

## **CHRIS RAGSDALE: New US hope?**

**By Vic Armijo**



It's ironic that the **Race Across America** has long been dominated by European riders. The last top finish by an American born rider was David Haase's 3<sup>rd</sup> place in 2008, and the last US winner was Alan Larson way back in 2003. But while Seattle's Chris Ragsdale will come to RAAM 2013 as a rookie, none other than 2011 winner Christoph Strasser points to Ragsdale as a rider capable of mounting a challenge, and fellow American rider Mike Wilson called Ragsdale, "the real deal," saying, "Of any American in the race this year, Chris is probably the fastest."

How does 35 year old Ragsdale feel about these assessments? "I have a lot of confidence that if I can go into this in the best shape of my life that I can hang with the best," he said, "I want to aim for at least top American. But I also know the history of RAAM and know statistically that my odds aren't that great as a rookie!"

Rookie or not Ragsdale has amassed impressive results over the past 8 years in the highly competitive US Ultra Cycling scene, including five wins in the US National 24 hour Challenge, and a win in Furnace Creek 508, "And that was that horrible horrible year with 50 mph headwinds in Death Valley," he said, "Just brutal!"

Not bad for a guy who as he describes "...got into this stuff on a whim. After 9-11 I felt that I didn't want life to pass me by. I had a friend who'd gone coast to coast, so I felt 'I've got to get on this—I've got to start living life. I didn't know anything at all about biking and did a self-supported coast to coast tour as my intro on what was basically a mountain bike with front suspension and I was carrying just 80 pounds worth of stuff, it

was just crazy. Some of my longer days were 100 miles and I remembered feeling like that was massive miles back then—hilarious!” Even more amusing was his idea that this trip had readied him to take on RAAM, “I had just gotten back from that trip and I looked in Competitor Magazine and saw RAAM listed in their calendar, and I got it into my head ‘Yeah! I should do that!’ Meanwhile not having a clue that I wasn’t qualified, I had no idea what it was all about. It was like this week in early June in 2002 where I was trying to pull off racing in RAAM and I had never even ridden a road bike. The most I’d ever done was a hundred miles pulling a big trailer. But I thought I was going to do RAAM! It came down to logistics; I couldn’t get anybody to crew for me. I thought ‘I’ll need two or three buddies and a van.’ I quickly just forgot about it.”

But in just 2 years Ragsdale went from being clueless to posting a respectable finish in the Seattle to Portland, double century. “And then I read about Furnace Creek 508 and right away felt ‘I gotta do that!’” He called the organizer about entering, “He told me ‘Maybe you should go ride with the randonneurs for a year and then think about doing the 508.’ Because again I had no clue. That ended up being a great piece of advice.”

Before he could ready himself for his first 508 he was hit by a car. “It was the summer of 2004,” he explained, “I broke six vertebrae in my neck, had bad thrombosis in both legs, there was a big divot out of my arm that required months of treatment. So I got a Spin bike and watched the Tour de France in my neck halo.” A year later he finally entered his first 508, “That was my first race of any kind,” he recalled, “But I ended up doing well. It was a really tough year and I ended up ninth in about 31 hours. And it’s just continued to evolve. I went to National 24 Hour and won that my first year—I ended up winning that five years straight. I was the first person to ever break 500 miles, which was pretty cool. And winning Furnace Creek became an obsession for me, my fifth time I finally won it in 2009.”

That steady progression now has him ready to take on the pinnacle of Ultra Cycling; RAAM. “I want to be competitive,” he related, “But I know that some of these guys are able to train full time, while I’m a husband and I’ve got two little guys, 5 and half and two and a half and I have a full time job as production manager at a printing and marketing company. I’m doing 50 hours a week at work and I spend at least three or four nights a week with my boys.” But his real life commitments haven’t hurt his results so far, “I’ve gotten to go against some fast guys,” he said, “I’m not intimidated by those guys. I’ve gone against (Marko) Baloh at the Texas Hill Country. I led for lot of that and later in the race he closed it down and I ended up losing by about twenty minutes. But I wasn’t in top form for that race.”



### **AN AMERICAN IN PARIS**

**In 2008 Ragsdale took 5<sup>th</sup> at Paris Brest Paris with a time of 44 hours and 36 minutes.**

To help him reach that top form with his limited training time he works with Dr. Cooper at Seattle Performance Medicine. “She does a crazy amount of testing on me,” he said, “Peak wattage and all kinds of stuff, a lot of blood work. I’ve just got to look at what I’m doing and ask myself if it’s going have me going into this in the best shape I’ve ever been. And I feel that it is.” It’s been a long road to RAAM, “I don’t have a lot of financial means,” he added, “So I feel like I might only get to do this once or twice and I didn’t want to jump the gun. It feels right now. I have quite a bit of experience and I feel like I’m capable of reaching my peak physically.”

Chris Ragsdale has done his work; he has the physical capabilities and desire to make his mark on RAAM 2013. Just how high of a mark? We’ll all know that some time around June 19 or 20, won’t we?



**TOOL OF THE TRADE**  
**Ragsdale aboard his new Volagi. “Volagai is really excited about my being on their bikes this year.”**