



The Fabulous Fourth, two riders, first time.

July 4, 2005

Tryon, NC



I've wanted to try the annual Fabulous Fourth ride in Tryon, NC for at least the last three years, but there's always been some conflict. This year we finally made it happen.

My intrepid stoker, Anna, hasn't been quite so convinced, but as usual, she was game. Total climbing on this metric century route is 5900 ft., or about 1800 meters. That's the same as either of the two big Alpine climbs on the Tour de France's 10th day. Good thing I didn't figure that out until after the ride, or I'd have been riding it on my single!

It takes us a couple hours to get to Tryon. With an 8 AM start time and not having pre-registered, we preferred to get there the night before and so we stayed in Tryon's Day's Inn. A number of other cyclists stayed Sunday night at the Day's Inn, too. (There are a number of very nice B&Bs in the area, but we figured we'd miss the breakfast.) About 3 or 4 AM, we heard a

real downpour. I hoped it would rain itself out soon.

Monday morning dawned very overcast and very humid. We figured we'd get rained on sooner or later, but headed out anyway. The registration lines were long and the start was delayed 15 minutes, but we finally took off with over 500 other riders and at least four other tandems, only one of which we actually saw on the ride. As usual we stayed behind the pack. Unusually, we were soon glad to be there.

Within the first 3 miles, we traversed a narrow, curvy road with several spots where the night's downpour had washed sand and gravel across the road. I can't imagine how the hard-charging pelotons ahead of us managed to get through without incident. We were glad to be on our own near the rear!

The next 20 miles or so were through very pretty rolling horse country. Lots of beautiful (but not showy) large country homes with lovely pastures, barns, and plenty of horses. We then went all the way around Lake Lanier, a small hydro lake lined with lots of summer homes. Again, tight curves, limited sight lines, and sand and gravel washes. And again, we were glad not to be in the middle of a fast-moving pack.

Near the end of the circuit around the lake, one of the turn arrows appeared exactly in front of a hard right turn up a steeply sloping lane. The cue sheet said something about a "cut through" somewhere in this area, so I turned – right up someone's driveway. Worse yet, the driveway was treated with very smooth asphalt sealant that was still quite wet. We lost all traction and got out of our clipless pedals barely in time to avoid a spill.

A few more miles of rolling countryside with a "grunt hill" or two got us ready for the sustained climb: up the Greenville municipal watershed. It's steady and not too steep, but it comes after you've already done plenty of climbing through the rollers. We were tired, but we kept at it, distracting ourselves

occasionally with the beautiful banks of rhododendron brightening the understory of the lovely, dark watershed forest.

As we passed the last water stop on the outskirts of Saluda, we thought, "If there's much more climbing, we aren't going to make it." Luckily, there wasn't – it was a pretty flat run from there into Saluda's small, attractive downtown.

After a couple more small hills, the long downhill starts. There are least 3-4 miles of curvy, fairly steep downhill where it's pretty easy to stay ahead of the cars behind you. This stretch requires careful attention from the captain because of lots of uneven, patched pavement. We heard from others it can be a real thrill if you're in a fast pack. We weren't, but enjoyed a descent that was plenty fast for us, appreciating our drag brake all the way down.

Finally, the slope moderates and the road straightens. The cars can pass, the riders can relax, and the last 2-3 miles back to Tryon are a fine cool-down. We got back when the course timer read 5:30; not the last bike, but not far from it.



Historic Saluda

The dream of apple pie-style "small town America" is alive and thriving in Saluda, N.C., a historic Victorian summer retreat perched at the edge of Polk County in the Blue Ridge Mountains. At the turn of the century, Saluda, with its charming Victorian summer homes and inns, was a bustling mountain summer resort served by the 'Carolina Special' passenger steam engine train which brought visitors escaping low country heat. Today, the town proudly retains a Main Street Historic District listed on the National Register of Historic Places lined with wonderful old brick buildings.

Along Saluda's green-fringed streets, folks still greet one another by name, children chase fireflies on summer evenings, and front porches are graced by porch swings and rocking chairs; visitors discover the wonder of "Saluda time" where time goes a little slower... and a little sweeter!

Railroad With A Past...

Come on out, rest on a street bench and watch the famous Saluda railroad track built in 1878, home of the Saluda Grade, the steepest standard-gauge railroad grade in the U.S. Frequent trains moan, their brakes hissing and groaning when they prepare to head down the mountain. Use your imagination: if you listen quietly, you can almost hear a steam engine train crying its high mournful whistle up that track, the black smoke belching from the coal boiler as the iron horse charges into town!

Friendly Historic Main Street...

During your visit, amble into Ward's Grill on Main Street, Saluda... this high-ceiling grill harks back to the 40's look, with pictures of townsfolk gracing the mint green walls. Your cup will be filled with steaming coffee by friendly women- who don't mind if you just happen to act like a "local" and refill your own cup! Wander over later to visit the adjoining narrow-aisled grocery/hardware store side of this historic building; the scents take you back in time to days when Model T's and rumble seats were common and roads were still dirt. Admire the old-timey M.A. Pace general store close by; there are items from overalls to mothball-scented boxes yellowed with time that *might* just hold a treasure! Town shops include art/craft galleries, a juice/coffee shop, garden shops, unique gift shops...you can have a therapeutic massage, find herbal treatments, buy rare plants, take a creative class, and much more! Past the bridge overpass where you can watch trains, try award-winning barbecue, nearby is a Christmas shop offering collectible ornaments plus home furnishings. (Reprinted from: <http://www.saluda.com/welcome.html>)

Although it's probably the 2nd hardest day of tandeming we've ever done, we enjoyed the ride. The scenery was pleasant, the organization flawless, and despite the threatening morning, it never rained seriously. The sag support, coordinated by the local ham radio club, was excellent, and the water stops were frequent and well-stocked. The pavement markings (except maybe the one by that driveway) were ample and clear. No door prizes and no included lunch, but all the basics were flawlessly covered.

If you're not in the hard-charging set, this ride can be a real challenge and an incentive for some good training. We felt we were pretty well-conditioned, but we mounted our touring chain rings anyway, giving us a 19 gear-inch granny. We might not have finished without it!

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