

11th Annual Tour of Mount Nebo – 2005

July 23, 2005

It was a gorgeous, sunny day with temperatures in the mid-70s. I arrived about an hour before the start and mechanically went through the usual pre-race rituals of registration, pinning on the race number just so ('On the left side, please'), getting the bike together, and filling the bottles. I was rolling around, warming up and chatting with a few of the guys when I noticed the bike was bumping along gently. Strange that the road surface is so serrated, I thought. Better check the front tire just in case. Sure enough, the front tire was incorrectly mounted and the tube stuck out between the tire and rim. The thought of having this tire explode on the first descent at 40+ MPH made my blood run cold. I had just enough time to ride back to the car and fix the problem before the race. An auspicious start!

We lined up in the Martic School parking lot and were told by the officials that we would go off as the third race, behind the Cat 4/5 race. This indicated a rather low appraisal of our field by the officials. There was the usual rather nervous chatter before the race, but not a lot of sizing each other up. It was quite a large field, but we all knew each other by now. Clustered at the front of the field I could see Bob Kehl of Guy's Racing Team, the current leader of the BAR championship series, Art McHugh of Morgan Stanley, last year's BAR champion, my team-mate Chip Berezny, a former BAR champion, the climbing specialists from ERA Cycling, Tom Grim, Dana Ormerod, Barry Free and Bill Care, as well as Brian Saylor of Dynaflo/Technocycle, Jim Weidner of Tri-State Velo and Neil 'The Falcon' Gussman of Main Line Cycling. I swiveled around in my saddle and saw a sea of brightly colored lycra behind me.

I caught a guy with furry legs in a plain jersey saying, 'I'm a really strong climber, so I guess this is the race for me ...'. Another guy quickly crossed himself – not a bad idea on a course with such high-speed descents.

The race referee gave us our instructions, invoking the yellow line rule and warning us about one section of gravel on the course. Then he blew the whistle and we were off. The first downhill was neutral, behind the pace car. I got into the big ring on the descent and found myself jockeying for wheel at over 40 MPH. Given the huge climbs that awaited us, the futility of this exercise slowly dawned on me and I backed off.

We made the right turn onto the valley road, the pace car accelerated off and it was pedal to the metal as we sought to get the front of the peloton. The first effort is always a shock to my system and it took a while for my body to settle into rhythm and for my heart rate to steady. Still, I what was upper-most in my mind was the first steep climb that was less than a mile away.

The first climb was a stair step of steep ramps separated by false flats. The first ramp strung the field out, with a partial regrouping on the first false flat. The next ramp on Drytown Road strung it out further. My pre-race plan was to try and stay with Bob Kehl, as I felt he was likely to be one of the strongest non-climbers. This worked well and up

the steepest ramp of the first climb, I managed to stay with him and the leading group of about ten.

Over the top and without missing a beat, we were into the first exhilarating descent. Several riders dropped on the climb rejoined on the descent. This process was repeated again and again on the first lap. We went through the mountaintop start-finish and the immediate rapid descent found a decent-sized peloton re-forming. The second time up the Drytown Road climb, the ERA boys really put the hammer down. I got on Kehls' wheel and everything else was blotted from my brain. I just saw the wheel and the periodically looked up to locate the top of the climb. We crested, hammered the following descent and false flat. On Tuquan Glen Road, Bob sat up and looked around – 'Is this all that's left? Where's Chip?' There were nine of us together at this point. The next climb, up Brady Hill Road was the hardest yet. The ERA boys and Kehl were riding away from me up the hill. Try as I might, in the saddle, out of the saddle, I was still losing ground. The terrible realization dawned that I was being dropped. I hunkered down and rode my own tempo. I could hear voices from my training videos in my head – Chris Carmichael telling me to 'Pull up from bottom dead center, push down over top dead center ...', Connie Carpenter-Phinney telling me to 'Relax the upper body and spin.' I crested with Brian Saylor and got on his wheel as he powered onto the plateau.

Brian and I worked the next few miles pretty smoothly, riding a good tempo up the climbs, trading pulls on the false flats. Brian is a great descender – a skill from having raced motorcycles – and he rode a great line on the downhills. I later found a maximum speed of 52 MPH on my computer. A few other riders from our race periodically joined us on the descents, but fell away on the climbs. We were catching and passing riders from the Cat 4/5 race regularly. Some would get into our slipstream for short bursts before dropping off. On Creamery Road we caught Mike Connair of First State Velo Sport and now there were three of us working together. Better still, he rode a very strong tempo up the climbs.

Things got better as we were climbing toward the start-finish at the end of the second lap, as Barry Free and Dana Ormerod of ERA came into our sights. We crested just after them and caught them on the descent. With five of us together, we came around the last lap with excellent speed. On Douts Hill Road, with Ormerod leading our little group, a little rabbit skittered out of the fields and crossed in front of us. Ormerod missed it by inches. 'Missed it by a hair!' called out Barry Free. I had so little oxygen in my brain that it took the best part of another mile for the pun to register.

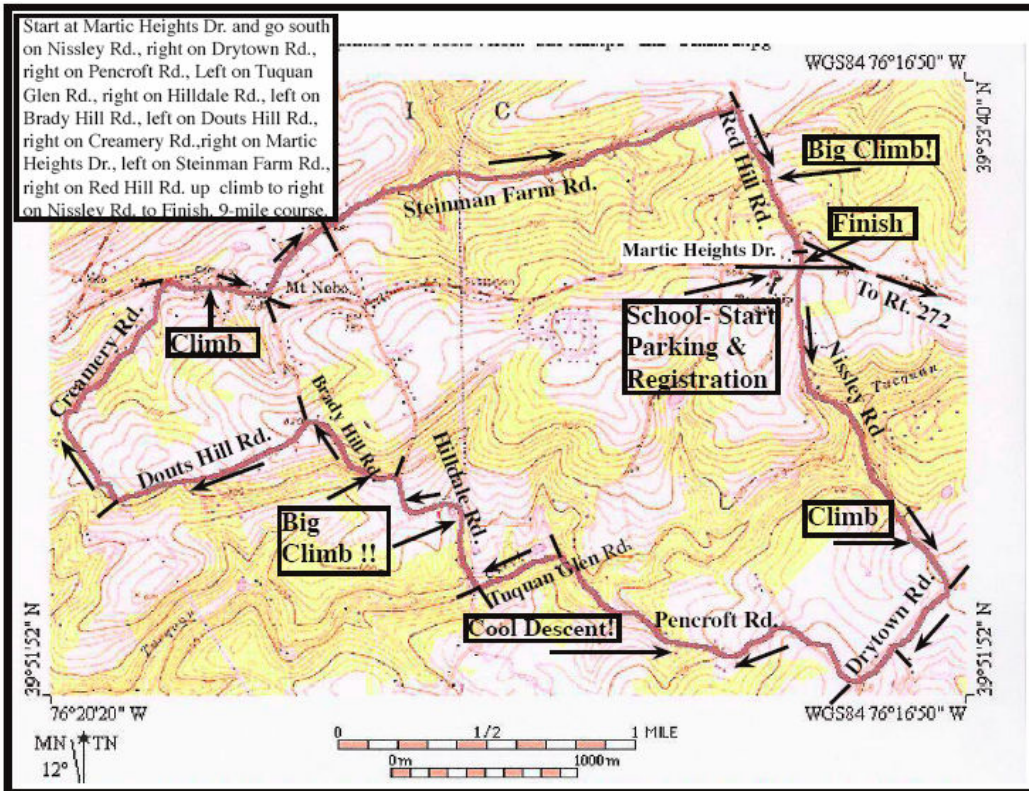
Through Steinman Farm Road we began catching the front of the Cat 4/5 field and a long train formed behind us. On one small riser, a rider from Main Line Cycling sprinted up the right and cut dangerously in front of the pace-line. 'Watch your line, us older guys have to work on Monday,' Brian called out to him. The younger rider soon slowed and was gone.

Mike Connair continued to ride a strong tempo up the finishing climb, starting at the 1 km banner. At 200-meter banner, Barry Free attacked and I went with him. There was a

slight easing of the pitch at a 100 meters and I up-shifted and came around. The legs were full of lactic now and the line came up infinitely slowly. Somehow Barry managed to find a second effort and came around again to nip me at the line.

Tom Grim won and Bob Kehl held on for second. Barry took third and I was fourth. It was my own little Tour de France on the penultimate day of Lance Armstrong's historic 7th victory.

After the race, Bob Kehl told me he had been training for this race all year. 'We need more of these hard road races', he said.



Tour of Mt. Nebo Contour Map (above)

& Profile Map (below) Course is 9 miles per lap with 1125 feet of climbing per lap.

