly climbing down a mountain without a rope. I was off my seat and I carefully picked my line - when I was almost at the bottom of the hill some guy came flying by me and almost hit me. He scared me more than anything, but it was close... At the bottom of the hill the road went to the right and then straight back up - it was steep, rough, and full of ruts. All 3 of the guys ahead of me were walking up the hill - I was already in my granny and I shifted to my 32 on back. I was going to climb this hill - I slowly navigated up the steep hill passing the first two riders. Then I came to the guy who almost took me out on the downhill - he was walking on the only section of the road that was ride able. I pulled up behind him and said "can I get by" - he moved to the left a little and I passed him on the right. I was close to the right ditch, but squeezed by. Kevin later told me that he knew I would climb that hill after I saw him start walking his bike - he was right!!!! (Smile). Honestly - that hill could not be climbed without a triple and Kevin does not have one on his cross bike. After I crested the hill - Lil Egypt did not let us down, it was a hilly and snaked around the beautiful scenery and toward the end it went over a really cool one lane bridge. I did not have my camera so those memories will just have to live in my mind &oh what memories I have from this day!!!! At about mile 136 my brother called me &I do not remember much of that call. I just remember saying I had to go I needed to stay focused. I was hurting bad! Later my brother told me that he didn't think I would finish after the phone call &he said I sounded defeated!!! He was wrong about me finishing, but I probably did sound defeated and I was hurting. Soon we were rolling into Alma, the third checkpoint, we were 40 minutes ahead of schedule (current time 7:20 pm). When we checked in Kevin asked the directors how many people were ahead of us &he said he did not know, but only 12 riders at this point were going on to finish the ride. I looked at him and said &give me the next map& &he was surprised& We both had a ham sandwich and I grabbed a bag of chips, drank a lot of water, and downed a Mountain Dew -- for that extra energy I was going to need to finish. Soon I was starting to recover and that smile was coming back to my face &don't get me wrong the smile was always there it was just lost. Just like in Life, when things get hard sometimes we forget to smile, but I will guarantee this - a smile will make any day better!!!! We agreed to take 40 minutes at this stop and we would roll out of town at 8 pm &which we did. This would prove to be the toughest section of the ride &tough roads and most of it in the dark.. They also warned us about a low water bridge around the 175 mile mark &told us to be careful it was marked with flashing lights and it was very dangerous. I thought to myself this bridge must be bad, they did not say anything about Lil Egypt road and it was scary in the daylight!! This bridge is marked and they have warned us &what are we in for. Oh ya &It will also be dark when we get there. They also mentioned, I think they enjoyed seeing our expressions, that 3 miles outside of town we were going to hit a big hill that went on forever and the last part would be at a 14% grade. You non-bikers might not understand 14% grade &Let me tell you something that is STEEP!!! I left a few minutes before Kevin, but missed the turn and had to back track - soon we were back together. I was starting to feel better &Thanks Mt. Dew! Then we hit the hill and it did not let us down, but we climbed it and continued on down those country roads. As darkness rolled in our Hi-Tech headlights would become a life saver on those dark country roads. No street lights &no house lights &no moon that night - nothing but darkness. As we headed South& we could see a storm building in the distance would we finish this ride in the rain &we had already had wind in our face the entire day and had to endure record setting high temperatures. So the way I looked at it - chances were good and looking at the lightning I figured we were going to get wet. One more thing &you remember that wind that had shifted directions and been blowing in our face the last 140 miles and should be at our back on the last 65 as we headed south toward Emporia. You guessed it, it quit blowing as the sun went down - just as we started to head south. The good news &at least it was not blowing in our face the last 65 miles& As we rolled down the dark roads, we scanned the ditches looking for the reflective poles that showed us where to turn, In the dark it became a real challenge

just to keep our sense of direction. Soon we were approaching the town of Eskridge & everything was closed and deserted. Later we found out that there was a Bar open & just think we could have had a cool one. We did see a lone bike rider standing behind a Ford Expedition - as we approached the vehicle we realized it was our friends (Dianna, Maribel, Lauren, and Dusty) they were picking up another defeated rider. They cheered us on and said "You Can Do It" - it was another vote of confidence, and one that we both needed. As we cruised down the deserted dirt roads we knew we were getting close to the low water bridge at mile 175. I kept thinking that this was a good road & I am surprised the bridge would be so bad. About that time we saw a reflective pole and we made a right turn onto a path through a cow pasture. This was not even a road - it was two tracks through a field that had grass in the middle that was 2 to 3 feet high in places. Soon we saw the flashing lights and the sign that said caution. What we did not see was the low water bridge, because there was no bridge. The road, better name "the path", just ended with a 3 foot drop into a creek & with about a foot of water in it. We stopped and evaluated the situation & we are in the middle of nowhere with a creek in front of us & probably no cell phone service & in the middle of the night - this was an epic moment. We decided that we would jump over the creek with the bikes in our hands & trying to keep our feet dry. It worked and we went on the down the path for a few more miles until we got back on the main gravel road to town. During the next few miles we finally figure out the race directors mind set on road selection for this ride & "if you come to a fork in the road and you are not sure which road to choose & always take the worst one". That discovery of information at the 178 mile mark was a milestone event & it was an epic moment in this ride. No longer did we need maps or any reflective poles & we had figured out the course. Well we thought we had & while riding down the road I noticed a reflective pole in the ditch, but there was no turn. I yelled at Kevin, who had totally missed it, he stopped. I said hey there is a reflective pole back here in the ditch, but no road. I turned my light toward the ditch and 15 feet into the field I see another reflective pole - I then notice the two tracks through the field. Once again we were riding through a pasture with weeds 3 to 4 feet tall in the dark & I am sure the race directors found this path and had a smile on their face as they made it part of the route. It brought a smile to my face, but I don't think Kevin enjoyed it quite as much. It was rough riding and after a few miles we were back on another gravel road heading south toward Emporia. It was sometime after 1 in the morning by now and we still had 20 miles to go, but the road was straight and it looked like the storm was going to miss us, and we knew we were going to make it. We continued to cruise down the gravel roads, picking up the pace, we wanted to finish before 3 am. With about 3 miles to go my phone rang and it was my friend Dianna (known to some as Princess) & they were at the finish line waiting for us. As we rolled into town & I reflected on what had got us to this point. It was our plan that we had agreed upon, the night before, & this plan was known as the "WALT" plan. I know you are probably trying to figure out what the letters stand for & I also know that some of you are pretty creative and probably think - it stands for "We Are Loving This" & a positive attitude spin on this ride. Nope & this word is not an acronym, but is the name of one of our riders in our bike club. His name is Walt and he is 81 years young and still rides with us all the time & "he was our game plan". You see, Walt is the most consistent rider we know & he sets his speed and just keeps on pedaling. Many times I have ridden off and left him, but then I stop, to do something, and when I look up & Guess who I see passing me while I am standing on the side of the road & That was our plan & ride smart, consistent, and keep on going & just like Walt does everyday!!!! 100 People signed up & 85 People showed up & 70 People gave up & 15 Finished & It was an EPIC Ride!