

How easy would it be to give up, to become the occasional rather than habitual cyclist?



Kevin riding up Kings this morning. Once we got up above the fog, it was really nice! One of my biggest fears is discovering how easy it might be to give up on cycling as a way of life. What would it take? I think about the people I raced with back in the 70s. Some of them are still out there riding (I even went to France a year ago with one of them!), while others have kept a bike (or two or three) in the garage but rarely ride. My assumptions that cycling was the ultimate addiction, tougher to quit than smoking, became questionable. But what about me? Could anything separate me from my addiction to cycling?

Getting married didn't. Having kids didn't. Running a business didn't. Being diagnosed with a mild bone marrow cancer didn't. Not even a hint, with any of those, of something that could break me loose from a cycling lifestyle. But at the back of my mind, I've often wondered, what would it be like if I weren't in shape, if suddenly I couldn't do the things I'm used to? Eventually it's inevitable; at some point in my life I'll ride my last 100 miler, my last Pescadero/Tunitas loop, my last time up Kings Mtn. Heck, my last Tuesday/Thursday-morning ride... how far off might that be? Contemplating mortality is not fun!

I may have gotten a taste of what a turning point might be like. I was heading towards winter in pretty good shape this year, feeling pretty good about things. Then, first half of December, I was gone 15 days to Morocco with my wife, a bike-less vacation (in an area that might be pretty nice to ride!). I enjoyed myself and didn't spend each day thinking about gaining weight and losing shape for cycling; I figured when I got back, I'd get right back into it and was really looking forward to the annual New Years Day ride up Mt. Hamilton.

That 15 days would have been fine, except that it was followed, shortly thereafter, by another two weeks of The Plague. Supposedly not the flu (opinions vary) but whatever it was, it flattened me. I've always been able to ride when sick before, but not this time. No power, and worse, no desire. The type of sick where you forget what it feels like to be well. That continued through last week, and I was beginning to wonder, is this how it ends? Is this where your cycling spirit is broken and what had been a lifestyle becomes that occasional thing you do? Where you choose your bike and components based not on how they'll be used and how long they'll last but rather because they look cool? The bike becoming the equivalent of a sports car whose capabilities exceed the need?

It was close. Too close for comfort. The first couple of rides were not very challenging, and I wondered if I'd ever be in shape for a challenging ride again. What was the point of riding if you couldn't ride fast & long? Thank goodness I had a bit of patience and common sense and recognized I needed to bring things back to normal gradually, and not get too upset over lack of obvious progress. Sunday I skipped riding altogether due to the heavy rain, something I'd normally have looked forward to. Tuesday Kevin and I skipped the West Old LaHonda loop, yet still felt like we got in a good ride. And today was my first full ride. Even on the heavier rain bike, even without a power meter, it felt good. Really good. And now I'm really looking forward to a good soaking ride in the rain, something challenging, something that normal people wouldn't consider doing but for me, it's part of being a habitual cyclist. Maybe it will be this Sunday. And I'll be ready for it. Not like last Sunday. A lot's changed in just a week. And glad it did, because I came face to face with how easy it would be to turn the corner and just ride now & then for fun. Nothing wrong with that, but it's not me.