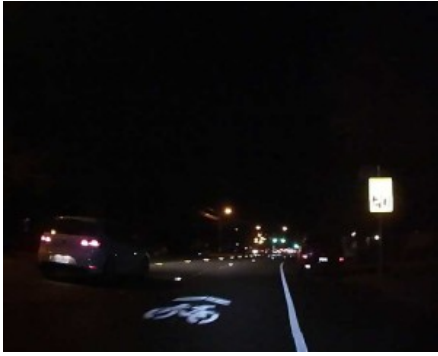


13:01 for the ride home. 2 seconds from credibility. I'm fighting the clock. But which one?



Does it matter if the radar speed sign says you're going 20 or just 19mph? Absolutely.

I don't have to ride hard on the way home; taking it easy, I could avoid breaking a sweat and eat dinner without having a shower first. I could do that. But I won't. I could blame it on the new power meter, which tells me if I'm slacking off, but it wasn't much different before (only difference being that, if I'm slow now, I have the power numbers to show I'm slacking, that it wasn't just a "high gravity" day).

It's a commute, not a race. Just 2.8 miles, with a 400ft climb at the end. But it comes after a long day at the shop, and when you really push, you're not just pushing the pedals, you're pushing a reset button. It may only be temporary, but while it lasts, the rest of the day goes away, you exist only in the here & now, whatever your legs can put to the pedals, whatever air you can get through your lungs. You hope you get green lights all the way, but part of you looks forward to being held up for just a few seconds, just long enough to catch your breath. But not too long, because your elapsed timer is running, whether you're stopped for 2 minutes at a very long light (Jefferson & Alameda) or you're climbing up Highland. It's running when you leave the back door of the shop, stare down Franklin and wonder if you'll hit the light right for the left turn onto Jefferson (a light that cannot be triggered by a bicycle, so you have to wait for a car on the other side. It's running after you've crossed El Camino and wonder if you should be pouring on the gas all the way to the Hudson stoplight, at an unsustainable pace but gambling on the light turning red and giving you a chance to breathe.

It's that darned Alameda light that can ruin everything. It stays red so long, and you can't anticipate the cycle because it doesn't have one... it follows just one law, which is to turn green for any cross traffic, and stay green (red in my direction) for as long as it takes to thoroughly frustrate me. Doesn't matter. What comes before that light is all-out war on the clock. What comes after depends upon the light. If I'm stuck there for two minutes, there's not that much point to killing myself up the hill... I'll end up with a 14 or 15 minute time, right? I wish. I'm just not wired that way. Never give up, never surrender. There's a strava segment for Highland, and if you're rested up from the light, you might nail it.

Riding hard, pushing my limits, it must be in my DNA. I don't think 13 minutes of hard effort makes any difference at all in the grand scheme of things... how fast I can ride up Kings, what I feel like 80 miles into a 113-mile Santa Cruz loop. But the alternative feels like giving in to that mortality thing, the idea that at some point I won't have the choice but to ride more slowly, more measuredly, because if I push too hard I'll blow up before I make it home and be riding 'round that final corner on Jefferson at 4mph instead of 8 or 9 or even 12.

I didn't start out writing this with an idea that it would be about, or even include, anything having to do with mortality. However, the "racing against the clock" bit, complete with the occasional red light along the way, seems an accurate metaphor for life. When you're 20, racing against the clock is fun, but you have no problem turning it down. When you're almost 58, it's serious business. :-)