

## NC State Games Criterium

Cary, NC June 26th

Masters 45+

I've somehow never raced this course before even though it has been used for this very event in the past. They changed it up a bit and as we warmed up (forever -- they were running nearly an hour late) the small talk was all about how most of us would pull out if the streets got wet. It was looking like they would. Drizzle was falling but never came down hard enough to soak the tarmac. I half seriously joked that if it did pour we should all agree to give first place to Ronnie Hinson, second to Barney Baxter and third to Randy Shields and be done with it. Call me a soothsayer but if I'd reversed the top two places I'd have nailed it.

The course was a technical seven turn affair that could fairly be described as contrived and sketchy. Three of the turns offered ample crash possibilities. In fact one unlucky dude crashed and broke his bike while warming up! There was one slight uphill section that would prove to be significant (while riding it at nearly 30 mph each lap). As things would turn out I spent quite a lot of time in Time-Trial mode rolling around this course (I did both the 45+ and 35+ races and got dropped during both) and learned to like it. It was fun.

The race started off very fast and stayed that way. There are some old, determined and fit people racing bicycles these days. Funny thing is that some of us who have been a round for a while don't know the half of them. I've no idea where they come from but I do know you can't drop them.

The Raleigh Allstars team had the numbers and talent in this one (again). These guys have dominated the 45+ racing this year and I'm not sure it is a good thing. With two of the best sprinters in the region (Barney Baxter and Ronnie Hinson) and plenty of horsepower backing them they dictate a policy of negative racing. It's driven good old racers away from the division. I did my best today to change that without luck.

With thirteen laps to go I drove the pace up the long hill as hard as I could go with Barney on my wheel. When I turned the corner at the top of the hill (heading towards the start/finish) I looked back at him and saw he was clearly suffering. The pack was stretched out. I eased off and he sat up. I took a couple of deep breaths and jumped again. Only Dean Lyons matched the move and we quickly opened up a nice gap. Dean pulled through one time and as I went back on the nose I glanced back and saw that the Allstars were getting organized. Dean wouldn't pull through again. I gave everything I had. It failed. When the pack caught up I would last only one more lap before popping off the back. I assumed Time-Trial mode in an effort to keep from being lapped. It worked.

When what was left of the pack topped that long hill on the last lap a rider clipped his pedal in the turn and pandemonium instantly occurred. He went down hard. The rider just behind him hit him and did a one-eighty summersault high in the air that would have made any gymnastics teacher proud (only without a safety net). Another rider trying to avoid the calamity rode into an unprotected street sign (a police officer had removed the bail of straw that covered it to try and stop automobile traffic from pulling out of a parking lot onto the course) and was very slow to get up. Several riders simply rode straight ahead instead of turning to fight for the finish line. When I got there I just rode on through and crossed the line in eighth place!

I don't think anyone was seriously hurt. The 35+ race went off without any crashes. I got to work on my Time-Trialing plenty on that one too. I'll let someone else tell you about it.