

Two days late? Three? Riding keeps me sane, but losing time for the basics

I did ride Thursday, along with Kevin, Karen, & Kevin. This season's version of the regulars, those who don't mind (as much) riding with someone who's lost all semblance of speed once the road tilts upward. It was a bit cooler again, although I never saw the temp drop below 40. Still, a bit chilly feeling due to being right on the edge of the fog, not in it, but damp roads and beautiful rays of sun showing through the trees, highlighted by the mist.

The reality is that it's been so busy at the shop, and so many higher-level things to have to think about, that I get home and am pretty much dead to the idea of sitting down and doing any real thinking. April has been an amazingly-busy month for us, definitely our best April ever, although it's hard to compare fairly between this and Aprils of the past since this is the first April in 25 years that we've had just one location. It's tough to know how much of the increased business is coming from former Los Altos customers making the trek to Redwood City, but they definitely account for part of it, and we're doing our very best to accommodate them in a professional and friendly manner.

But in the space of just two weeks we've gone from a repair backlog of 48 hours to 10 days, which is not, to me, an acceptable level of service. And we haven't yet gotten into peak season! Plans of being open 7 days/week have gone out the window as we have just barely enough staff to keep open 6. Finding employees has never been tougher, due to the high costs of living in this area, and the low margins that exist in the bicycle biz. What keeps me going? An endless stream of customers who really seem to appreciate us. That really makes a difference. Every single day.

Another thing that helps to keep me going is that I've finally convinced myself France will be a reality again this year, this time with my son Kevin. Yet another reason, of course, that we need to get some more employees to help cover for our absence! The France thing is obviously a bit of an obsession for me, having gone, what, 16 of the past 17 years? It feels like a second home to me, but a home where things are a bit different, a bit challenging, and where I'm a bit on my own... all things I look forward to, because I'm good at it. I'm good at something in an environment where I'm the only judge, except maybe my son, but the only real failing in his eyes are my dreadful attempts at French. He stays clear of the planning and just goes along for the ride.

Three months to get into halfway-decent shape again, and it's going to be a lot tougher this year, riding with my son, who can put down 280 watts for an hour on a climb, vs Larry, my ex-racing buddy from the 70s, who tops out a hundred watts short of that. I'll try not to forget my tow rope this time.