

RAAM Daily Wrap-Up - Day 2

By Andy McGrath – Race Across America

The 2009 Race Across America got underway for twenty-eight male soloists at 1200 in Oceanside today. While this is the beginning of a race and journey, it is also a means to an end. We fans and spectators only see the blood, sweat and tears of the race itself; we judge the riders on an eight-to-twelve-day period as they pedal across America. It is easy to forget the thousands of kilometres of training clocked, as well as the hours of time spent not just on the road but planning the logistics. Make no mistake, for many racers, the RAAM is a dream that has been years in the making.

Men's Solo

RAAM 2009 – Male Soloists (alphabetical order)

Patrick Autissier (Fra), 47
Hermann Bachmann (Swi), 57
Marko Baloh (Slo), 42
Bill Bradley (Usa), 49
Dominique Briand (Fra), 54
Michael Cook (Usa), 39
Claudio Clarindo (Bra), 32
Christopher Gottwald (Usa), 38
Gerhard Gulewicz (Aut), 42
Kevin Kaiser (Usa), 41
Scott Luikart (Usa), 47
Richard Newey (Gbr), 44
Tony O'Keefe (Can), 48
Peter Oyler (Can), 39
Ben Popp (Usa), 35
Franz Preihs (Aut), 31
Jim Rees (Gbr), 46
Jure Robic (Slo), 44
Daniel Rudge (Gbr), 42
Julian Sanz Garcia (Spa), 36
Christoph Strasser (Aut), 27
Jean-Marc Velez (Fra), 47
Dani Wyss (Swi), 39

Robic roars into an early lead

With a good start so important, nobody was hanging around Oceanside after the staggered departure. Four-time winner and race legend Jure Robic's pace was almost as scorching as the 100F weather. With darkness falling, the Slovenian started as he meant to continue, making the position of race leader his, after putting his head down for the first couple hundred of miles and averaging 21mph. This is hardly a surprise, considering his past performances. It is now down to the other competitors to try and match him.

The rivals are whittled down

Of course, his rivals have not put in all the hours of training and preparation to simply watch Robic pedal off into the distance – at last check, there were still eight men within two hours of the favourite. Closest is his compatriot and close friend Marko Baloh, fifteen minutes in arrears, followed by Peter Oyler and Christoph Strasser, who has latched on to Baloh, who started twenty minutes after him (remember, there is a staggered start so each rider leaves at intervals of one minute). He is particularly a man to keep a keen eye on: at 27, he is the youngest in the race and the overwhelming favourite for Rookie of the Year. Time will tell whether youth trumps experience.

Pro racer Gottwald shows promise

The biggest early surprise was perhaps Christopher Gottwald. Though he's never done RAAM about, the 38 year old rides pro on the road with Colavita Racing. He'll be hoping to emulate the feats of Tour rider Jonathan Boyer, who went from road racing to RAAM victory 25 years ago, igniting a memorable rivalry with race legend Pete Penseyeres. It remains to be seen how he'll cope with the race, but at this early stage, it looks like he and Strasser are very evenly-matched.

2008 RAAM protagonists Franz Preihs and Gerhard Gulewicz- were riding well, about an hour and a half down on Robic. Jean-Marc Velez and Julian Sanz Garcia are also showing strong early legs and have been chatting happily to RAAM communications director Perry Stone. RAAM virgins Scott Luikart, Michael Cook and Ben Popp have also gone out of the blocks with some zip. However, it's still early doors, so all this can and will change. A fast start is no good if you run out of energy and motivation halfway across America - following the wrong pace turns the suffer-fest that is RAAM into something even more tortuous.

Tomorrow...

The Bradshaw Mountains and progressive distance will open up some bigger time gaps. We will see whether anyone can peg back the gradual lead that Jure Robic is grinding out. Undoubtedly, it is unwise to let him get too much of a time cushion so early in the race. In the coming days, it will be fascinating seeing which riders pay for an over-zealous start and, at the same time, which slow-burners continue to tap out a steady pace and climb up the leaderboard.

RAAM Solo Male; Time Station #4: Salome, AZ (293 miles/3,016 miles), 1864 ft

1. Jure Robic (Slo) 14 hours 17 minutes (20.56mph)
2. Marko Baloh (Slo) +15 minutes (20.21mph)
3. Peter Oyler (Can) +33 minutes (19.8mph)
4. Christoph Strasser (Aut) +35 minutes (19.76mph)
5. Julian Sanz Garcia (Spa) +1h 30 minutes (18.61mph)
6. Gerhard Gulewicz (Aut) +1h 32 minutes (18.57mph)
7. Franz Preihs (Aut) +1 hour 52 minutes (18.19mph)
8. Dani Wyss (Swi) +1 hour 53 minutes (18.17mph)
9. Jim Rees (Gbr) +3 hours 57 minutes (16.11mph)

**** The other riders' TS #4 figures are not up yet; below are their TS #3 times****

Jean Marc Velez (Fra) 12h 28m (18.66mph)
Michael Cook (Usa) 12h 37m (18.44mph)
Ben Popp (Usa) 12h 49m (18.15mph)
Scott Luikart (Usa) 13h 04m (17.8mph)
Tony O'Keefe (Can) 13h 26m (17.32mph)
Claudio Clarindo (Bra) 13h 39m (17.04mph)
Richard Newey (Gbr) 13h 46m (16.90mph)
Patrick Autissier (Fra) 14h 19m (16.25mph)
Kevin Kaiser (Usa) 14h 23m (16.17mph)

****Here are the TS#2 times for the following riders****

Miles for Mentoring / Christopher Gottwald (Usa) 6h 56m (20.63mph)
Daniel Rudge (Gbr) 7h 55m (18.06mph)
Bill Bradley (Usa) 9h 44m (14.69mph)

Men's Solo 50-59

Evergreen Dominique Briand deserves a big mention too. In the opening twelve hours, he opened up a gap of 90 minutes on sole 50-59 rival Hermann Bachmann. With an average speed of 18mph, the veteran is challenging riders twenty years his junior on the route.

Time Station #3: Blythe, CA (232.6 miles/3,016 miles), 269 ft

1. Dominique Briand (Fra) 12h 51m (18.1mph)
2. Hermann Bachmann (Swi) 14h 20m

Men's Solo 60+

Sole 60+ entrant Paul Danhaus was still riding well on day two. Going through lofty Flagstaff, he had averaged just under 13mph.

Time Station #8, Flagstaff, AZ (490.8/3,000), 6840ft

1. Paul Danhaus (Usa) 1d 13h 57m (12.94mph)

Women's Solo

At the head of the race, Janet Christiansen turned the tables on her rival Daniela Genovesi to take the lead in the women's race. Despite the ups and downs of the Bradshaw Mountains, the two were only separated by 19 minutes at time station 7 in Flagstaff, Arizona, after 490 miles. One wonders whether Genovesi will pay for her strong start in the coming days but, at the moment, she is riding with resilience.

Michele Santilhano is chirpy and riding consistently in third. And while Ann Wooldridge is bringing up the rear of the four-strong women's field, she is technically in a category of her own as the lone 50-59 women. The plucky Brit is keeping in the zone, riding smoothly to stay within four hours of Christiansen.

Time Station #7, Cottonwood, AZ (437.9/3016), 3347ft altitude

1. Janet Christiansen (Usa) 1 day 6 hours 28 minutes (14.37mph average)
2. Daniela Genovesi (Bra) 1 d 6 h 47m (14.23mph)
3. Michele Santilhano (Rsa) 1 d 8h 19m
4. Ann Wooldridge (Gbr) 1d 10h 0m

RAAM 4-Person Male (75+)

The Great Grand PAC Masters have already made a stir in Oceanside, as their RAAM ride and positive attitude garners a lot of deserved press. Out on the road, as they headed into Arizona after the third check at Blythe, they had averaged 17.17mph. Every RAAM rider is a supreme athlete, but this ride really is simply phenomenal. At this rate, the other teams won't catch sight of them till the finish in Annapolis; not bad for a bunch of grandfathers!

Bear in mind, folks, that the rest of the RAAM teams start at 1200 on July 20.

Time Station #3: Blythe, CA (232.6 miles/3,016 miles), 269 ft

1. Great Grand PAC Masters 13h 33m (17.17mph)

Race Across the West

For those "dipping their toes" into ultra-racing, there is the Race Across West. It is a 1,000-mile race over the first third of the RAAM course; some use it as preparation and qualification for the big one next year. It may be much shorter, but there is nothing easy about this, as the riders have to go over some of the toughest climbs on the road to the finish in Taos, New Mexico.

In the men's solo event, Canadian Dallas Morris was absolutely flying, comfortably the first man to reach the fourth time station at Salome and trading blows with the cream of the RAAM soloist crop. The pre-race joke he had with RAAM reporter Jennifer about beating Jure Robic to Taos is not so far off the mark! Averaging 18.28mph, he was almost an hour ahead of closest challenger Joe Mann, with Mike Wilson close behind.

In the women's race, Jennifer Swaney leads Leslie Holton and Linda Guerette by just over an hour. She also deserves some credit for riding the first quarter of the race with two 50-59 male competitors, John Caton and Gary Johnson. The pair are inseparable, passing through time station #3 in Blythe together. Rest assured, it'll be very close between this competitive duo come the finish in a few days time.

Male and female two-up leaders Team RAO – GVHBikes and Team Project Athena have set blistering opening paces, blowing away the competition. It'll be intriguing to see whether they can keep up their efforts all the way to the finish in New Mexico.

Race Across the West – Solo Male (Under 50)

1. Dallas Morris (Can) 16h 4m through TS #4 (18.28mph)
2. Joe Mann (Usa) 13h 16m through TS #3 (17.53mph)
3. Mike Wilson (Usa) 13h 30m (17.23mph)
4. Tim Richardson (Usa) 16h 0m (14.54mph)

Race Across the West – Solo Female (Under 50); Time Station #3 – Blythe, CA (232.6/3000)

1. Jennifer Swaney (Krebs) 14h 39m (15.88mph)
2. Leslie Holton 15h 49m (14.71mph)

Race Across the West – Solo Male 50-59; Time Station #3 – Blythe, CA (232.6/3000)

1. John Caton (Usa) 14h 39m (15.88mph)
2. Gary Johnson (Usa) 14h 39m (15.88mph)

Race Across the West – Solo Female 50-59; Time Station #3 – Blythe, CA (232.6/3000)

1. Linda Guerette (Usa) 15h 50m (14.69mph)

Race Across the West –2-Person Female

1. Team Project Athena 16h 12m through TS#4 (18.13mph)
2. Team Fitista 14h 14m through TS#3 (16.34mph)

Race Across the West –2-Person Male

1. RAO – GVHBikes 15h 5m through TS #4 (19.47mph)
2. Team Wisconsin 13h 47m through TS #3 (16.88mph)

Race Across the West – 4-Person Male; Time Station #4

1. Wildcats Four Brett 16h 24m (17.91mph)
2. Bicycle John's 16h 25m (17.89mph)