

Rider's Narrative

Summary

My ride was marred by a spectacular crash near the finish. I managed to complete the attempt, but I estimate that I lost about 15 minutes in the last couple of miles. My driver didn't show up, so (per WUCA rules) I received time and distance penalties. Mine was the first attempt in my categories, so despite the crash and penalties, I established new records: 100km (3:43:44.16), 100mi (6:13:24.86), and 6hrs (96.637 miles).

Details

Records attempted: 100km, 100mi, 6hrs, 75-79, solo standard.

Rider: Tom Hoopengardner, 76

2022-09-25, start at 6:33am.

The start-finish is at the Church Creek, Maryland, Park 'n Ride (photo).

The skies were fair, temperature in the low sixties rising to the mid-seventies as the ride progressed, with very little wind at the start increasing to 10 mph later in the morning.



The ride

I pushed off at the Church Creek Park 'n Ride in the dark at 6:33 am on September 25, 2022. Pictured, from left to right: "TJ" Cohen-White (WUCA-certified official), the follow car, and (reclining) my Lightspeed Vortex. I was hoping to complete four 25.4 mile laps in not much over 6 hours. Yes, I realize that speed demons like Larry Oslund and Jonas Bohr are pedaling 100 miles in less than 4 hours, but hey, they weren't born in 1945.



The first two 25.4 mile laps were uneventful and easy. I made two comfort stops. The wind picked up during the third lap, and the long first leg into the headwind seemed endless. I started feeling the effort, and I started to worry about cramps. For electrolytes and salts, I was drinking Gatorade Endurance; for calories, Ensure (350

calories / 12 oz bottle); and for pure hydration, plain water. I made a third comfort stop, which reassured me that I was drinking enough.

I kept on truckin' and my times for each of the first three laps were about the same: 1:29, 1:32 and 1:31, 4:32 total. I felt like I was only 2 minutes behind my goal of 6 hours for 101.6 miles.

I faced an even stiffer breeze on the fourth and last lap. A flock of buzzards started circling overhead, and cemeteries next to little churches on the course seemed more and more inviting. This was definitely the most difficult part of the ride. The headwind portions are clearly visible on the speed graph below. It was a real relief to turn the corner from the second to third leg and put the wind behind me.

Disaster struck about 2 miles before the finish. I was riding on a very wide, well-paved shoulder, and heading for the finish at about 20 mph. I apparently hit a large chunk of concrete and went over the handlebars onto the pavement. It happened very fast, and I have no memory of it.

The follow car stopped, of course, and I remember a fisherman headed the other way stopping to see if I was still alive. Maybe he was hoping to cut me up for bait? I badly wrenched my back and scraped up my leg, shoulder and back, but my other injuries seemed limited to the usual bruises and road rash. My bike was undamaged, so I remounted and pressed on. I had a spare helmet in the follow car, and if I had been thinking more clearly, I would have changed helmets. Note to self: carry an anti-inflammatory like Motrin. The photo shows my back on the "day of", and the close-up was a day later.



I completed 101.6 miles disappointingly slower than my personal best, 6 hours 5 minutes, last July. A plausible estimate for time lost because of the crash is about 15 minutes. The Garmin Connect speed graph (below) reflects that I was stopped dead for several minutes, and then lost more time struggling to the finish.

Hopefully, the injury to my back isn't permanent, but days later, I'm extremely stiff and sore, and it really hurts to sneeze.



Motivation

I planned a records attempt as an incentive to train. Some cyclists train to race, but I race in order to train. It's easier to jump on the bike at 4:30am and ride outside in the dark, or join a 4:30am ride with a European club on Zwift, if I have something to shoot for. The records attempt was actually a substitute goal. It was my ambition to win the 2022 National 24 Hour Challenge in my age group by riding over 300 miles in 24 hours. I rode in the N24HC in 2021, my second ultracycling event, but bonked after only 16 hours and 203 miles. I wanted to redeem myself. When the 2022 N24HC was canceled, I needed a new ambition, and WUCA time and distance records provided it.

The bike

I've been riding the same Lightspeed Vortex since 1996. When I purchased it, the titanium frame was the lightest on the market. I was under the illusion that it was worth spending \$\$ to save a few ounces on the frame. I had just been hit by a truck so hard that it broke a weld on my old bike's frame. I decided that if I was going to be killed on a bike, I wanted it to be the best bike money could buy.

Since then, I've gained 15 pounds. I also load the bike down with five 24-oz bottles and a tool pouch that weighs a couple of pounds. It's hard to notice the few ounces on the frame that I obsessed about 25 years ago.

Earlier this year, I appeased my aging, arthritic legs by converting to a compact (50/34) crankset and I ditched my 12- and 13-tooth cogs in order to fill in gaps higher up.

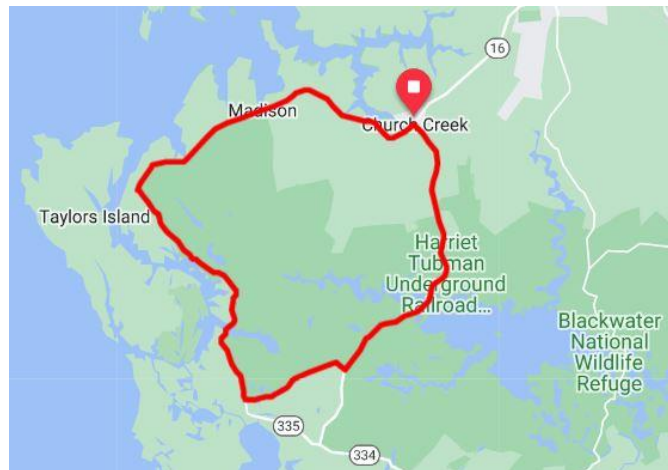
I experimented with tri-spoke aero wheels, but I found that gusty winds from the sides really knocked me around. I reverted to the original triple-cross wire-spoked Mavic wheels that came with the bike. They're noticeably out of true, so in my next life, I'll take care of that. When I was in my fifties, I raced crits on 21mm tires. Now I'm on 25mm tires because the additional comfort for long rides is worth what probably isn't much difference in rolling resistance. For the 2021 National 24 Hour Challenge, I opted for comfort by running at 90psi. That was too soft. Now I run at 110psi.

An unusual feature of my bike is five bottle cages, one above and two below the top tube, one in front of the seat tube, and one above the down tube. With a 24 oz bottle in each cage, I can ride 50 miles without worrying about finding liquid. This is advantageous because I'm usually riding between 3:30 and 6:30 am, when nothing's open. For this ride, I carried only three bottles and used the spare cages for empties. I resupplied from the follow car when I made comfort stops. I avoid using a water bladder on my back because it puts unwanted weight on my sitz bones.

I went to Smiley the Bike Fitter (bikefitbysmiley.com) in Kensington, Maryland, after my hands went numb during the Maryland Endurance Challenge in 2021. I managed 157 miles in 12 hours, but I really suffered and my hands stayed numb for three weeks. No problems following Smiley's bike fit. Thanks to Smiley, my bike is dialed in perfectly. It is my fervent hope that the bike will last longer than I do.

The course

As I pedaled through the swamps near Church Creek and Cambridge, Maryland, I thought of Harriet Tubman wading through these same swamps 170 years ago as she led her brother, other relatives, and eventually dozens of other enslaved people to freedom. The four-sided, 25.4 mile course goes past the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument and around and through the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge.



In one respect, this WUCA-surveyed course is perfect for records attempts: it's as flat as a board. The downside is that the course is very exposed and therefore vulnerable to wind that seems to pick up as the day progresses. It's important to start early in the morning before the wind becomes a limiting factor. There is almost no vehicular traffic at all on Sunday morning on this course. The pavement is generally excellent. Watch out for deer and turtles.

The course is on Ride with GPS – <https://ridewithgps.com/routes/33717091>.

Reader, if you are considering using this course, note that there is an Airbnb right across the street from the Church Creek Park 'n Ride. It's a nice one-bedroom apartment with a gracious host, and the price is right. It might help you get an early start.