

A fun, new race this weekend.

Seems unlikely for an event thrown on Fort Bragg in July amidst sand, pine trees and firing ranges, but the organizers did a great job. Dave Petree, Michael Satterfield I traveled down for the road race on Sunday. You knew you were close to the race when you got to the security checkpoint where they search your car. Actually, the security personnel we encountered there both days were pleasant, did their jobs quickly and we were smoothly onto the base and to the start/finish area.

The Masters 35+ 1,2,3 race was set for 1:35 pm. By that time, it was a balmy 93 degrees and we faced 64 miles -- 4 times around the 16+ mile loop. The course must manage some type of optical illusion. By my math and geography, elevation gained must equal elevation lost over the course of a lap, but I was hard-pressed to figure out where on this course we went downhill. It had a series of looong false flats with a slightly more obvious grade thrown in here or there, though never anything steep. You could frequently see for a long ways and it always seemed that that point out there a mile ahead of you was slightly uphill all the way. With only 11 racers -- the smallest field I've seen this season -- this had the makings of one ugly trek.

Of the 11, excluding our three team members, I knew that 5 were strong rollers. With this race likely to break into little pieces with a long ways to go, the writing on the wall told me that I'd better be ready to try to roll solidly for a long ways once it started splitting. Lovely. It figured to be more of a Will Shore scenario than one for me. However, the race rolled out and we immediately went double file at conversational pace for over a lap. The two roders on front would peel off and be replaced by the next two and so on. With an odd number, it actually meant that you had a new "partner" beside you to meet and chat with each time through. Sort of a square dance on wheels. Pretty neat actually. But, as they say, all good things must come to an end. So, on the second lap, after chatting for a lap with the competition, hostilities commenced.

The first fracture of the field saw Michael go with an attack, which yielded him and 4 others on the front side of the split and me, Dave and three others left out (one racer having been dropped previously). Somehow, the two Raleigh Allstars guys sitting there with us had missed this move. Once they realized it, the gap was established, but one of them jumped to go across and I followed him. A big effort and we were across to make 7 in the lead group. From there, with still 40 miles to go, this race was defined by continual attacks, which thwarted any chance at steady efforts. It was a long ways to play cat and mouse at 93 degrees with just a few guys, but that's what happened. One of the attacks shook Michael off, leaving a 6-man lead group. Michael joined in with Dave and another racer behind, but they could not regain the lead group.

Eventually, two riders escaped from the lead group -- Steve Sherman and Ted Hopkins. One of the racers in that lead group was so unwilling to pull but so willing to attack anyone who did that he effectively snuffed any chance of a chase of the two leaders, who would finish first and second. Man was that frustrating. Strangely, this guy denied working for either of the two up the road, which was the only logic I could see to what he was doing. In any event, it left four of us racing for third place. With 500 meters to go, the first finish line attack came. That attack by Peter Leousis was covered by all. With 200m to go, I threw what I had on the table, got a good jump, and held it to the line for third. Dave and Michael finished together shortly afterwards.

A word to those who weren't there: This was a well-organized event. Everyone we encountered was friendly. They had neutral handups. The course has very very little traffic and doesn't require you to be a climber or a flatland roller to compete well. The drive was quicker and easier than expected from Greensboro. They say they'll have it again next year. Hopefully so.