

CAPE FEAR ROAD RACE - MASTERS 35+
May 6, 2006
by Dave Petree

And tough it was! Rumor had gotten out that the inaugural Cape Fear Road Race in Harnett County was going to hurt. So much so that Lonnie announced he wouldn't even bother. Most of the pack seemed to have heard the rumor too, or knew it to be fact. The pace for the first two laps was generally timid. As if everyone was afraid to really start racing. But, I get ahead of myself.

We lined up a smart looking bunch: Griffin, Rodney, Michael, Melencio, Matt, Blair, and myself. We had numbers. Dave LeDuc was in our field. He'd be racing on roads he trains on. How nice! He would be nearly impossible to beat and clearly one to watch. I would suck his wheel so often as to feel guilty not to buy him a new one by days end.

Blair rode off the front as soon as we got rolling and the pack let him get some ground. Slowly he was brought back and Barney Baxter jumped up the road and drug out Back To Dirt rider Rob Moran. The two hung out there for a good spell. As we started up the long hill that led to the finishing false flat to start lap two we had gathered some numbers up front. Blair set a strong tempo up the hill with me in tow. He was closing the gap. I took what felt like a pretty hard pull and I think Michael followed as we rolled through the Start/Finish line. Moran had come back to the field, but Baxter still hung clear. Mark jumped the field and would catch Baxter. The pack seemed content to let them roll. There was a long way to go. Griffin and Baxter started putting time on the field.

The rest of us tried to be patient. I kept marking LeDuc which is kind of weird for me to be doing. Kind of David verses Goliath. For another thing, he spends a lot of time on, or even off, the back of the pack. Exuding confidence. A few flurries went off but the big move came on the back side when big Kurt Massey (Raleigh All-Star) attacked for the second straight lap at the same spot on a longish hill on the back side of the course. I'll bet Kurt has ridden that hill a thousand times training. This time he would get clear. Matt came to the front and started setting pace up the hill with me on his wheel. He was holding ground to Kurt but realized that this was not altogether a bad thing for us. Kurt would bridge to Griffin and Baxter adding considerable strength to that move. Advantage us. Matt eased up.

The details of the third lap are pretty foggy to me. Testament to lactate threshold efforts one after another. I remember being impressed that on several occasions Rodney and I would be blazing up the road in one move or another, and suddenly Michael and Matt would come rolling through the paceline. Man that's a good feeling. As we began lap four Rodney simply rolled clear of the field (a la French Broad last year) and I jumped across to him. I think I was going really fast as I came by him yelling for him to jump. Peter Leousis was coming too and dragging a Raleigh All-Star rider. Rodney and I traded pulls a couple of times and I yelled back at Peter to see if he would pull through. He asked me if we were going to work? I thought 'what the heck does he think we're doing right now - playing!' Instead of trying to reason it out I screamed 'yes' and sure enough he pulled through. We were going so hard I couldn't recover and eventually had to skip a pull. When I did, I asked the All-Star rider if he would take a turn. He just smiled (or was that a grimace?). I didn't really expect him to work with two team-mates up the road, but sure enough he did just that on one of the long grades this course featured. Next time I pulled through I looked back and he was not in sight anymore. I bet he won't ever listen to me again. The three of us kept banging away with Rodney taking the hardest pulls. With three of four miles left in the lap we spotted LeDuc dragging a small squad up the road towards us as expected. They made contact and sure enough Matt came pulling through. Man that's a good feeling.

Our little group was now a pretty select few if I may say so. Three DeOro riders, Dave LeDuc, Peter Leousis (Carolina Masters), Kevin Gorden (Back To Dirt), and Bill Holder (Raleigh All-stars). Sweet. I was so glad that no one attacked going up that long hill towards the Start/Finish but my happiness was short lived. After we made the first right hander on our last lap LeDuc

jumped the first of many times. He was openly frustrated to be dragging so many DeOro riders up the road and was fussing for the others to respond. Man that's a good feeling. The pace stayed hard but not over the top. When we approached the hill that Kurt Massey had made his move on Dave jumped hard with Leousis second on his wheel. Leousis looked back at me and said "man, I got nothing for that". I had to agree. Dave did what he does so well and hit it super hard at the top of the downhill building super speed and then sat on his top tube and coasted (very quickly) to the bottom on the hill. He then stood up on the pedals and we never saw him again.

The rest of the lap could be described as Rodney and I doing a lot of things wrong and Matt being unable to educate us on the roll and explain why. We basically pulled the remains of the break towards the finish line instead of ganging up on them like we should have. My legs were starting to go even before we hit that long hill up to the line and when we did hit it, Rodney decided to set tempo. He was trying to give me an advantage, but I cracked and faded back. Matt took over the pull but it was all over with the three of us taking the last three spots out of the break. Hurts to say that.

Behind us, Michael would get clear of the diminished pack with early break-away rider Rob Moran. Ahead of us, Kurt would jump clear of Griffin and Baxter on the last lap for a brilliant solo victory. Griffin would take second. LeDuc solo for fourth. We had beat him.

Blair rode perhaps the most unselfish and smart race any of us could remember. His early lap efforts made him the hero for the day plus he hung in for a good finish. Rich would sacrifice himself early and get caught out on one of the long hills losing contact. He put his nose down and finished the race with a no-quit attitude that speaks volumes about this team. Man that's a good feeling.