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Race Format, Rules, and Records

The Race Across America (RAAM) is the toughest endurance event in the world.

The Format

RAAM is **not** a stage race; it is a non-stop, continuous race in which cyclists ride as fast as they can from start to finish. Perhaps the most unique, and exciting part of RAAM is that the non-stop format, dictates that the racers are on the road throughout the nighttime hours. Racers may stop to eat, sleep, and change clothes when and where it makes sense in their race. However, the clock and, likely, the competition, continue to move forward. Support crew preparedness, and racer(s) sleep management, are two of the most critical elements to overcome in order to finish the race successfully.

All Racers, both Solo, and Relay Teams are required to check in at 54 Time Stations set up along the route. These Time Stations are spaced approximately 50 miles apart, and many are situated in locations that offer necessary services to the racers and their crews. Approximately 25 of these Time Stations are staffed by local volunteers that serve as liaisons between the race and the local community.

The Racers check in at each Time Station by calling RAAM Headquarters. This call must be made within several minutes of the racer's presence at the Time Station, else the racer will be penalized. Maintaining contact with RAAM Headquarters ensures the integrity of the competition, and ensures the safety and wherabouts of all competitors. The progress of the racers will be noted in real-time from the "Race Coverage" menu bar on the website.

For the list of Time Stations and maps, as well as estimated arrival times in your area, go to the "Route" tab on the website.

The Three Different Races

The Race Across America runs three events concurrently. The growing interest in ultra endurance cycling has provided an opportunity to expand from the marquee, 3,000 mile race, into two shorter races, which are more accessible for a wider audience.

1) Race Across America

The marquee event, in its 27th year, is the Race Across America - a transcontinental bicycle race starting on the west coast and finishing on the east coast. The race covers 3000 miles across the Rockies, the heartland of America, and finally the Appalachians. It continues to stand alone as the toughest endurance event in the world, and a tribute to human endurance.

2) Race Across the West

The Race Across the West is the latest addition to the roster of RAAM events. It runs concurrently with the Race Across America and covers the first 1000 miles of the RAAM course finishing in Taos, NM. This is a real chance for competitors to test themselves on the RAAM course against the RAAM racers. The 1000 mile distance makes this a truly unique event in the world, and accessible to those racers with limited time or resources to commit to the full RAAM. Many racers will use this race to gauge their readiness for a full RAAM in upcoming years.

3) 24 Hour Challenge

The 24 Hour Challenge is a team oriented event that also runs concurrently with the Race Across America. It covers the first 500 miles of the RAAM course finish in Flagstaff, AZ. This is a great event to form a team, and experience what RAAM is really about. This event has been popular among corporate teams looking for an extreme, yet healthy, team-building exercise.

The Rules

RAAM is unlike a stage race because it is, in essence, a time trial. Therefore, RAAM racers are prohibited from “drafting” any of their competitors, and are not allowed to ride in the proximity of local cyclists that may want to accompany them.

Above all, RAAM places the highest priority on safety. Obviously, the rules ensure the integrity of the competition among athletes, but, the rules unique to RAAM revolve around the safety of our racers and crews. Each racing entity must pass a stringent pre-race inspection of bicycles, vehicles, communications equipment, and support personnel documentation.

All bicycles must have reflective material in no less than 16 spaces on each bike for nighttime riding. Additionally, headlamps and taillights are required. And, the most critical rule for nighttime racing is that no racer may advance on the road at night, unless they are directly followed and protected by an approved support vehicle. So, if the support vehicle needs to stop for gasoline, the racer must stop too. No exceptions!

Each racing entity usually has at least 3 support vehicles. All the vehicles must have appropriate RAAM identification signage, and pass inspections. The direct support vehicles, usually minivans, that follow racers, must have additional safety features like flags, strobe lights visible to the rear, and emergency flashers while following a racer.

RAAM has approximately 30 Race Officials that follow the race across the country. They ensure the integrity of the competition, but also ensure that our racing entities are integrated into the open, public roads across the country. RAAM Officials maintain contact with RAAM Headquarters and have the power to penalize, or disqualify racers that compromise our high standards of safety and integrity.

The full set of rules are available on the “Resources” section of the website under “Gear.”

The Records

Each year, a number of solo riders and teams set **incredible speed records** for their category (based on number of teammates, sex and age range). In general, the first place solo rider will cross the finish line in eight to nine days, with an overall average speed of 11-12 mph. Four- or eight-person teams will normally finish in five to eight days, and two-person teams in seven to 10 days.

The RAAM course has changed from year to year, using different starting or finishing locations and routes. But, the total mileage always remains approximately 3,000 miles. Therefore, the average speed records are the benchmarks that many RAAM historians use to compare efforts from year to year.

The most revered record in RAAM history is Pete Penseyres’ 1986 solo 3,107 mile crossing at an average speed of 15.40 mph. To put this in perspective, in the 21 years since 1986, no other racer has even broken the 15.0 mph threshold, even on courses that have been 150 miles shorter. Penseyres set this record at age 43, and you’ll note that his name appears on several other records in the ensuing years. Most notably, you’ll find Penseyres, now age 65, on the starting line of RAAM 2008, as a member of the North Coast 8-person Relay Team.

For a full list of RAAM records, go to the “Awards” section of the website.