

Horses for Courses



Photo: Mark Fussler

Elsewhere in this magazine, I write about the Computershare Mystery Tour, where the Tour Director and the Route Master saw fit to inflict three Lesotho mountain passes on us in one day. It is one thing to enter a race and end up doing that kind of riding after you had time to study the course profile, but here it was a surprise. We were told just before dinner the previous evening! In hindsight, it was not the gravity-challenged people at the back of the field who were most surprised by this day, it was those who might know better.

Shivering in my shirt sleeves, I was slightly dismayed to see Malcolm Lange coming down the station platform looking like an emissary of Lucifer: black arm warmers, black leg warmers, black windjammer! He won the Tour of Lesotho more than once, so he knows the area well, but of-course he completely underestimated the amount of time he would be spending on those nasty gradients. My favourite photograph of him on this day was taken well past mid-day, laughing his head off, while pushing someone. Average speed? Well that would have got distorted when he had to keep going down to come back up, wouldn't it?

Alan van Heerden was an absolute gem. I think he slept with his multi-tool in his hand, because the only time he was not adjusting handlebars, cleats and

saddles was in the dining room. Knowing what lay ahead, he was quite keen to lose any excess weight, and our tubby bags were the subject of much ridicule. On the preceding days, punctures were quickly sorted out by the guys in the follow vehicles, who would then drop the victim off just ahead of the group where they could rejoin with minimal fuss. On this day the groups splintered loong before the top of the first hill, and there was no vehicle when Alan stood punctured and tubeless at the side of the road! Someone with a tubby bag lent him one.

Ms Editor of Ride magazine did not fare much better. I just rode along with the people who had been going my pace, but when one of them jokingly cast aspersions on my BMI, I mistakenly thought I had something to prove. Only when I reached the pass in the middle did I stop to see where the others were, and by then I was in no-man's land. For the first few hours I thoroughly enjoyed the solitude and the scenery, and I got a thorough talking to by an old man in a traditional hat and blanket, who wanted to know who was looking after my kitchen. Later a dude on a pony made no effort to hold his line when we came face to face on one of the switchbacks and my bike scared the hell out of me when she went into a high-speed shimmy on one of the descents. Whatever. It had all worn very thin by the time I had to do some walking and weaving and half-hearted waiting while sitting on the barriers. I might have been one of the first at the top, but all the action was down below... and it took me several hours to work this out. Shame, I really should try to get out more!

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