

What is 'Chunking'?

I had to break the bike rally into chunks. Manageable chunks. And since I didn't own a bike, hadn't ridden one in a decade, was out of shape, overweight and late to start the training regime, those chunks had to be very, very minute to be manageable. Especially at the beginning. And later, when the going got tough.

If I had thought logically about whether I could pull this off I would never have even begun the training. For starters, the other riders, including my wife, [Ava](#), had already been training for 6 weeks. The bike rally was happening in 10 weeks. And this wasn't a one day thing. It was six days long. From Toronto to Montreal. It was 622 Kilometers (386 miles) of riding. That's roughly from New York to Norfolk Virginia. From Frisco to L.A. Paris to Amsterdam and then halfway back. And at night, we camped. That's right, camped. In tents we put up ourselves. In various campgrounds, one of which was a farmer's field.

So on the first day of training, I got on my wife's old mountain bike, in the only pair of shorts I could find. Not flattering. I looked like a potato on two pasty white sticks. And I rode as far as I could. Which was not nearly as far as I'd hoped. And possibly even less than I'd feared. So on that first day of training I rode my heart out... for a distance of 4.2 kilometers.

I know the distance, because when I finally made it home, I plopped my weary bones into our car and retraced the route to see how far I had gone. 4.2 kms. And 4.2 back. At about half the speed. With a short detour to stop for a coffee and donut at Tim Horton's. You can find one on almost every corner in Canada because of people like me. A total of 9 kms. That's less than 6 miles. That's nothing! Some people walk that every day!

How the heck was I going to ride 100 kilometres a day, and then get up and do it again the next day? 6 days in a row. Assuming I didn't pass away that night, which, at some points during the training, seemed like a great possibility. When I drove back home and saw the bike, I felt sick. Partly out of the dread of what lay before me. And partly from the coffee and doughnut I'd hastily downed trying to replenish my flat-lined blood sugar. Panic set in.

Take It One Day at a Time

Until I decided I had to take it one day at a time. Or rather, until Ava assured me I should just take it one day at a time. So I decided to sleep on it. Sure enough, the very next morning, I felt worse. My muscles were sore. My feet were sore. My tush was sore. And I was sore at myself for telling everyone I was going to do this.

So I took the day off, and spent a great deal of energy working on plausible excuses and reasons as to why, “I couldn’t possibly do this on such short notice, but for sure I will next year. After all, I don’t want to leave Ava a widow and the kids without a father.” The brainstorming paid off handsomely. I came up with some solid, sensible excuses, which, if I blurted them out fast enough, would convince anyone I was wise to stop now.

One More Day of Training Before I Quit

But I had to look good, so I decided that I’d wait and go on one more training ride the next day, just to show how slowly I’d progress. Unfortunately, a terrible thing happened. I rode 14 kilometres. I was on a [better bike](#). With a seat that wasn’t designed for a girl. And the route was long enough that I “passed by” two Tim Horton’s. Oh, and I took a water bottle and drank that too.

So, I kept training, hoping at some point I’d hit a wall and have to pretend to be disappointed that I’d have to drop out of the rally. No such luck. Within a week I could ride 22 kilometres and not develop blisters, cramps or heart failure. Looking back now, I can see I was very cautious. In three weeks I was up to almost 50 kilometres at a time. When it hurt, I slowed down, stopped or turned back. And it hurt a lot. I was astonished. In a month I had muscles. After two months they were very visible muscles.

When the date for the rally arrived, I was shocked to discover that I could ride 110 kilometres. Though I’d never managed two days in a row, because we kept getting rained out. Anyway, I made it. The rally began. The first day was about 112 kilometres. There were about 190 riders. I think I arrived at the campsite that evening third last. Out of our group of 20 or so who had trained together there were three grandmothers! One, Gita, was about 4 feet tall. They had all beat me. But I’d made it!

The next day was the hottest day of the summer, or so we were told afterwards. We had to ride 124 kilometres. The reward was that on the third day of the rally we only had to ride 50 kms and we got to sleep at student dorm at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. A real bed! Yesssss! But first we had to get through day two. It was brutally hot.

At one point I was the last rider of the rally, with two expert riders pedaling along slowly behind me. They were called the ‘sweeps’ and their job was to make sure no one got left behind. So they trailed the last rider. Me. In the late afternoon air I could hear them talking about their favourite TV shows while I concentrated on not dying.

At this point I was alone. Ava had been pulled from the race with heat exhaustion, so had other riders. It was bizarre. At times I was literally euphoric at what I was accomplishing. At other times I was in pain, with one leg or the other in a cramp. At those points I had to 'chunk it up'.

When I thought about the fact that a lot of better riders than me were being pulled from the race... that Ava was out for the afternoon... that I was going through 3 bottles of water every 30 minutes... and there was still 2 hours to go... I would decide it was probably time to quit.

Ready To Quit? Chunking Helps

So I'd ask myself, "Can I make it another two hours?... Are you kidding, I don't know if I can make it to the top of that little hill up ahead."

That's when I start chunking it up. "Can I make it to the top of the hill and then decide if I'm done for the day?" If I stopped a van would pick me and my bike up and whisk us to the campsite. "Nope, I don't think I can make it to the top of the hill... How about to half way up, to that farmer's lane?... No, my leg hurts too much... Okay, how about to the next telephone pole?... Yes. I can pedal that far." So I did. One more pole. And then I'd ask, "Can I make it to the next one?... I can make one more... and I'll use the other leg and just rub the sore one... Okay, one more telephone pole..."

I wonder how far apart they are... Did it.... Hmm, the leg is a bit better, I can do three more poles and then I'll decide... the cramp is fading, okay, I can make it to the farmer's lane..." And so I did. The cramp abated, I decided I can handle the next hill as well... and eventually, I ride into the campground, past dozens of cheering riders, and fall into Ava's arms, tears pouring down my face and hers.

Chunking it up. One telephone pole at a time. At some points, it was down to one more turn of the pedal. And one more. And one more. Yeah, I can do one more. And I did. I'll blog about the other [bike rally strategies](#) that kept me going next time. In other words, I'll chunk this up!

Best,

Rick

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