

Bruce Deming's Race Report  
2010 24 Hours of Great Glen Mountain Bike Race  
August 14 – 15, 2010  
Mt. Washington, New Hampshire

This year's 24 Hours of Great Glen Mountain Bike Race was held August 14-15, 2010 at the base of Mt. Washington in Northern New Hampshire. In its 15<sup>th</sup> year, the Great Glen race is a classic 24-Hour format pitting 4 man teams, two-man teams, and a select number solo riders against each other in a grueling 24-hour battle to see which team or individual can complete the most laps on an 8.1 mile closed loop course.

This report details as best I can my own experience as a solo rider in the "50+ men's solo" category, and to answer frequently asked questions about what a race like this is like. If I could sum it up in a few words, it's like being in a 24 hour plane crash. It is hard. VERY hard. MIND BENDINGLY hard. And it tests the absolute physical and mental limits of all who participate. Especially the solo riders.

To begin, here are some answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs).

### **WHAT IS THE COURSE LIKE?**

The course begins in a start / finish area under a massive circus-like tent, surrounded by campsites where the racers maintain their "pit areas" with attendant support crews.

The course itself is all dirt, and is a combination of fire roads and technical "single track" trails that are rocky and filled with steep drops, steep climbs, and slippery, exposed tree roots. This year, it was also extremely dry. The good news was that there was no mud to contend with. The bad news was that instead of mud, there was dust. Clouds and clouds of throat choking, eye stinging, lung burning dust. As I write this, I am 6 days since the race, and I am still expelling it.

Not one inch of the course is flat, and very little is straight. You are either climbing or descending, turning left or turning right. Concentration must be maintained, or you pay the price.

### **HOW LONG WAS THE COURSE?**

The loop was a little over 8 miles. Lap times averaged about an hour in the early part of the race, but grew longer as the race progressed and fatigue set in.

### **DID YOU RIDE THE WHOLE 24 HOURS?**

Except for the pit stops to take on food and drink, yes.

For the most part, I was able to keep my pit stops to less than 5 minutes. At the end of each lap, I would swipe my electronic card at the officials table (hence clocking a lap on the official race computer, which was linked up live to the web so friends and family could “watch” the race), and then veer off the trail about 10 yards to my campsite, where my trusty support crew was waiting.

I would switch “Camelbacks” (the little back pack hydration system I drank from through a tube dangling near my mouth), stuff some food in my pockets, and then have my mechanic lube my chain and address any gearing or other mechanical bike issues I might have as soon as possible. If he could do it while I stood over the bike, he did that. If he couldn’t, he would throw the bike up on to a portable work stand to make the adjustments.

In the end, I rode continuously, except for these fast pit stops, for the full 24 hours – noon Saturday to noon Sunday.

### **IS THE COURSE LIT UP? HOW DO YOU SEE AT NIGHT?**

No, the course is in the woods, which are so dense there isn’t even moonlight. You ride with lights. This year I used two: one on my handlebars and another on my helmet. The lights I used are an “LED” design, energy efficient and very bright. Coincidentally, they are from a New Hampshire based company. <http://www.dinottelighting.com/> The owner of the company helped me select the right combination system for this race, and they were awesome. In fact, I looked like a commercial jetliner approaching a runway, and more than one rider I passed on the course complained about them being too bright.

Too bad dude. I’m old, and I need to see. Wear sunglasses next time.

### **DO YOU GET TIRED?**

Not in the sense of yawning and thinking, “gee, I guess I’ll take a nap now” kind of tired. Instead, you get depleted of your stored carbohydrates in the form of glycogen (energy), so you begin to slow down. But it’s a *race*, and if you’ve trained hard and fighting for a podium spot, your adrenaline is sky high, so you do your best to not let the sensation of wanting sleep to even *enter your mind*. My personal technique is to simply focus on finishing each lap as fast as I possibly can. And celebrate it.

If you look at your watch and reflect on how many more hours remain in the race, you’re toast.

### **HOW MUCH IS PHYSICAL AND HOW MUCH IS MENTAL?**

Equal parts. You can’t cram for this test. Months of hard training are essential if you want to do well, i.e. be able to maintain “race pace” through the night without stopping. That means proper training on the bike, developing lots of core strength

(abdominals and back), good flexibility, and paying attention to your nutrition to make it all possible. That's the physical side, and there are no short cuts or magic bullets. It's hard work.

The mental part is more complex, and takes practice. Taking third place this year was my best result so far, in part because I had done several "Solo 24" races before and gained a lot from those experiences.

The critical thing mentally is to maintain a high degree of concentration on your riding, while at the same time keeping up the emotional intensity to drive the bike as fast as you can. As you grow more fatigued, the mind can wander, and that's a very bad thing for two reasons.

First, as the hours pass and your body fatigues, your physical reactions slow down. But unlike riding a road bike on smooth pavement where you can day dream all you want, riding a mountain bike on technical single track requires coordination of mind and body through a million coordinated reactions of strength and balance every minute. If you screw up for a nanosecond, you're going DOWN. As in falling. Hard. So the trick is to maintain concentration throughout the race, which becomes more and more difficult.

The second thing is that self-doubt starts to creep in – especially at night. You start to think, "Oh, God, I can't do this. Just quit after this lap, and go to sleep." And then there are the hallucinations that creep in from the shadows.

Late in the night, big rocks flashing by me on the sides of the course looked like laughing Buddhas, their bellies quaking with laughter, pointing at me -- mocking me.

They were there. Really. I saw them.

You absolutely have to banish those bad Buddha thoughts from your mind or you're on a fast train to Toastville.

## **DID YOU EVER CRASH?**

I crashed a number of times on steep hills, mainly due to the slick tree roots that became even slicker at night after the mountain dew had fallen. Plenty of mud, blood, cuts and bruises, but nothing serious. I didn't feel anything at all until after the race.

The next day, I felt like I'd been stomped by the Hells Angels in a bar fight.

## **WHAT DO YOU EAT?**

My primary source of calories for the race was the drink mix consumed in my Camelbak. It is a custom blend from Infinite Nutrition, <http://www.infinitnutrition.us/> ,

and came highly recommended by Chris Eatough, a six-time world 24 Hour champion who I consulted by phone specifically on nutritional issues before the race. If you ever consider training for an event like this, Chris's advice is valuable indeed. You can contact him at <http://www.chriseatough.com/?page=coaching>

Aside from the liquid, I ate simple turkey and ham sandwiches, fig newtons; peanut butter and jelly; potato chips, bananas, and banana bread. By the time midnight came, however, it was almost impossible to eat solid food without becoming extremely nauseous. It also was very hard to chew and swallow anything at all. I don't know why, but the other solo races all had the same experience. Without the calories in the liquid, I never would have finished the race.

### **HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR SUPPORT CREW?**

It's critical. Mine consisted of two guys: a bike mechanic named Scott Dallaire from New Hampshire, and my old friend and law school roommate Mark Beliveau, also from New Hampshire. Ideally, the mechanic should be all about the bike, while the other keeps track of your standings in the race, monitors your nutrition intake, and plays the role of your psychologist. The little things said and done by your crew at each 5 minute pit stop can have an enormous impact on your performance out on the course.

This year, for important reasons my friend Mark could only stay for part of the night, so my new friend Scott had to play all roles simultaneously for most of the race. He did so, and our team got the podium result to show for it. He was absolutely awesome.

### **HOW DID THE RACE UNFOLD?**

The cannon went off at noon Saturday, with several hundred riders running a half mile sprint before getting on our bikes and charging on to the course. This "LeMans-style" start is standard in these races because the course is narrow, and it's a way of stretching the field out to keep the initial crashes to a minimum.

My first few laps were pretty fast, and fairly consistent, which was my goal. By early evening, I was in fourth position, which suited me mine because that early in the race, I prefer to be "chasing" rather than "running" (offense vs. defense – pick your analogy). Then before midnight, I learned that I had moved up from second to third, and then from third to second. As it turned out, the second place rider, who had been going hard all day, just cracked. He got off the bike and went to sleep. Remember those night-time doubts I was talking about? That decision cost him the podium.

For the rest of the night, the third place rider and I switched places in the standings three times. We were never more than 4-5 minutes apart from each other, and passed each other regularly. I didn't realize until the race was over that my challenger was, in fact, Brett St. Claire, the fellow who won it the previous year.

Back and forth we went, fighting for second place, as the first place rider, Derek Griggs, held a steady lead. It was an epic “race within a race,” and neither one of us would let up. Eventually, however, Brett threw down a blistering lap after sunrise that put a bigger lead on me, and I just didn’t have the mental strength to close the gap. He eventually rode away from me, and secured second place. It was well deserved. He was the stronger man. That day. ☺

## **THE FINISH**

There is a rule that all teams – including solos – must have a rider on the course at noon or you are disqualified. The solos typically finish a little before noon, so we que up on the far side of the finish line and wait. When the cannon goes off, we cross the line walking our bikes the last 50 feet to the finish area.

While waiting for the gun, I had a chance to chat with Derek and Brett, who finished 1 and 2 ahead of me, respectively. They were both awesome guys, and we bonded instantly from the shared experience that had brought us there. I was also struck at the similarity of our experiences, as we related them. We had all suffered tremendously, and it showed.

As the sun shone high overhead in a cloudless blue mountain sky, 1500 friends and fellow racers cheered and stomped as we walked the final few feet to the end of our race. The roar echoed down the valley. It was an incredible, emotional moment.

As documented in our podium photo taken a few hours later, we resembled the cast of “Night of the Living Dead” as we strode slowly, zombie-like into the tent for one last swipe of the card into the race computers. I swiped mine for the 17<sup>th</sup> time and smiled as I handed it to the official.

The best part was calling my wife Clay to tell her and my little girl Celia what they already knew from having watched it all unfold online. Daddy would be on the podium.

My new friend Scott packed up my gear for me because I was barely standing and simply incapable of doing it. He took down our entire campsite, and packed everything into my SUV for the ride south. I was immensely grateful.

I made it 20 miles to North Conway, and checked into a lovely old Inn that I knew of there. As I checked in I maintained a ten foot distance from the young woman behind the desk. “Why are you standing way over there sir? She asked.” “Trust me,” I said. “You don’t want me to come any closer. I smell like a goat.” And from the horrified reactions of the other guests around me, I surely did.

After consuming an entire large pizza and a very deep 8 hours of sleep in North Conway I departed in the pouring rain, and drove 12 hours straight back to my home in

Arlington, Virginia. The calls of well wishes from friends and family came one after another, allowing me to relive the moment with each call. This race was a big deal for me and I will never forget it.

A personal thanks to everyone who made this possible – especially my wife Clay who accommodated my training and supported my efforts. Special thanks also to the race organizers and volunteers who put on a fantastic event. You can check it out here. <http://www.24hoursofgreatglen.com> It requires a lot of effort to pull off something like this, and they did a fantastic job.

### **WILL YOU DO IT AGAIN?**

Every time I finish a “24” I vow to never, ever do it again, and I mean it. But then I get to thinking.....what if I had trained a little harder.....?

*The author is a trial lawyer practicing in Arlington, Virginia, specializing in bicycle and motorcycle accident cases. [www.thebikelawyer.com](http://www.thebikelawyer.com) ; [bruce@brucedeming.com](mailto:bruce@brucedeming.com)*