

RAAM 2009 - Part Two Wyss vs. Robic.

Going Fishing.

By Perry Stone

The defining issue of the initial stages of RAAM isn't leaving the coastal climate and acclimating to the desert heat, it's all about how racers contend with Congress, Arizona and climbing away from there. It's a good idea to get to Congress early and begin your ascent in the morning before the 100+ degree temperatures attack.

With Congress' ghost town like appearance, a wall of mountains taunting them and the 346 miles behind haunting them, Congress, Arizona is a place where real doubt can rip through racers like a shark cutting through water. The constant migration towards the sun (at any time of the day) can become more than physical and mental, it can become emotional.

Solid riders can deal with this in no more than a prolonged instant, shrugging it off and staying focused at the task at hand. Others may fall into the trap, and it will separate them from the leaders in a dramatic and almost irreversible fashion.



In 2009, at Time Station (TS) 5 in Congress, Arizona, Jure Robic was almost in a class of his own. He rolled through with an average speed of 20.19 miles an hour. In fact, his pace would turn out to be faster than all of the teams racing except for the top 11. His closest competitor was countryman Marko Baloh who averaged 19.79 mph. Dani Wyss, came through almost 2 hours back averaging 18.23 mph.

RAAM 2009 was starting to look like just another day at the office for Robic. What was somewhat interesting though, was that he had company; trailing him by 22 and 24 minutes respectively were Baloh and rookie racer, Christoph Strasser. It was too early to tell, but the time gap between Robic and Wyss could have indicated the Wyss was sticking to his race plan and had slept the first night, while likewise Robic was sticking to his and had not.

These were tough miles, RAAM makes you pay a price every inch of the way.

We drove back and forth watching the top riders. Robic built his lead over the second place rider, who was now Christoph Strasser. At TS 6 his lead was 25 minutes, at TS 8 it was 35 minutes and at TS 10, 634 miles into the race at Kayenta, AZ, Robic had built a lead of 1 hour and 11 minutes. Yet his average speed had dropped to 18.65 mph. Wyss, who was 1

hour and 35 minutes back, was averaging 17.8 mph. losing less than a half a mile an hour off his day one pace. If Robic had not slept yet, was his strategy already costing him?

In Mexican Hat, Utah, Robic takes what appears to be his first sleep and while he does Dani Wyss passes him checking in at the TS there 11 minutes ahead. Tack on the 15 minute penalty Robic already has and Wyss is leading by 26 minutes. Robic is now averaging 17.77 mph, (almost a mile an hour slower than his day two pace) but soon Wyss will sleep for a second time.



There is a difference between Robic and Wyss visible to our media crew; Wyss appears to be relaxed and enjoying himself, while Robic seems either strained or completely focused. Knowing Robic all these years, I naturally presumed the latter, but what I really wanted to know was will he be able to re-establish and grind out his lead. A master tactician, Robic understands that RAAM is a race of inches and minutes and like a giant marlin hooked on a line, every time there is slack, he puts distance between himself and his pursuers.

On paper, and out on the course, it appears as if Robic is in control, but leading is not always what it is cracked up to be. Who will weaken first, the fisherman or the fish?