

Marcus- nice guy or cruel sadist?

I had expectations of a kinder, gentler ride this morning. Why not? It was Thursday (and Thursday rides are supposed to be easier-paced than Tuesdays), Kevin (my son, not the pilot) was home with a cold, and at the start of the ride, it's just me, Eric, Karl & Mike, picking up Marcus along the way and Millo further up the hill. The dynamics of the group are such that Marcus and either Karl or Mike might key off each other and bolt up the hill, so I did have some understandable fear & trepidation.

Since it's a Thursday we did the through-the-park option, delayed slightly by the bottom gate being closed, requiring a dismount & squeeze (not for everyone though; don't remember, might have been Marcus that deftly squeezed through the narrow spot to the right of the gate without getting off his bike). It was a moderate pace to the upper park entrance, just a few seconds over 10 minutes (by contrast, it takes 7:45-9:00 minutes the "normal" way). We quickly regrouped and were off again, this time with me sitting on Marcus's wheel. Why? Good question. Partly defensive; if I'm on his wheel, someone faster isn't, so there's less incentive for him to really push the pace. Nevertheless we gradually pulled away, with me wondering how long I could hang with him before blowing up.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, Marcus rides very smoothly, and if he's not trying to ditch you, and notices you're falling off a bit, he doesn't just sit up and wait, but instead slows down just a bit, allowing you to claw your way back up to him at your own speed. You could say he's allowing you to perfect your Levi skills (Levi Leipheimer is known for getting dropped during hard accelerations on steep grades, but instead of becoming discouraged or working too hard and blowing up, he grinds away at a sustainable pace and catches up to those who dropped him. This works because the hard accelerations that allowed the other guys to drop him also put them into their reserves so deeply that they have to slow down and recover).

In the end my time was 28:16, which if I extrapolate for the normal route up the hill, would have been a darned good time. Could not have happened without Marcus (and the new, lighter me probably helps a bit too). --Mike--