

Mercy Training Camp: December 17th and 18th

By: Ryan Fiddler

The 2006 Mercy Cycling Team training camp, held in Ft. Smith, AR, was this past weekend. The weather wasn't looking too promising but fortunately held out for some decent riding conditions. Some of the guys got an early start to the weekend putting in a solid 4.5 hours on Friday. I arrived Saturday morning at 10:00 am at the Mercy Fitness Center to a surprisingly large group. There were about 20 of us, some new faces, and many familiar faces. We had several team riders and a few local club members.

One of the highlights of the weekend was the opportunity to ride w/ Brice Jones, a professional riding for the Jelly Belly cycling team. He would be leading the group rides both Saturday and Sunday. As we rolled out of town the energy was high, this being the first time of the year we were all together. Meeting all the new team members was something I was looking forward to. Cycling is a unique sport in that success is limited to the collective effort of a team although victory is only awarded to a single individual. A key aspect to a successful team is that everyone gets along and enjoys one another as we will be spending many uncomfortable hours with one another over the next season traveling and racing. We rode nice and easy for the first couple of hours just talking about the upcoming season and getting to know one another. The route today was pretty straightforward; we would ride out to Mt. Gaylor, nail it up the climb and ride back. Total ride time was about 5 hours. At about the time we hit Gaylor the pace quickened as Doug Greek got on the front and really cranked it up. It wasn't long into the climb that several small groups formed. The climb took about 30 minutes for the lead group of Brice, Mat Ankney, and Chad Cagle. I and three others arrived shortly after them. I had no idea we would ride that hard, it was tough, but it felt good. I was instantly reminded of the difficulty of the Joe Martin Stage Race held on the same roads in May.

After regrouping we headed back down the mountain, basically freezing our tails off. For most of the ride home we kept the pace fast, by the time we arrived back in Ft. Smith we were all ready for a hot shower and some hot food. We had only a few hours to clean up and relax a bit and we were off to Brice's parent's house for dinner and the chance to meet the sponsors of the team.

This was an important part of the weekend. Getting together as a team off the bikes so we could discuss the upcoming season's schedule and goals was one of the reasons for the party. Secondly, it was an opportunity for us to meet and thank all the sponsors that support the team. It was nice to see in person all the different people involved with the Mercy Cycling team. I realized very quickly how fortunate I was to be a part of this team. I found extra motivation to be 110% dedicated to the team and my training after meeting all the kind and selfless people who make possible the opportunity for us to race bikes at this level.

After the party we didn't waste much time getting to bed, as we knew Sunday was going to be a tough one. We'd planned to do a loop that would take over six hours. At least some of us knew this, it turns out many thought the loop would only be three hours, needless to say they had a rough time Sunday. The weather was even better than Saturday and the route was amazing. It was one of the nicest rides I've ever done. There was very little traffic on the roads and excellent terrain and scenery as well. Most

everyone was pretty tired from the previous days ride but we still managed to crank it up several times. Overall, we got in over 200 miles for the weekend, had a great time, and are all that much more motivated to be ready for 2006. The feeling was mutual; we are all looking forward to racing with and for one another next year.