



Photo; the approach to Scotty's Castle. Serotta fillet brazed tandem with 48 spoke Phil Wood hubs, Champion 27" rims, Continental Ultra Sport 27" x 1 1/8" tires, Mafac long lever cantilever brakes and Shimano disk brake on the rear, Suntour Mountech derailleurs, Suntour bar end shifters, Shimano 7 speed 11-28 freewheel, TA Cyclotourist crankset & Selle Anatomica for two!

## 2007 Death Valley Autumn Double Century

By Adrienne Ruggles & Tom Milton

Hello All,

I drove down to Death Valley with Lee Mitchell (RAAM Crew Chief and "professional" SAG Extraordinaire), and did the Death Valley Double with Tom Milton on a tandem we nicknamed Chitty Chitty Bike Bike (more on that in a minute). Lee dropped me off at the top of Towne Pass so I could ride down the momentous hill I'm generally driving in the dark of night as Crew Chief during Furnace Creek 508. That said, I was really excited about the Double because I've never seen Death Valley in daylight!

Tom told Lee and me to bring nice clothes, that we were going to the snooty Furnace Creek Inn for dinner Friday. Those of you who know Lee know that he owns Levi shorts, red socks, T shirts, and sneakers. He fussed a bit, but rallied admirably and donned slacks, a button-down shirt, and shoes with laces! Word of his unusual outfit passed like wildfire so that we were accosted by riders checking in shouting things such as, "Lee, heard you are you wearing a dress?!"

Because the sun is rising so late, Tom & I didn't shove off until 7:10am among the second wave of fifty riders. Since we stayed 100 yards from the start line, I didn't have to roll out of bed until 6am. Beautiful. The weather was FABULOUS. Overcast, under 80 degrees, and still winds all day. I finally removed my knee warmers around 11am (more for good form than anything else). The first 70ish miles take us from 250 feet below sea level to 4,500 feet above. The valley floor is good for warm up and great for tandems.

At mile 40, the route begins a gradual 2500 foot climb to Scotty's Castle at mile 65ish. I was feeling a little medium as one often does on long, gradual, seemingly flat climbs, but Tom said we were doing fine as we were passing all the single bikes on the climbs. Scotty's Castle (named for a spinner of yarns who got himself in the good graces of a millionaire), was supposed to be our lunch stop on the return leg in another 60 miles, but we dove right into the subway sandwiches, V8, and anything else we could stuff in. An easy but long canyon climb away from Scotty's took us into Nevada on a road with two or three gradual turns in 20 miles featuring views to the vanishing point horizon.

Our tandem flew along effortlessly at >20 mph out to the turn around at Nevada Hwy 95 (or some such number). We passed a man and woman on fixed gear bikes several times during the outbound leg in the course of stopping to aid riders on the roadside and for personal aid.

More calories consumed, bottles filled, bladders emptied, and we headed back for California. We counted riders making their return as we headed out and figured we were around 60th. Standing to climb a small bump, we realized we needed a taller gear. No sooner did we state our sentiments than the bike shifted up for us. I did the only appropriate thing, which was to sing a new song composed earlier on the day:

Oh you pretty Chitty Bike Bike  
Chitty Chitty Bike Bike, we love you  
And our pretty Chitty Bike Bike  
Chitty Chitty Bike Bike loves us too  
High, low, everywhere we go  
on Chitty Chitty we depend  
Bike Bike Chitty Chitty Bike Bike  
Our fine two fendered friend

You're fast as a thoroughbred  
Your saddles are featherbeds  
You'll turn everybody's head today  
We'll ride on the mother ship  
With pride in Tom's ownership  
The envy of all we survey

Oh you pretty Chitty Bike Bike  
Chitty Chitty Bike Bike, we love you  
And on pretty Chitty Bike Bike  
On pretty Chitty Bike Bike what we'll do

Near, far, better than a car  
Oh what a happy time we'll spend  
Bike Bike Chitty Chitty Bike Bike  
Our fine two fendered friend  
Bike Bike Chitty Chitty Bike Bike  
Our fine two fendered friend!

Doubles aren't worth doing if one can't burst into song and limerick. They don't call me the chief morale officer for nothing.

Back to Scotty's Castle for lunch # Two. I was feeling far fresher than someone with 120 miles on her legs had any right to feel. Off (and up) to Ubehebe crater - very much worth seeing should you get the opportunity, then back down over some impressively heat cracked roads manifested as lovely thump bumps every 10 feet or so for 5 miles. Once we turned back onto the main valley "highway" another 15 or 20 miles going back down the morning's longest gradual climb, putting good time into several single bikes while tearing downhill for 10 to 15 miles at 40 mph.

We rode into darkness with 40+ miles to go. After riding with a guy named Bob yakking for a long time, (Bob was completing his first double century in fine style), a support van came by and asked

if we needed anything. Tom's alter ego burst forth, "No. Show us your tits then get lost." The driver kindly obliged. Name withheld to protect his manliness!

We pedaled on to Mud Canyon, the base of the infamous road to Hell's Gate. Many a seemingly strong rider have DNF'd on this climb. It is a 7 mile relentless grade, which commences at mile 170. We paused at the rest stop for a gourmet cup-o-noodles, the best food ever engineered at mile 170 of a bike ride. Back on the bike, Tom thought he'd take it easy on me and let us spin on up the hill, constant 7% - 8% for seven miles.

After the first leisurely digestive mile I rallied, we shifted up and off we went. I couldn't see the speedometer but assume we rocketed from 4mph to a whopping 6mph. Perception is everything! Tom grumped and growled during the second half of the climb where things definitely grow steeper, still relentless. We turned off the lights for a time. The nearly full moon peaked out from cloud cover occasionally to enlighten the canyon walls. Tom definitely grew grouchy as we went. He started cursing and swearing at a rider behind us, shouting at the "rat bastard" to turn off his "drunken headlamp." The rider was struggling to the point that his wavering headlight left us feeling seasick.

I managed to down half a coke at Hell's Gate before being hustled back onto the bike by my militant captain. Tom is a slave driver, glass half full kind of guy, but trainable, trustworthy, and one hell of a thorough preparer. We blasted off down the hill for 10 miles of screaming downhill to the valley floor and a leisurely 12 mile run to the finish. I have to go back to do that downhill section in daylight one day. Tom wondered why the bike was shuddering as we rounded the Stop sign at the bottom of the hill? I apologized and explained that my left leg had been shaking for the last 5 miles. It quit once we were able to pedal again.

Several song bastardizations later including; The Ballad of John and Yoko, Me and Bobbie McGee, and who knows what else, and we rolled into to finish at Furnace Creek Ranch, smiling and happy, plenty of cheering clapping fans. We did official sign in duties and Tom quickly excused himself to make a beer run to our hotel room. We started whispering "BEER" hours before. We drank, eat pizza, and swapped tales with workers and riders until the sprinklers came on chasing folks in all directions. Special thanks to 508 veteran Steve Barnes for story telling accompanying uncontrollable laughter! Our elapsed time was 15ish hours. Time in rest stops, probably too much. Total smiles and laughs, too many to count! It just is not fair that two folks should have so much fun on a bike for this long!

Adrienne & Tom