

RAAM 2013 – Race Summary – Part 1 (The Solo Race)

The Solo Race

This year saw the return of four RAAM winners, including 6-time RAAM Champion Seana Hogan. But the 2013 Solo Race will be remembered as the year Christoph Strasser (Austria) demolished two long-standing RAAM records - Pete Penseyres' 1986 average speed record (15.4 mph) and Rob Kish's 1992 crossing time (8d:3h:11m). With three prior RAAM winners in the men's solo field – Dani Wyss (2006 and 2009), Reto Schoch (2012) and Strasser (2011) – everyone expected a close race. Everyone expected them to push each other to their limits. There was even talk of breaking the 8-day barrier. The young Austrian delivered. But, something more profound was taking place - RAAM was entering a new era.

Solo RAAM Champions - History

In the Race's 32-year history there have been 17 men's Solo Champions and 10 of these have multiple wins. Jure Robic (Slovenia) tops the list with 5 (2004, 2005, 2007, 2008 and 2010), followed by two riders with 3 each - Wolfgang Fasching (Austria) (1997, 2000 and 2002) and Rob Kish (USA) (1992, 1994 and 1995). Seven other riders have 2 each – Lon Haldeman (USA) (1982 and 1983), Pete Penseyres (USA) (1984 and 1986), Bob Fourney (USA) (1990 and 1991), Gerry Tatrai (Australia) (1993 and 1998), Danny Chew (USA) (1996 and 1999), Dani Wyss (Switzerland) (2011 and 2009) and Christoph Strasser (Austria) (2011 and 2013).

There have been 17 women's Solo Champions as well, although the history is a bit more colorful. Nine years saw no female solo finisher (1982, 1983, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2007 and 2008). Only 3 racers have multiple wins. Seana Hogan (USA) – the winningest solo RAAM racer ever – heads the list with 6 (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997 and 1998). Two riders have 2 wins each: Susan Notorangelo (USA) (1985 and 1989) and Cassie Lowe (Australia) (2000 and 2001). In 1984, two racers tied for first – Pat Hines (USA) and Shelby Hayden-Clifton (USA). Two racers on recumbents finished first: Barbara Buatois (France) (2010) and Maria Parker (USA) (2013). Those were the only years where the fastest racers – male or female – were not on standard bikes. The top female finishers on conventional bikes those years were Sabrina Bianchi (Italy) (2010) and Cassie Schumacher (USA) (2013).

The 2013 Solo Race

RAAM invariably presents unique challenges. Weather is always a factor and this year was no exception. Temperatures in the Desert Southwest were in the 110-120 F range in the weeks leading up to the Race. Many of the top racers were there at the time – training, preparing for the heat. Fortunately, the temperatures dropped into the 105-115 F range by race time. In some cases heat took its toll. But, all-in-all, the weather conditions were ideal for racing.

With extreme heat and drought, the Western US has been a tinderbox. Fires are currently burning with little or no control along the RAAM route – near South Fork, Colorado and Yarnell, Arizona. Fortunately,

all racers made it through those areas without incident. The Colorado fires were caused by lightning and are burning in the area between Wolf Creek Pass and TS 17 – South Fork. The fires had just started as racers were passing through the area. We were monitoring the situation closely. Some racers experienced smoky air. Shortly after the racers passed through the area, US 160 was closed. The Yarnell fire is burning west of SH 89 between the top of Yarnell Grade and the town of Yarnell, between TS 6 – Congress and TS 7 – Prescott. 19 firefighters – a hotshot crew from Prescott – lost their lives when high winds suddenly changed directions. Our thoughts and prayers go out to those firefighters and their families. Fortunately, all of our racers had gone through the area before the fire started.

There was flooding along the Mississippi River. Racers had to be re-routed around TS 35 – West Alton. The re-route required a short shuttle. Times and distances were adjusted to eliminate the effect of the shuttle.

Christoph Strasser (Austria) was the fastest Solo Male racer, covering the 2,962.4-mile course in 7d:22h:11m (average 15.58 mph) and Maria Parker (USA), riding a recumbent, was the fastest female racer covering the distance in 11d:20h:54m (average 10.4 mph).

Strasser was driven to avenge last year's loss to Reto Schoch (Switzerland). After winning in 2011, Strasser was expected to win in 2012, but the diminutive, ever smiling rookie from Switzerland shocked the young Austrian. Also, two-time winner Dani Wyss (Switzerland) figured in the mix. The only year Strasser raced against Wyss – 2009 – Strasser dropped out of the race. Moreover, Wyss beat the winningest solo male racer, Jure Robic (Slovenia) twice – in 2006 when Robic was forced out with pneumonia and 2009 when Robic withdrew for personal reasons. After winning in 2009, Wyss suffered a serious accident which sidelined him for a season. His comeback plan included the Race Across the West in 2011, where he finished first, breaking the course record by 12 hours. His plan to return to RAAM in 2012 was derailed by another accident. He decided to race RAW again in 2012, bettering his prior record by 2 hours.

Strasser knew he had to put time on the two Swiss racers, Schoch and Wyss, both strong climbers, before the Appalachians. Schoch and Wyss posted the fastest times to TS 1 - Lake Henshaw. Strasser and Marko Baloh (Slovenia) posted the fastest times to TS 2 – Brawley. By TS 3 – Blythe, Strasser was in first place and never looked back. Strasser stuck to his race plan and the result speaks for itself.

Wyss finished 2nd and Schoch 3rd. Mark Pattinson (UK) rode another solid race, moving steadily through the field to finish 4th. World 24-hour record holder Marko Baloh (Slovenia) finished 5th. Austria put 4 racers in the top 10 – Strasser (1), David Misch (6), Eduard Fuchs (8), Gerald Bauer (9) and Franz Preihs (10).

Jason “The Hammer” Lane (Canada) was last year's tough guy. After getting run over by a car, he went to the hospital, was checked out and released, got back on his bike and moved up through the field to finish 8th among solo men (9th overall) with an average speed of 11.47 mph. This year The Hammer finished 7th with an average speed of 12.9 mph.

Veterans like Henning Larsen (Denmark), Peter Oyler (Canada), Mike Wilson (USA), Chris Hopkinson (UK), Valerio Zamboni (Monaco) and Gerhard Gulewicz (Austria) mixed it up with rookies like Jan Larsen (Denmark), Chris Ragsdale (USA), Meurig James (UK) and Stuart Edwards (UK).

The rookies did well – there were 3 in the top ten – Misch (6), Fuchs (8) and Bauer (9). The young guns figured prominently - Misch (27) finished 6th, Jan Larsen (Denmark) (28) finished 13th, Strasser (31) finished 1st, Lane (32) finished 7th, Bauer (32) finished 9th, Chris Ragsdale (35) finished 14th (15th overall). The future looks bright.

In the female solo field all eyes were upon 6-time RAAM winner Seana Hogan. Hogan started out strong and led the field through TS 28 – Eldorado, where she dropped out citing respiratory problems. Maria Parker was in 4th place when her follow vehicle was hit by a texting driver outside TS 10 – Tuba City. The vehicle and her backup bikes were totaled. Parker was not involved in the accident, but several crew members, including her son, sustained injuries. She went to the hospital with the injured crew members while others replaced the vehicle and bikes. After nearly 24 hours off the bike, she returned to the race and slowly moved back up through the field.

Parker was the top female finisher at 11d:20h:54m (average speed 10.4 mph). After posting a DNF in 2012, Cassie Schumacher (USA) finished 2nd in 12d:18h:57m (average speed 9.65 mph).

Solo Division Winners

Franz Wintersberger (Austria) won the 50-59 age group by finishing in 10d:22h:37m (average speed 11.28 mph). Mario Fraternali (Italy) won the 60-69 age group by finishing in 12d:2h (average speed 10.22 mph).

The Solo Male 60+ “finisher club” continues to grow. This year there were two more Solo Male 60+ finishers – Mario Fraternali and Patrick Seely (USA). The “club” now has nine members.

At some point in the not-too-distant future there will be a 70+ solo finisher.

More About Solo RAAM

The average solo finish rate over the 32-year history of the Race is 60.92%. This year was above average with 64.10% of the solo field finishing.

RAAM continues to expand its reputation as a global event. This year, of the 39 Solo participants, 11 (28%) were from the USA, while 28 (72%) came from outside the USA. This year 13 countries were represented in the Solo race field – Austria (7), Canada (3), Colombia (1), Denmark (3), Germany (2), Italy (2), Korea (1), New Zealand (1), Russia (1), Slovenia (1), Switzerland (2), UK (4) and USA (11).

There are many trans-national competitors, for instance, Mark Pattinson is from the UK but lives in the USA, Scott Ragsdale is from the USA but lives in Dubai, Jose Bermudez is from Columbia but lives in the USA and Valerio Zamboni is from Italy but lives in Monaco. Racers may choose to race based on where they were born or where they live – their choice. RAAM is truly a global event.

RAAM always has interesting moments, like Eduard Fuchs (Austria) racing down to the wire and edging out fellow countryman, Gerald Bauer, in one of the closest finishes in RAAM history with less than one minute separating the two racers after 3,000 miles. But, Bauer may have netted the bigger prize by proposing to his girlfriend, Tina, on stage at the finish line. She said, yes, even after crewing for him!

Not to be outdone, Chris Hopkinson (UK), shed his helmet, showing off his red Mohawk, and getting down on one knee under the finish truss to propose to his girlfriend, Jenny. She, too, said yes, again after crewing for him! Crewing is a difficult, stressful job. If they can survive RAAM together, daily life ought to be a breeze. Congratulations - we wish you all the best!

The fields are becoming faster and increasingly competitive. Four of the five fastest average speeds have been posted in the last five years by three separate riders - Strasser (15.58 mph in 2013 and 14.94 mph in 2012), Wyss (15.24 mph in 2009), Schoch (15.08 mph in 2012). Also, it should be noted that 5-time RAAM Champion, Jure Robic (Slovenia), was averaging 15.24 mph through TS 51 - Mt. Airy when he dropped out of the Race in 2009. Following are the 10 fastest solo average speeds:

1.	Christoph Strasser	Austria	2013	15.58 mph
2.	Pete Penseyres	USA	1986	15.4 mph
3.	Dani Wyss	Switzerland	2009	15.24 mph
4.	Reto Schoch	Switzerland	2012	15.08 mph
5.	Christoph Strasser	Austria	2012	14.94 mph
6.	Christoph Strasser	Austria	2011	14.94 mph
7.	Rob Kish	USA	1992	14.91 mph
8.	Bob Fourney	USA	1992	14.85 mph
9.	Danny Chew	USA	1999	14.72 mph
10.	Wolfgang Fasching	Austria	2000	14.7 mph

In last year's report, we said, "It's becoming increasingly clear Pete Penseyres' 1986 speed record will be broken – it's only a matter of time." Well, it happened. In that same report we also said, "We're now hearing serious discussion about breaking the 8-day barrier." Again, that happened.

We were witness to one of the greatest moments in the history of endurance bicycle racing. Announcer George Thomas and RAAM President/CEO Fred Boethling – both RAAM veterans - were on stage with Christoph Strasser after finishing his record breaking ride. Pete Penseyres called Boethling on his cell phone and asked to speak to the humble young Austrian. Boethling put his cell phone on speaker and Thomas held the microphone close so the crowd could hear when Penseyres told Strasser, "Congratulations, you broke my record, and you did it on a much tougher course." Penseyres recognized the significance of what was happening. His words were those of a true RAAM Champion. The torch was passed. RAAM was entering a new era.

Congratulations to all of the 2013 Solo RAAM finishers and to each and every racer with the courage and self-confidence to start.