

Why?

Yes, why. Why did I feel so strong this morning compared to most? Why did it feel so nice out when it was only 35 degrees in places? Why was that **HUGE** Hawk screeching as we rode out Manuella on our way to Kings? Why did my bike feel so wonderfully magical, like a motorcycle with a twist grip for more power, than a bicycle subject to the limitations of my lungs?

Even those first few pedal strokes away from the house and up the hill felt great. I've learned not to make too much of that, but today, things felt like they were in place for something magical.

I love my bike. I realize it's not entirely the bike that makes the ride, but this morning, my bike, my Trek Madone 6.9 with the carbon wheels that have 30,000 miles on them, well, it just felt perfect. Compared to my Mount Hamilton ride, on the older 5900, the difference was incredible. Like training with weights so you feel better without them, not that I would know what it's like to run with weights because running is something I simply wouldn't do.

I'm beginning to think I'll enjoy this winter (even though much of it will be spent on the not-as-fun-to-ride 5900). I've already decided to change my "style" (if I have one) of climbing, moving from a steady grind designed to be as efficient as possible for the best time I can manage up the hill, to doing some sections really hard, then taking it easy for a bit, then attacking again. Interval training. You won't get up the hill as fast (because you're dead at the end of each hard section), but you'll get a whole lot faster overall, so when you really do want to go for time, you'll do better. Yes, that's right, the best way to get up a hill faster is not to try getting the best-possible time each ride.



Skyline Blvd, 35 degrees & comfortable

But forget the bike, forget the training methods. Look at the picture. How could you not want to be out there enjoying the amazing roads we have in San Mateo County? The views from Skyline would be spectacular if not for the trees in the way (and all those darned green Webcor jerseys!). Actually, it was so strikingly-clear looking out towards the coast that even through the trees you could see Half Moon Bay.

Right, today's rider roster. Eric, Marcos, Mark, Kevin, John, George. Marcos & Mark turned back early, but not before Marcos got to torture me up Kings. Kevin was riding with new-found caution on the descents, leaving me to wonder if his relationship (girlfriend in Colorado Springs) (do 55 year olds have "girlfriends?") has gotten suddenly serious lately. Sprints weren't contested too seriously because Chris wasn't around to show me how it's done.

You don't have to be the strongest rider in the world to enjoy cycling in the winter, but it does help to get in shape. Why? Because maintaining a fair amount of power through the ride keeps you warm. Think about what we're doing out there, with the temp varying between 35 & 39 degrees (this morning Eric asked me to stop calling out the temperatures; it's one of those things where sometimes you feel warmer if you don't know). I'm wearing some pretty lightweight Garneau winter gloves, a long sleeve base layer, jersey and warm tights. Shoe booties too. No jacket. I have a jacket in my seat bag, but rarely need it. If we keep the power up, you stay comfortable. The only thing that can derail us is if someone gets a flat; you cool down very quickly, and you may never feel like you've warmed back up.

Something else that helps when it's cold is to break up your descents (I wrote about this the other day). Anything over 4 miles can get pretty darned chilly, so figure out a way to arrange the ride so you've got a couple of shorter descents, rather than just one long one. The design of our Tuesday/Thursday-morning ride is unintentionally perfect this way. Now for a bit of practical info-

Dressing for cold- If you can't keep up a full head of steam for two hours, you'll need to dress a bit more warmly. It won't be the hands or feet that suffer so much (gloves & shoe covers will easily take care of that), but your mid-torso and even your head can be an issue. If you don't have a [long-sleeve base layer](#), get one! It's the most-important piece of apparel I own. The Craft Pro-Warm runs about \$55. I would recommend a base layer before a long-sleeve jersey; with the base layer, adding a standard jersey to it gives you a lot more flexibility. Then a light windbreaker, warm gloves and you've got the top half covered, without being uncomfortable (providing it isn't raining). For the legs, if it's not too cold out you can wear regular cycling shorts and leg warmers (plus booties, always booties if it's going to be colder than 45 degrees; the new Garneau ones are only \$20). If it's going to be in the 30s to upper-20s, thermal tights make more sense. If it's in the mid-20s & below, we're not talking about anywhere I ride!