

Blast from the past - My first Mt. Seymour Hill Climb Race in 2006

Mount Seymour - July 29, 2006

The race day analysis:

My team mate Joel and I met at the store @ 7:30 am. The ride is approx 1 hour to the base of Mt Seymour and the Cat5 start was 9:30 so we had lots of time. We decided to shorten our mileage by about 10 km by taking the Seabus. A good idea until we got there to find that we missed it by 30 seconds ☹ and the next one was 30 minutes later so we continued on the bike to the race.

Easy spin there with no big efforts just to keep the legs in check. We arrived at 8:40 and registered which took about 5 minutes. Then we decided to use the ever popular controlled substance of caffeine to start us up. Starbucks was the vendor of choice and after a good 10 minute stretch and a latte we were ready to face the day.

It was almost surreal. There were a lot of riders in the area and a bunch of them were there with team vehicles, some were on trainers and rollers warming up. We decided to warm up the old fashioned way with a spin around the block then off to the start line.

There were about 10-15 guys in the Cat5 group. The Cat4 group was collecting as well because they start 5 minutes after Cat5 and then the Masters group starts 10 minutes after them. This is the moment where we all started to look around at each other and try to come up with a reason why this was a good idea. Too late now, turning around means a documented DNF so pride takes over from this point onwards.

Temperature was 14C at the bottom and overcast. Temp at the top was 12C and apparently the cloudline was at 800m (peak is 960m or so) so the last part of the ride could be low visibility. We start with a vocal countdown. 1 minute to go...getting a little nervous...5..4..3..2..1 and we are off.

The field stuck together at the start. There was one guy dressed in a loose cotton t-shirt with mountain bike shorts on who seemed a bit out of place. Pretty much everybody made a visual note at the start line figuring that he must be coming out for the first time and doesn't have any road gear. This thought was about to become ironic.

The group begins to splinter at 2 kilometres. The first 2 km are steep so it is a relentless and unforgiving start to a long painful ride. Off the front is our casually dressed friend with Joel about 10 seconds behind him. We all looked at each other and the comment from most people was "is this guy serious?".

Joel and I both came here with basic goals. Personal best time, have fun and just finish. Joel was riding well and his goal to try to average 16 km/h was within reach judging by his form. My goals were simple. Don't be last...try to beat 56 minutes. I was on form to do that despite feeling sick. My sinuses were a mess so it was pretty much mouth only breathing at this point.

I did a quick check back @ 3 km and saw a couple of guys behind me. Keep pedalling...they can pace but they probably can't catch me now. 4 km mark is coming up and so was one of the Masi/Adobe team riders. I knew one thing that I didn't want to do was pass. Passing is a big responsibility. It means earning that place by staying in front. No point in passing if you are going to blow up and

drop back. This is a race against time for me, not against anyone else. I had no choice at this point. I was just pacing and I slowly overtook him. It was secretly enjoyable to know that I had dropped a rider, but I knew that he was now my target because it was a long way to go.

I kept looking for the 5 km marker. I was feeling alright and just spinning my way up. Never looked back...the race is in front of me...not behind me. Then my next happy moment hit. I saw the marker coming up...6 km. What? I missed the 5 km marker so I was already at the half way point! Feeling good, but also reminding myself that halfway doesn't mean done...and a lot can happen to the body in 30 minutes. I was at 27 minutes at the halfway point so I was pacing to hit my 56 minute best time. Keep pedalling...look forward...you've done this before.

Then the Cat4 group came up on my left. A fierce group of 5 guys who were bent on breaking 40 minutes. Strangely enough I didn't lose my edge when they passed. In my mind they were in a different race. I was just thinking about my Masi/Adobe friend who was somewhere behind me.

At 8 km there is a 160 degree turn in the first major switchback. The road levels a bit so it feels great. You are 3/4 of the way there and now you get to look over the field without looking back. I round the corner spinning well over 110 cadence and kick up the gears. I see Masi/Adobe about 10 seconds behind me and a couple of other guys behind him. So far so good.

Kilometre 10...2 km to go and I am feeling good so I get up out of the saddle to push. Just testing the legs and I quickly realize that this is now a survival game...not a race. I have no extra to push so I drop back and just keep my rhythm in the saddle. Over my shoulder I catch a glimpse of that telltale Adobe logo. He's back. Out of the saddle he is pushing to overtake. We both look at each other and simultaneously say "good ride...almost there". Inside ourselves we are somehow having a race with each other but a friendly one which makes it alright.

I stay fast on the pedals and I see him drop back in the saddle but he loses ground when he transitions. He's at his limit. So I take the opportunity. It almost seems unfair, but then again, he was about to do the same to me. I hop out of the saddle, kick up a gear and ride steady for about 200 meters. I head into the next switchback and as I round the corner I lookdown and realize I have about 30 seconds on him. Time to level off and bring this race home.

The last 1.5 km was a weird feeling. I was nervous because I knew that I was not going to gain any more, but I had to ensure that I could finish and stay in my time. I was tracking to hit 55 minutes. The finishing straight is ahead. My glasses fog up completely in about 5 seconds because of the clouds. I strip them off and put them up on my helmet so I can see. It is about 400 metres to the finish. A Cat4 rider is on my shoulder and he edges past me. I decide to ride hard and finish big. I jump out of the saddle and stay about 2 metres off his wheel to the finish.

My glasses drop off my helmet to the ground. I flinch, but decide to deal with that later. Time to take care of this finish line first. Joel cheers me through as do a bunch of other riders. I don't know my time but I know I did what I came here to do. I pushed so hard at the end that I had to cool down for a bit just to be able to talk.

Everyone up here has that look on their faces. They can't believe what they just did. It is like a car crash almost. The idea that you can survive something and then look back only minutes after and not even fully realize what just happened. I check the board and only see Joel's time at 44:20. Awesome! He is a humble guy and fails to tell me that he also took 2nd in the division. Ironically behind Mr Cotton Shirt. Goes to show you that the clothes don't make the man.

We stay at the top for about 15-20 minutes and it is a sea of congratulations for everybody from

everybody. This isn't Everest...but today...for a lot of us...it was close enough. The descent is welcome but chilly. Windy, 12C and moist air at 60 km/h are not fun. This seems like the longest descent I have ever taken on this mountain. It doesn't help that my nose is running full out now and I am coughing up a storm. All done for the day.

Final time 54:08.9



The road to the top