

*Excerpt from Steve's Blog: <http://justaboutcrazy.blogspot.com>*

July 20, 2008

This morning it looked like it was going to rain again, but I had two things that I really wanted to do:

- a) Ride my bike,
- b) Go to church.

As I approached the main-road, I looked up & saw a group of cyclists (read racers, not the every-day joe on a bike) go by. My heart jumped. One of the riders waved at me. I saw that no traffic was coming so I jammed on the pedals hard & sped across the highway, turning left to chase them down. About half-way across the road, I noticed a policeman, directing traffic & realized that he had been holding traffic back. Now there were cars coming at me. I cut the corner hard which meant that I rode right in front of him. He started blowing his whistle at me & then yelling stop!

It was at this point that I noticed that there was an escort motorbike following the bikes in front of me. It was a race, & they were going fast! With the policeman behind me right ticked off, I decided I had better not stop & that the only thing to do was to join the race. I started really giving it, hoping to jump on the back of the peleton.

It was at this point that I realized that the people lining the sides of the road weren't just Sunday-morning pedestrians, but cycling fans who had come out to watch the race. I realized this because as I started to catch up, the crowd went wild. They were cheering & screaming & laughing (you have to realize that I was wearing running shoes & an old MEC backpack full of clothes & my giant French Bible that must weigh 6 pounds!)

Anyways, the laughing/screaming crowd gave me energy & I closed the gap to less than 20 metres. The escort bike had noticed me by this time & moved aside so that I could move into position. However, by now we were going uphill & into a wind. I started to fall back & began to wonder if I would be able to make the back end of the peleton after all. Just then, the front of the pack made a break for it & the rest followed, leaving me gasping for wind & trying not to let my backpack weigh me down, mentally. Turns out that they were sprinting for the turn-around. 180 degree u-turn & back-down the other side of the highway. Yikes. This was the first time I had really ridden the bike in a year & I wasn't very confident of a high-speed turnaround. With all those spectators, I decided to take it easy & push hard on the other side.

I did push hard, but there was little hope of catching the group. I kept them in my sights, but by completion of the lap, I was soaked in sweat & conceded defeat. Instead of doing the next turnaround, I just kept going to (unbeknownst to me) the finish-line! The announcer was out on the street, yelling at me into the microphone & the crowds were going crazy. I smiled & gave a victory-wave to the crowd as I crossed the line! The last 2 km to church made for a good cool-down, although I was still sweating profusely by the time I got there. Sure glad I brought a change of clothes.

When I walked into church, I was surprised to see that the service hadn't started yet. I guess the whole race incident must not have lasted more than 10 minutes, though it seemed like a lot longer than that. I sat down & started to work out what in the world had just happened. It is kind of surreal & bizarre, but then again, this is why I love Africa.

I guess I don't have to participate in the Tour de France, now (Go Sanchez!! by the way, & I see that Cadel Evans is holding steady). I have already experienced 1000's of screaming spectators cheering for me as I chase down the peleton! Today is a day I will never forget.

Thanks God!