

251 watts average for 8+ minutes... where did that come from?



That's Kevin and Burt way up ahead of me, on the steep-ish climb up Crystal Springs Road. Kevin's young and strong. Burt's 75 I think? How is this possible? Burt has a new Domane +SLR TQ electric-assist ebike. I probably can't wait until I'm 75.

The days of pushing 280 watts for 20 minutes are long, long, LONG gone. Sadly, they don't seem like they were that long ago, but that's the sort of distortion Strava provides, because anything-Strava seems like current history; everything pre-Strava is an entirely different world.

Today's ride was more than a bit wonky. It was to be a one-way affair, meeting up with my wife in the City (that's what we call San Francisco, right?). And making things a bit dicey was the fact that I didn't know exactly when she'd be ready to have me drive her back from her appointment. The plan was to be in the Castro to meet her around 1pm at the earliest, 2:30pm at the latest, depending how her stuff went.

So I put together as interesting a ride as I could from Redwood City to San Francisco, including a loop out to Pacifica via Sharp Park and, if time allowed, a climb to the very top of San Bruno Mtn, a place I hadn't been to since my 3rd place in the race back in, what year? Whenever I was 16, could have been 17.

I met up with Kevin at his place in Foster City and shortly thereafter came across a former employee of our, Burt M, who'd recently picked up a new bike from us, a Trek Domane+ SLR ebike. Although it's not your typical ebike because it's designed to be used without the electric assist at all when cruising along on the flats. It's the bike that I'm wondering how long I can put off myself, given how poorly I've been climbing lately. Burt put on an amazing display of how that bike can literally take years off your age, as he easily rode up Crystal Springs road with Kevin, putting quite a bit of distance on me. 287 watts for 2 minutes, 44 seconds for Kevin on that stretch; I was at 241 watts for 3 minutes, 15 seconds. Could have been worse, and would have, earlier in the ride. Fortunately, by that point, I was probably close to 20 miles in.

The expected routing was to follow Skyline from Crystal Springs north, staying "high" until we got to Sharp Park. But the Garmin for some reason routed us downhill at Chateau Drive, and I was thinking maybe there was a section of road "up top" that wasn't available anymore and we had to loop downward for a bit to avoid it. But we kept going down. Down. Down. All the way down! I should have put a stop to it before reaching the bottom, but figured I'd still be able to get us easily back on track and it couldn't be THAT bad.

Well, it is THAT bad down low, hitting an unbelievable number of lights on El Camino in Burlingame, then heavy traffic and pad pavement as you rode further north. Fortunately I was able to get the Garmin to re-route us back up Sneath to where we wanted to be, although we'd wasted so much time down low that the Pacifica "detour" would have taken too much time.

Eventually we got to the base of San Bruno Mountain. It wasn't recognizable from almost 50 years ago; I didn't spot the school where the race started from and the road felt a bit familiar but much shorter than I'd remembered. In the race, that early part up the wide 4 lane road (even back then) was a bit discouraging as guys would fly past while I just rode at the best pace I could, trying not

to burn up. In the race I began reeling guys in on the upper part of the climb and once on Radio Road (the part Kevin and I didn't have time for today), I was on fire, but had no clue I'd passed all but two until well after the finish.

It was with great surprise today that I felt pretty darned good on that wide 4 lane section. I normally dislike climbs on really wide roads, but there was something about this one that felt just right. I felt like I could really drive my pedals into it, like it was the perfect grade, something I could keep up for a while without falling apart. Kevin, on the other hand, was falling back. I kept checking up on him, making sure he was ok, not having a seizure, but also wanting to keep my distance and not let him catch up. Yeah, competition. There are so few times I can beat Kevin on a climb anymore. Looking back on it, it's tough to know how much I might have been holding back, how many watts I had left in the tank.

It was at the top of this climb that I got the text from my wife that she was ready to be picked up, so any thoughts we had of finishing on Radio Road were quickly put to rest. It also changed the plans for the rest of the ride because I needed to get Kevin on his way home ASAP, and he was going to be taking the train back. Well fortunately there's a train station not too far from the other side of the climb, so I sent Kevin on his way there while I tried to get a new course plot to the Castro. This is one of Garmin's weaknesses; mid ride destination changes aren't handled too well. In my perfect world, I could look things up on my phone on Google Maps, plot it out, send it to my Garmin and poof, all done!

Little did I know that the station I'd sent Kevin to wasn't being served by CalTrain presently, due to the electrification construction. So while riding through San Francisco, navigating some really crazy crap (and I do mean crap; intersections where it looked like your only option were freeway on-ramps, only to discover this tiny bike path stuck in the middle of everything) I get the message on my Garmin, a text from Kevin, that he's riding back home instead. Fortunately he had a pretty good idea of the routing from a ride we'd done many years prior.

And me? I eventually found my way through the city of way too many stoplights to my wife. Wasn't at all sure I was going the right way until I saw the huge Gay Pride flag off in the distance.

The ride had the potential to have nothing but crappy memories, but that climb up San Bruno Mountain really changed the tone of things for me. I have some hope that I can still climb, and enjoy it.

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