

On Saturday, March 4, we lined up for the 3<sup>rd</sup> race of the Greenville Training Series, the River Falls Road Race. This course at the foot of the mountains north of Greenville is a fixture of the Greenville Training Series. It typically marks the first true hill of the racing season. The course takes in a scenic 6-7 mile loop which is flat and fast, but with one notable exception, a fairly tough ¾ mile hill. The finish line, of course, is at the top (actually just past the crest as you start down the back side). We'd do 6 laps.

We lined up a strong squad: Blair Palmer, Rodney Simpson, Richard Melencio, Michael Satterfield, Dave Petree, and me [Matt Mason]. This race also saw the Masters debut of new teammate Grant Lawyer. Grant is an expert mountain biker, super guy, and a very welcome addition to the team. Grant began training with some of us last year and that fortunately did not dissuade him from jumping into the mix. Besides us, that mix included a stellar field. Smith Barney again had an impressive squad. They had the strongest numerical presence in the race and some exceptional riders, especially week one's revelation, Jason Sprouse. The race also saw impressive riders from other teams, including former series winner Andy Lougher from Georgia.

Sparing the sordid details, we thoroughly blew this race, although not from a lack of effort. What proved to be a decisive split occurred on the hill at the end of the second lap, thus still early in the race. The race had been active to that point. Blair and Michael had already had to cover moves on the first lap. Rich went into the well going hard too and Grant was at the front end of a big learning curve. In short, we had already burned some matches and simply missed the break when it went. Yours truly, in particular, misread the race and coulda-shoulda-woulda been there but wasn't. The split blew the race into several pieces. Dave and I were in the second group and he pounded away to try to pull us back up but the front group had major horsepower and it wasn't to be. With the chase beginning to fade, I took a crack at bridging to the front group on the hill, but came up short. In the next group back, Michael and Rodney kept at it and eventually regained the second group only to see Michael then flat.

To our credit, we didn't quit. In fact, Dave and Rodney rode hard to the foot of the hill for the last trip up in order to protect my chances at contesting what was left. With 11 racers now up the road, the field was left to battle the hill and each other for 12<sup>th</sup>. Small consolation, but we prevailed in the best of the rest category. Midway up the hill, where it steepens, I went for broke and held off the field. That was nice, but not what we were looking for.

However, we promptly gathered ourselves and did something we do pretty well: enjoy the part of racing before and after the race is over. In this case, this involved what has become the team's special Starbucks in Greenville, followed by dinner at Macaroni Grill, and hanging out watching cable TV at the hotel. Blair had come accessorized with something called a "thumper," but I'd best leave that for him to explain. As I told Rodney afterwards, if I finished no better than 12<sup>th</sup> in every race but had as much fun as we were having, I'd have no complaint. Even so, wish us better luck at the next one! We'll keep you posted.

Matt Mason