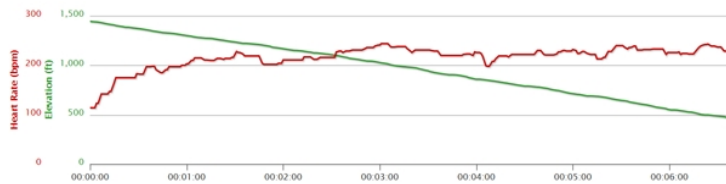


112 miles, great ride, but long winter rides require more thought & preparation

February is a bit early in the season for 100+ mile rides, but Kevin and I had a bit of, well, body work to take care of (the scale hasn't been our friend lately). It was actually Kevin's idea to do the Santa Cruz loop, the only real challenge being whether we could get it in during the limited number of daylight hours available, without having to get up too early.

We had a nice roll out to the coast via Old LaHonda and Haskins Grade, holding a moderate but steady pace (22 minutes up Old LaHonda, 2 minutes slower than Kevin can pull off on his own). Turning onto Cloverdale for the run south we were blessed with a mild tail wind, which nicely accompanied us all the way into Santa Cruz. Of course we stopped in Davenport on the way for lunch, and then stopped again for water in Boulder Creek before the long run up to Skyline (Saratoga Gap). It was only as we approached the top that temps started to rapidly cool; the marvelous 64 degrees on the coast were replaced by 42 degrees and substantial wind at the top. My thin full-fingered gloves, which had been perfect during the morning run to the coast, simply weren't up to the task. Nor was my thin baselayer.

Normally, 42 degrees isn't an issue, even dressed as I was. For our morning ride, I'm able to keep a full head of steam the entire time, but that's only for 30 miles. When you hit such conditions 85 miles into a 112 mile ride, it's a different story! Still, there's enough uphill on the run north on Skyline to keep you going, just barely. I was having some issues shifting (tough for cold inflexible fingers to find the small buttons for the Di2 electric shifting), but it wasn't until the descent into Woodside where I got really chilled and started to shiver a bit. Thank goodness it warmed up slightly on the way down, but the graph below tells the story.



My normal max heart rate is 175; check out what happens to my heart rate just after the descent begins. Temporary tachycardia (extremely-fast heartbeat) is a symptom of mild hypothermia. Fortunately without lasting effects.

I didn't notice the elevated heart rate until a few minutes later, on Tripp Road, when I was less preoccupied with the mechanics of descending with hands that didn't work well. Kevin's heart rate was also elevated, but not nearly so much (he had chosen to bring much warmer gloves than I did, and wisely put on his light jacket earlier in the ride than I did). At the time I didn't know if this was something I should be concerned about or a malfunction of my heart monitor, but when I got back I did the google thing and came up with a bunch of references to tachycardia and cold. Yep, that pretty much nails it!

You would think that, after all these years cycling, this wouldn't be new to me. And you'd be wrong. Rarely would I ride such distances in cooler weather (I resist calling 42 degrees "cold" given that I ride in much colder temps on a regular basis!), but I do have strong memories of the Etape du Tour "citizens race" at the Tour de France back in 2000, where we had great weather for the first 70 miles and then hit a nasty cold storm on the flanks of Ventoux, resulting in at least one death from exposure and many busses put to use hauling chilled riders off the mountain. I was one of the few relatively prepared, having had a similar experience just a few weeks earlier on Sonora Pass when a freak high altitude storm hit.

In the end, mild hypothermia is not a big deal. You survive it, there are no lasting effects, and you hopefully prepare better next time!

You can check out the Strava details by clicking on the ride below. --Mike--