

Tips for Women

Updated: March, 2008

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Thanks to Kerry White for providing this article. Kerry has finished RAAM twice on a team and unofficially finished solo in 2007. She is back racing in 2008 again on a 4-Person team.

Tips and Advice for the Women of RAAM

I would like to begin by thanking the RAAM Management for providing me with the opportunity to share my experiences and provide some key strategies that hopefully will help any solo and team women competing in RAAM reach the finish line with positive and life changing experiences.

In this piece I plan to elaborate on the top issues the rookie women of RAAM need to know and strategies to assist you in your quest.

First however I would like to ask you to answer a couple of questions for yourself. Answering these questions will assist you in developing strategies to suit your goals and taking the recommendations below in your stride to match them.

- Why are you doing RAAM? – There could be a million reasons but write down the top 3.
- What is your finishing goal in RAAM? Do you want to finish before the time cut-off? Do you want to break the women's solo record? Does your team want to break the women's team record? Or do you just want to finish?
- What do you fear the most about this race and how are you working on this fear? For me the greatest fear was to let down myself, my crew and all the people I knew that were cheering for me down, by not finishing. So many close friends and contacts I had made along the way to RAAM preparation had believed I could do it. Now I had to convince myself I could. Embrace your fears and turn them into positive motivation to help you face them head on and succeed in putting fear aside to finish the task you started.
- During your preparation there will be periods of doubt and fear of failure. What do you do to get through these tough times?

The top issues I plan to cover to assist you in your mission include:

- Picking the right crew for you and your goals.
- Doing the number crunching and know what you have to do to reach your finishing goal.
- Combating saddles sores and personal hygiene.
- Assist you in the realization of how to be the best person you can be while competing in RAAM and beyond.

Pick the right crew for you and your goals

Having completed 3 RAAM's, two on a Women's four-person team and one unofficially as a solo competitor, I have yet to find the words that best describe to a non-RAAM

competitor what this race does to you. I think however, you will find if you ask any RAAM competitor or crew member, they will tell you it is a life changing experience.

Your crew must be prepared to do whatever needs to be done. They will be as sleep deprived as you but still have to make decisions, eat, drive and sleep in order to keep you SAFE. Your crew must know how to be calm under pressure, make spontaneous decisions under extreme stress, and adapt to any adversity that you can think may come your way. Most importantly you have to charge the crew with helping you monitor time and make it to the cut-offs and finish line in the allotted time.

[Ed. We have other articles about choosing crew. Kerry is stressing how important it is to find a crew that fits you and your goals.]

Crunch the numbers

Do the number crunching and know what you have to do to reach your finishing goal. know exactly how much time you have between each cut-off checkpoint, how far you must ride per 24 hours and what average speed you must maintain to reach the cut-offs. Included in the number crunching you need to include your plan for ensuring you allocate enough sleep time to be safe...RAAM is the beginning of a different way of seeing life – not the time to sacrifice your life.

Saddle Sores and Personal Hygiene

Saddle Sores - if you have had them before I guarantee you will have them in RAAM. If you have not had the pleasure of saddle sores before now, be prepared as this could be the time.

During my 2007 RAAM crossing if there was one issue that could have caused me to stop racing it would have been my saddle sores. For the crew members that had the gruesome job of assisting me with trying to keep the pain and infection at bay - hamburger mince were the words used to describe it.

There are two primary types of saddle sores that I have experienced I am sure there are probably more but here are the top two causes

- Sores from constant abrasive movement between your seat, shorts and skin.
- Sores from ingrown hairs

I have heard of many remedies some which people guarantee work, and some which I think will assist in reducing discomfort but in the long run it is highly unlikely that you will finish RAAM with an unscathed rear end or crotch.

Here are some recommendations and strategies to test in training to see if they will work for you.

1. Shanna Armstrong swears by cornstarch. I did not try this but regret it now. This would be something you need to use right from day one, otherwise once the sores begin it will not mend them but can definitely help avoid the start of saddle sores.

2. If you suffer from sores from ingrown hairs electrolysis might be the answer. It is expensive and a 6-9 month process but will definitely prevent infections from occurring in the hair follicles under the skin as the hair is no longer there. I had some of this done prior to RAAM and it was an enormous help with ingrown hair problems, it did not however fix the issue of constant friction between skin, shorts and seat so I still had extremely bad abrasion sores.
3. Once the sores begin there are some things that will help reduce the friction and ease pain.
 - i. Bag balm (antiseptic and a great lubricant).
 - ii. Some say two layers of shorts (I have not tried this for fear of additional friction but it works for some).
 - iii. Lanacaine cream to dull the pain
 - iv. Antiseptic pain relief gel
 - v. Sticky second skin band-aids. These are incredible but also can cause excruciating pain when trying to remove them from sensitive spots. Additional moisture and sweat can also cause these patches to rub off quickly and require multiple reapplications daily.
 - vi. One of the RAAM racers from last year, from Europe was selling a saddle sore pad – Jim Rees used these and had good success so I would invest in purchasing some of these as a backup if problems begin.
 - vii. Multiple short changes each day and ensuring that your shorts are washed and bone dry (usually this can only be achieved by using a Laundromat dryer). Air drying usually will not achieve the desired result especially in the humid states east of Kansas as the Lycra material with all the creams and ointments you have been applying will never dry properly.

Personal Hygiene – number VII above is a critical element to ensuring you are avoiding any bacteria or infections from developing. Anti-bacterial mouthwash used 2++ times a day will be a huge asset to ensuring your mouth stays in good shape so your ability to refuel is not jeopardized.

The final element to avoid added stressors during your journey will be to ensure you do not have to experience that glorious time of the month while riding your bike across the country. There are some medications that you could get from your doctor well in advance to help avoid this from occurring at this critical time – however nothing ever works as planned so even if you think it will be okay it might not. The only guarantee will be if you ensure you have just completed your monthly cycle or you have a medication that allows you to skip your monthly visitation all together. Have a backup female assistant on your crew to help in case the plan does backfire.

Help you be the best person you can be while competing in RAAM and beyond...

My mantra or motto in life comes from my three incredible RAAM experiences - Honesty, Integrity and Respect. Each time I have competed in this race it is a reality check on my Honesty, Integrity and Respect and if I am truly living by my motto.

When there are moments of frustration, fear and doubt about yourself, your crew or any part of what is going on along the road, remember these words or your own words that define who you are and why you are doing RAAM. This will help you resume focus, treat people well and preserve the integrity of your team and crew.

Honesty – be honest with yourself about what you want from this race and what the realistic goal for finishing is. With this honesty to yourself you then owe it to your crew and loved ones to tell them your plan and prepare them for the honest truth on what to expect and what could happen during the race. You must prepare not only yourself, but also your entire crew, for the worst, and of course hope and strive for nothing but the best.

Integrity – maintain your integrity as this is reflected in everything you say and do on and off the bike. Your integrity includes a voraciousness to finish, with the ability to accept the truth if this is not your final outcome. No matter the outcome do not downplay your achievements. It is a feat in integrity to make it to the start line of this race.

Respect – there are times when you might need to ask yourself
Will I respect myself later with this decision I am making now?
Will I respect myself later when I remember how I am treating this crew member right now?

Those who give respect will receive it and much more. I cannot even express in words how thankful I am for all the wonderful people who have helped me achieve my goals in the past RAAM's I have competed in. The people that support and crew for you are incredible examples of self sacrifice and respect. I am thankful every day for these types of people as they are the ones that help ultra endurance athletes achieve their dreams.

Good Luck, Be Safe and Have Fun. If you have any further questions please feel free to email me at Kerry.white@hotmail.com.