

## **COPENHAGEN ELITE RIDE**

### **Ram Mudambi**

It was an unusually gorgeous Sunday morning. After two weeks of solid rain and miserable sodden riding, it was sunny and almost 60 deg. F. I had heard rumors of an 'elite' ride out of 'Mosehuset' at 9:30, so saddled up and rode the roughly 4 miles to the start in shorts and a jersey. I arrived at 9:22 and made a note of the time. There was only a solitary rider there, so it did not raise my hopes overmuch.

However, the one guy looked pretty with it. He rode a beautiful and white Pinarello, with similarly colored jersey, shorts and helmet.

He didn't look too friendly, but I plunged in and asked, 'Is there a ride going out of here?'

He grunted an affirmative.

'Is it OK to join the ride?' I asked.

He grunted again, but his tone suggested, 'Yes, if you really want to, though I'd rather you didn't.'

As I had noticed on several past rides, in the five minutes leading up to 9:30, about 60 riders materialized. I drifted over and exchanged hellos with a friendlier guy called Frank. He rode a Klein with a really nice-looking purple-metallic paint job and seemed to have a rather better attitude to Americans.

'This is the hardest ride in Copenhagen,' he told me. 'It goes for 135 km. The first 35 km to Hillerod are fairly easy, but then its pretty much a road race for 80 km. We finish at the Klampenborg sprint and then roll easy for the last 20 km back into town.'

'Any stops?' I asked, rather naively.

‘No,’ he said. ‘Sometimes the leaders will slow down a bit when we get to Gilleleje at the far northern tip of Seeland. If they do, we get a chance to catch to our breath a bit.’

Before I knew it, we were off. This ‘slow’ start was still pretty fast. We rolled two-abreast at about 23 MPH up and down risers out of town on the bike path parallel to the Hillerod highway. Even during this ‘easy roll out’ I noted riders getting shelled off the back and accordingly stayed close to my new-found friend Frank. As we got into Farum, about 15 km from the start, I got a pleasant surprise when my friend Nicky from Copenhagen Cycling Club (CCC) joined the pack. He waved and motioned me to follow him up to the front where *his* friend, the former pro Brian Holm was one of the leaders towing the field. We exchanged hellos – he seemed to remember our Tuesday evening ride from the previous week.

Sitting in the draft, I was still feeling pretty good. I took stock of the riders around. Both Nicky and Frank gave me quick summaries of who the strong riders were. There was even one woman up in the front group. Nicky said that she had raced in the *Tour de France Feminin* and is on the Danish National Road team. All this information was to prove invaluable in the miles ahead.

And so to Hillerod. I knew from my computer that we were close and the road signs indicated that as well. We made a right at a traffic light and the next thing I knew, we were at 33 MPH. The *peloton* stretched into a long thin line and using my newly acquired information, I found a good safe wheel. This was pretty crucial, since when I looked behind, gaps formed and riders fell off the pace in droves. The unfriendly guy on

the Pinarello was dropped. The woman from the Danish National Team was on my wheel for a time, but the next time I looked around, she was gone.

For about ten miles the speed almost never dropped below 30 MPH – this was the pace of the old Fleetwood derby ride, but the high-speed section of *that* ride is only 14 miles! At the end of this section, we were down to 8 riders with 3 locomotives – Brian Holm, another former pro and a very strong rider from Team Amager. Frank, Nicky and I and another two guys (that I did not know) made up the trailing cars.

Holm is true *rouleur* – on the flats or the slight downhill, he rolls out an unbelievable 35 MPH for miles on end. His friend, the other former pro had the power on the false flats and slight risers. Between the two of them, we got almost no rest. It was only when the third guy from Team Amager took the pull that the speed dropped a bit and I got the chance to recover. It was one of those rides where every time we approached a traffic light – there were a few of those – I prayed for it to turn and stay red.

Eventually we got to Gilleleje and turned for the coast road. We did slow down for about a mile or so, before picking it up again as we headed south toward the town of Helsingor on Oresund strait between Denmark and Sweden. I knew we only had about 10 miles to Helsingor and hoped we would soon hit built up areas to slow our progress. Sure enough, we rode through downtown Helsingor, right by Kronburg Castle (the castle that figures in Hamlet). Lots of traffic lights, and a very moderate pace brought a smile to my face and lifted my spirits. I even got a chance to eat my banana. Now I really wished I had Gatorade in both my bottles instead of one each of Gatorade and water.

On the coast road or *Strandvejen* out of Helsingor we formed up and were soon back up to speed again. This was the scariest part of the ride as we cut back and forth

between the road and the roadside bike-path seemingly at random. Each time there was a small and short ramp to make the transition and if you missed it, you were out of the draft and in my case, certainly dropped. Even scarier was the ride on the bike-path – only about 4 to 5 feet wide, winding around bus-stops, with mail-boxes and street signs protruding into it. It required one to constantly duck and weave around these obstacles and all while the speed never dropped below 25 MPH. Even worse, was coming up on slower bike traffic, often dear old grandma's trundling along at 12 MPH or so. The leaders would just whistle and the grandma's would obediently swing over to the right and ride steady and straight while we whizzed by. We passed a lot of bike traffic, including several Sunday touring rides. I was very impressed with how well disciplined all the riders were – our line always went by the slower line very smoothly and with no fuss. I can't imagine riding like this down, say, the Valley Forge bike path.

I had taken a short pull and was drifting back to when Frank said to me, 'We've done 100 km! Good going!' I looked down at my computer – it was 2:33 since the start, so our raw average was just under 25 MPH; the rolling average was quite a bit higher.

We rode through Vedbaek and now I knew that we were less than 5 miles to the Klampenborg sprint. I knew that there are 3 risers between Vedbaek and the Klampenborg sprint line. I gritted my teeth and made it up the first riser out of Vedbaek, but I could feel now that it would be touch and go staying on till the end. I had only taken short pulls the whole way, but I was still pretty wasted. While I had recently ridden this fast OR this long, I had not ridden this fast AND long for many years.

The second riser is the hardest – about 1/3 of a mile long with a steep pitch of about 250 yards in the middle. The rider from Team Amager attacked up this one and I

took his wheel and hung on like grim death. Brian Holm came around us at the top, but it was a downhill section now and I was still on! The other former pro attacked going up the last riser. Instinctively, I took his wheel. This riser is only ¼ mile long with a steep pitch that is only about 100 yards long. But my legs decided to call it a day right here. The dreaded gap opened up and the wheel began to pull away from me. I got out of the saddle, but there was nothing there – the tank was empty. The other riders sensed weakness like a crowd of sharks and came around with power. The line reformed in front of me and the elastic band snapped. I was dropped.

It was barely a kilometer to the finish. I rode as hard as I could and was rewarded to come within hailing distance of two of the others who were also dropped in the final run to the line. As we rode back into town, Brian Holm dropped back for a quick word. ‘Its always hardest the first time you do this ride,’ he said.