

Sleep Management

Updated: November, 2007

© 2007 by Race Across America, LLC (Colorado). All rights reserved.

Sleep management is critical for everyone involved with RAAM. This includes Racers and Crew and is especially true for RAAM Staff who have an even longer time period to contend with. If someone can't function well because of lack of sleep, they are not much use to a Racer, fellow Crew members, or the race; they may in fact become a liability. This will offer a few suggestions to help everyone get some sleep.

No matter how you are involved with the race, don't expect to get much sleep. You certainly won't get your regular 8 hours; many Crew and Racers never get more than 4 hours of sleep each day. You should also be aware that your sleep may be many blocks of time versus one continuous block of time. The lucky ones are those that can sleep anywhere and in any position and of course you might gain that skill on a cross-country crewing experience.

When, where, and how Racers and Crew sleep could be some of the most critical and logistically challenging decisions of the race. In order for you (Crew, Racer, Staff) to get sleep, it must be planned, it just doesn't happen. This will help you plan so you get some sleep.

Basic Hints To Sleep

Here are a few easy hints to help everyone with sleep

- Sleep whenever possible.
- An eye pillow/eye cover might be handy.
- Earplugs might be helpful.
- Try to powernap for 15-30 minutes at a time.
- Even closing your eyes for 5 or 10 minutes without actual sleep may help.
- If you can't sleep, just lay back and rest and close your eyes.

Schedules

Keep a Crew Schedule

Our normal daily pattern is that we generally know we are going to go to sleep in the evening, sleep for a number of hours and then wake up. Sleep is part of a pattern and it's predictable.

RAAM disrupts any normal patterns of sleep, but patterns are important. You should have a schedule of who is doing what and when they are doing it. That schedule should also include sleep time for everyone, including the Crew Chief and Racers. Having a schedule helps everyone to know what's happening and it helps everyone to know they will get some sleep and when they will get it.

The second part of having a schedule is sticking to it. Some of the challenge of RAAM is the necessity to constantly change plans. Your crew schedule, the scheduled times for crew changes, and regular sleep for Crew should NOT be one of that changes. Everyone needs to be on time and ready for crew changes. If the crew change is off by even an hour that probably means some part of the crew is going to get less sleep – they will know it and they won't be happy with the people that are late, no matter what the circumstances.

Solo Racer Schedules

Solos Racers are more likely to sleep when needed versus having a defined sleep schedule. Some Racers use more frequent power naps and never sleep more than 15-30 minutes at a time. Some Racers like to sleep 3 hours at a time at the same time every day. Some just sleep when they need it. This does make it a bit more challenging for Crew. After several days you will begin to see the pattern which will help with predictability.

Team Racer Schedules

Team Racers are usually on a rotating riding schedule and thus can know when they have an opportunity to sleep. Team Racers rarely get more than 1-3 hours of sleep at a time. Obviously the plan is to sleep while another Team Racer is racing. With 4 and 8 Person teams, there is more time available to consider sleeping.

A 2-Person Team is particularly challenging for sleep. Most 2-Person Teams switch every 1-2 hours. You may have to adjust the nighttime schedule to accommodate a longer period of sleep for each Racer. Perhaps at night, Racers will ride longer shifts of 3-4 hours.

The sleep schedule for Racers and Crew may be different. Just ensure everyone has some scheduled sleep.

Where to Sleep

RVs, Motels, and Vans

Motels are usually a luxury during the race. This is partly because of cost, but also because it can often be difficult to find a motel when it's needed. If you're Racer is 30 miles from the nearest town and needs to sleep right then, a motel 30 miles away doesn't so any good. Riding another two hours to reach the motel may be too dangerous. Motels may also be a challenge because you don't necessarily know where they are OR if they have any rooms available. You can spend a considerable amount of time looking for a motel only to find nothing. The best plan is to attempt to use the hotel list in the Route Book and call ahead or send a Support Vehicle up the road.

If you get a motel, the priority is for the Racer. The Racer gets first showed, first bed, etc. You can often squeeze most of your crew into a motel room with 2 or 3 per bed and everyone else on the floor. If you are lucky enough to get a motel, it's best to get one ahead of the Racer. Send some Crew up the road to the motel, let them shower and get some rest. When the Racer arrives, you can do a Crew change and then the other Crew can also get a shower and rest.

It's for this reason that RVs are used by most Racers. With an RV, the Racer can sleep anywhere. With an RV, the Crew can sleep anywhere. RVs have other advantages and disadvantages as well (see the article about RVs). With an RV you can sleep while the vehicle is moving. For some, sleeping in a moving vehicle can be a challenge, but it's almost a necessity of the race. Most Team Racers end up sleeping in moving vehicles because of the need to keep moving forward.

Some Racers just use vans of some type. Vans are often cheaper and easier to drive without the luxury of an RV. Many Racers build beds into their vans as well.

In any case it is advisable to have somewhere horizontal where Racers can sleep. A horizontal surface for Crew sleep is advisable wherever possible though Crew may end up sleeping in a chair or elsewhere.

Sleep Anywhere

It is truly possible, and advisable, to sleep anywhere, or at least rest anywhere. Find little segments to rest. If you go shopping, have 1 or 2 people go and shop while everyone else rests for a few minutes. If you're in the Follow Vehicle, the Racer is humming along, there's no turns for 20 miles – if you're the navigator or feeder, close your eyes for a few minutes. The driver will surely wake you if something is needed. Many opportunities can be found throughout the race.

Let Them Sleep

Once a Crew or Racer goes for sleep, you should do your best to let them sleep for their allotted time. You should plan ahead knowing that several Crew will be sleeping for a period of time.

If there is a true emergency, then contact them for help. For example, running out of gas or supplies is a matter of poor planning, not a matter of emergency. You may end up contacting your sleeping Crew for help if you run out of gas – and if you do, they are more than likely to be annoyed and upset. This kind of situation is unnecessary and greatly disrupts the rhythm and synchronicity of the Crew.

Strategies

Solos

Solos have a little bit of an advantage over teams with respect to sleep for Crew. The Solo Racer must stop to sleep themselves at some point. This is the time when most of the Crew can get some sleep as well. The counter to this is that Solo Racers are on the course much longer than teams, as much as 12 days.

Strategies

One strategy for Solo Racers is the following:

- Send some of the crew up the road several hours to find a place to prepare for sleep. If they get there early enough they can sleep a few hours.
- When the Racer arrives, almost everyone can sleep for awhile. At least one or two people should remain awake to watch the time and wake everyone up. This is also a good time to clean and restock the Support Vehicles.
- Once the Racer is ready to depart, the crew that arrived early can depart with the Racer while the rest stay to continue sleeping and catch up later.

For Teams, it's a bit more challenging since the Racer never stops. Since the Racer never stops, some part of the Crew may have to stop to sleep. In that case either the Crew stops and then has to catch up to the Racer, or they drive ahead and then stop while the Racer catches them. These situations are discussed next.

Sleep Now or Sleep Later (Staying Behind or Going Ahead)

You will always have the question of where to sleep. Do you stay behind from the Racer to sleep and then catch up, or should you drive ahead, sleep, and wait for the Racer to arrive? There is not a good answer and each has advantages and disadvantages.

Staying Behind

- A crew coming off a Night shift will likely be ready to sleep, so driving ahead may be a problem for them to stay awake.
- Staying behind means you can help with any potential problems as you catch back up.
- By staying behind, you could underestimate the time needed to catch up and be late for a crew change. If you oversleep, this problem gets even worse.

Going Ahead

- If you do have to go backwards, backtracking on the route can be difficult. In the west you are not likely to get lost with the few number of roads, but in the east there are more roads.
- If you go ahead, your Racer will catch you and your Crew can wake you.

Time and Catching up and Getting Ahead

All Racers, Solos and Teams, need to be aware of the time involved with traveling – getting ahead or catching up. If you are 80 miles behind the Racer on the road, it will take you approximately 2 hours to catch up. While you are driving that 2 hours, the Racer will have riding forward perhaps another 30-40 miles. That's another hour of catchup. Expect that for every 40 miles you are behind your Racer, it will take 1 ½ to 2 hours to catch up.

If you want to get ahead to find a motel and sleep, consider the following: if you drive ahead 2 hours or about 80 miles, the racer will take 4-5 hours to cover that same distance. From the time you stop, the racer will be there in just 2-3 hours again.

Teams need to be aware that speeds are generally much faster than Solos and so times are different.

The route takes back roads and goes through small towns. Expect the average speed to about 40-45mph out west where it's more open and less as you proceed east.

You start to get good at math figuring this all out!

Contact

If you stop for sleep, you should be sure you have cell phone coverage so the rest of your crew can contact you. Communication at times can be a challenge and not being able to contact a sleeping crew can be very frustrating.

The Rest

Staying Awake

You may have situations where you need to stay awake or you are part of a Crew that follows a Racer under Night conditions. There are well known aids for staying awake. Caffeine in various forms usually works for most people. This can include coffee, soft drinks, No-Doz or the equivalent, or various energy drinks.

Here are a few other tricks:

- Frequent eating gives you something to do. Pretzels, raisin, nuts.
- Drink lots and then you'll have to use the bathroom, but you have to hold it since you're driving.
- Chewing gum.
- Put the vehicle window down and have wind blowing on you. Or perhaps just aim the vents at your face.
- Crank the heat or the cold in the car and keep changing it.
- Talk. Ask deep questions of life.
- Jumping jacks, push-ups, sit-ups – something to get the blood moving.

Some of these can be a challenge as while you are trying to stay awake, others may be sleeping.

To keep your Racer awake – WITHOUT putting them at risk:

- Music
- Tell jokes or Read them humor
- Read them letters or support from friends and family
- Read them something they enjoy, perhaps the newspaper or a daily Soap Opera update.

Do NOT use any anti-sleep drugs unless that is a normal prescription for you. This is a violation of the drug policy of the race.

Supplies

You might consider bringing a sleeping bag and sleeping bag for the Racer so they can sleep anywhere. You can also consider bringing a small pillow or just a pillow case to stuff some clothes in to be used as a pillow.

Watch out for each other

Your success depends on everyone getting sleep and functioning well. Look out for each other to ensure everyone is getting some sleep. It is also your responsibility to make sure you are rested and well and fit enough to proceed safely.

New Frontiers

RAAM is likely going to compel you to try things you've never tried before, including sleep. Most people have never tried going for a week straight with just a few hours of sleep a night. Perhaps you did in college as you studied for exams, but most are now a bit older. The human body is capable of mighty feats, just consider what your Racer is doing. You are also capable of more than you know and you can go farther than you know. It's a rewarding experience to get there and push your limits.

On the other hand, pay attention to when you've really hit your limits. Know when you are out of it and when you really need sleep.

Jekyll and Hyde

Without enough sleep, many people can get irritable, cranky, impatient – their behavior changes. Be patient with each other. This is usually more of an issue during the first part of the race since most people have never been in a situation like this before. One of the most important things to remember is that it's a team effort and you are all working towards a common goal. This means sacrificing some of your own comfort and sleep for the good of the team and to help Racers reach their dreams.

Sleep Early

The beginning of the race is exciting, the adrenaline is flowing. Some Racers and Crew have trouble sleeping the first couple` days. Some Racers even ride 36 or more hours before stopping to sleep. For the front-runners this can be part of the strategy to get out front; for most it's simply because they can't sleep.

The early part of the race is one of the most important times to try to sleep and to establish a pattern. If you get behind on sleep early on, you will never catch up.

The Middle

By the middle of the race you are used to the pattern of the race and how things work. The Midwest has less scenery though some wonderful Time Stations. Your team can start to hum along. This is a good time to take advantage of the some of the monotony and get a little extra sleep. Once you hit the Mississippi River you are on the home stretch, even if the finish is several days away. You will start to get excited again and less sleep is again natural.

Safety

If you need to, stop and regroup. Let everyone get a sleep break. This is a much better strategy than risking an accident. Better to finish a few hours slower than DNF because of an accident.

Finally the most important thing to remember is Safety, Safety, Safety. Safety is paramount, don't take unnecessary risks.