

Sub-30 Kings monkey off my back



Fake news? No, it's real. I really did get to the top ahead of Kevin & Colin today. To be truthful, I wasn't feeling it this morning. Those first few pedal strokes past my driveway and I was thinking, this could be a long day. That feeling didn't change as Kevin, Colin and I started our way up Kings; I told Kevin he might not want to wait for me. But, I had something going for me I didn't think about. It was a bit warmer than usual this morning. 55-57 degrees, and there's no question I breathe better when it's not too cold. Kevin was leading me out on the first part of the climb and, hearing how hard I was breathing, asked if I was ok. Um, yeah, right, like I'm ever ok when the road tilts upward? But our time at the first hairpin was looking pretty good, so I decided what the heck, just keep going. By the park entrance I was seeing indications it was possible, not likely, but possible I could get under 30 minutes. It's just under a third of the way to the top, so still plenty of time to collapse, but you have to try.

Kevin at this point dropped off to check on Colin, and rode the rest of the way up with him. For the most part I kept them in sight; they'd be on the lower side of one of the hairpins while I'd be on the upper. At the wide-open clearing, with 1.41 miles to go, I was just under 20 minutes. Just. Like 19:58 or so. That 1.41 miles to go sign is exactly 2/3rds of the way up, time-wise, if you don't crack. Hate it when it's so close, because it takes so little to lose those few seconds. But the final hairpin, where you need at least 4 minutes, 30 seconds in your pocket to make it up under 30... I had almost exactly 4 minutes, 30 seconds.

Every pedal stroke counts; you can't waste anything. You become a slave to the power meter, focusing on the watts and not how hard it feels. There will often be times a given gear might feel harder, standing might feel harder than sitting, and you think, incorrectly, that feeling harder means going faster. Don't believe it; watch the power meter and find a gear and style that gives more watts. Don't look at speed either. Just watts. There is no escaping physics; more watts = higher speed, and do you really have a clue whether a particular piece of road requires 9.3 or 8.7mph to get the job done?

You get to that final road sign, the yellow warning sign, and know that, if you're flying, it's less than 30 seconds to the top. I think I was there with about 40 seconds to go, and finished just 2-5 seconds under 30 (depending which version of the Kings segment on Strava you use). Considering that I thought I'd be fighting for 35 minutes today, I felt pretty good about that, and pretty surprised it was almost two minutes later before Kevin and Colin rolled up.

So maybe I'll survive in France next month. Maybe Kevin won't be totally frustrated having to wait for me on the big climbs. Or... not. Fortunately, in the Pyrenees, you don't get many of the super-long climbs that would likely do me in. The closest to what would be the norm in the Alps might be the Tourmalet, which is "only" 19km (11 miles) on the Lourdes side, 2km shorter on the other. And it's the Tourmalet that was the scene of one of my biggest failures, a climb from the "shorter" side that had me suffering badly from heat exhaustion, having to make frequent stops in the shade on the way up. It was also the site of one of my best recoveries, as I was flying down the other side, pulling a long line of cyclists behind me, and drilling it on the flat sections, strongly enough that nobody was able to pull around me.

I'll be ready.