

# The 2013 Texas Rando Stampede 1200!

*May 7, 2013 · by k7lro*

When I arrived in Texas, I recall thinking, “Well, I’m here. I might as well make the best of it.” It was hot, I was worn out from the drive and I was nervous about an uncertain future. I had been here before but it wasn’t a fun time in my life. Previously, I had been thrown in with 50 or so strangers and over time, we managed to jell into a cohesive unit.

That was October of 1977 and I was returning to Lackland AFB where I was to be assigned to Wilford Hall – one of the USAF’s largest hospitals. Like every USAF enlistee, I had gone through basic training at Lackland just a short 15 months prior and needless to say, it was hard to make a distinction between basic training and being a permanent party member assigned to the base.

Now, I found myself back in Texas again. Like the last time, I was a still a volunteer but for a completely different reason. When the 2012 Colorado Last Chance was completed, I was thrilled to have finished a 1200 and vowed never to do another 1200 again. That vow lasted for about three weeks before I found myself searching for another one.

Why? Who knows. Maybe I had something to prove to myself. Perhaps I had something to prove to others in that the first 1200 wasn’t a fluke. Maybe I’m simply another crazy “Elam”. If that’s the case then it’s a badge that I wear with honor.

The Stampede was attractive on many fronts. My very first bicycle tour had been in the Hill Country back in 1980 when we cycled 603 miles in a week. It was in a location that would allow me to visit some old friends and, it was an opportunity to ride with a few guys who were on my first 1200.

I left Phoenix AZ for Texas on Saturday, April 27<sup>th</sup> with a goal of getting to lovely Fort Stockton for the evening. Fort Stockton seemed to be a decent day of driving that was close enough to Sunday’s goal of San Antonio where I had plans to visit friends that I hadn’t seen in 30 years.

Living in San Antonio turned out to be one of the best times of my life. I started cycling seriously, developed my reputation as a very competent med lab tech, started a second job at a local hospital and made a few good friends.

One group of friends was the family of Earl Doderer. Earl had retired from Maxwell AFB, my last duty station and his family had preceded me to San Antonio by a few months in 1977. Sylvia, Earl’s wife, & I had a common friend at Maxwell who encouraged me to call her and introduce myself.

BTW, Earl was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for a low-fuel late-night mission over Laos where he kept a village illuminated with flairs and saved them from enemy attack. After retiring to San Antonio, Earl started his second career of 21 years teaching at Trinity University in San Antonio. A true class act.

Sylvia soon invited me over to their home and more or less adopted me into the family. The Doderer kids, Audrey, Jill, Mark and David, treated me like a brother and I was always welcomed into their home. Earl took me under his wings and never hesitated to offer fatherly advice and encouragement.

One fond memory is helping Earl set the roof trusses on their cabin at Lake Medina. For some reason, standing on top of a three story building is engraved in my memory! I was quite pleased when Sylvia told me that they still owned the cabin. I guess we did a pretty good job building it.

When I arrived at Sylvia's on Sunday evening to take her out to dinner, I was happy to learn that Jill and four of her kids would be joining us. Jill has matured into a lovely lady and her kids all inherited that Doderer poise and intelligence.

Earl passed away on February 16, 2011. My father passed away exactly one year earlier on February 16, 2010. In fact, they were almost the exact same age when each man passed. I don't read anything into that except that it's an interesting fact about two men who each had a major influence in my life. If everyone had the good fortune to have a father like one of these men, the world would be a greater place. I guarantee that.

Monday, on the way to Waxahachie, I stopped in Austin to have lunch with Ricky Schorlemer & his lovely wife Livia. Ricky and his brother Bobby ran two of the Schwinn shops back in the day and those Sunday rides with these guys taught me a lot about cycling. Ricky now works for the city of San Antonio and manages the bicycle fleet. He's also active at developing junior cyclists and is well regarded as a cycling mentor. He and his brother are two of the finest people I've ever met.

Before I talk about the Stampede, it's fair to mention my love for Texas in general.

(Channel your best LBJ or George Bush inner voice for this section.)

Texans are a fiercely proud citizenry. I've had the fortune to travel in nearly every state in the Union and I've never seen as many state flags being flown at the homes of ordinary citizens as I did in Texas.

There are several common combinations: the US flag and the Texas state flag are the most common. After this, you can count on seeing a few university flags. Well, make that Texas A&M flags. I failed to see even one UT flag during my entire trip. Lastly, if the homeowner was in the military, you'd see that branch of service flag also flying with the US and state flag of Texas.

It's obvious that Texans still love their pickup trucks. I'm not sure which state has the higher per-capita ownership of trucks but Texas has to be easily in the top five. The next most common vehicle noted was the Buick – that seemed to be a favorite of the average Texas grandparent. No – I don't have any data to support this – only my observations of traveling over, 2,000 miles by auto and by bicycle over the last few days!

I arrived at the Waxahachie motel reserved for the event on Monday and started to get a little organized for the upcoming event. I quickly located Larry Grabiak, a good friend who I met on the Last Chance. Larry's a great guy but he's a grumpy old man at when his inner-New-Jersey surfaces ~~occasionally~~ frequently all the time. He lives in Florida and made the drive over for the event also. It's always great to see friends like Larry at events like this! While we all love to ride our bikes, it's the friendships like this that keeps us attending these types of events.

I also met many of the other riders – Ruth D'Aiuto, Agnes Gallo & Keith Sherrick were among some of the other riders preparing for the event. It was also good to see Bill Olsen again and have the opportunity to meet his brother, Mark. Bill and Mark are legends in the brevet world. Dan Driscoll, George Evans and other, local club organizers & volunteers were also getting riders checked in and assigned to rooms in a quick and efficient manner. It was clear that this wasn't their first rodeo.

Sleep came easy that night – there wasn't much of the pre-1200 jitters that I experienced on my first 1200. When the alarm went off at 0530, I was already up and ready to go. I had organized my bike gear the night before, loaded the excess items not needed for the brevet back into my car and moved the car to another location where it wouldn't be in the other guests' way while I was off touring Texas.

Dan Driscoll had previously communicated his desire to keep the group riding together as much as possible during the event. As we pulled out at 0700 sharp on Wednesday, May 1, the group moved down the highway as almost a single unit.

While I supported Dan's goal of riding as a group, I found myself slowly slipping off the back of the pack as we moved past the 15 mile point. I was working just a little harder than I wanted to and I had to make a very simple decision: ride my ride at a pace that I knew I could sustain for 90 hours or less or attempt to hang on to the herd, burn myself out and fail. I suspect that I should have trained harder for this event so my inability to ride with the herd is my fault.

When I look back to January of this year, my first major ride was a century that I completed in a very respectable time. I also completed brevets of 200, 300 and 400-km without any difficulties or "training". My routine was to simply ride twice a week after work for an hour or so and do a club ride on Saturdays. The club rides are a blast – I try to hang with the fastest guys and, since every stop light re-start is an interval, it's a great way to build a little more strength.

While I had lived and ridden in Texas, I failed to remember the sheer number of hills that we'd incur over the next 750+ miles. Those hills impacted my speed to the point where I was just a little slower than the herd...and that's OK. I've ridden alone before and I knew that I'd enjoy the company of others along the way over the next few days.

As I eased off the back and watch the herd slowly ride off, there was no despair or worry. I leaned back, grabbed another Fig Newton, took a long slow drink of water and turned off my GPS. It's time to spin along

and enjoy the ride. Little did I realize that the Stampede was going to be a test of my cycling abilities and ability to withstand some of the worst weather that Texas had to offer!

I pulled into the first control at Valley Mills at noon and was followed in by Barry Benson and Ken Knutson a few minutes later. That was exactly five hours to cover 73.8 miles which equates to 14.7 mph. I do recall one short stop to refill a water bottle but other than that, I kept moving. The herd arrived in the same control 15-30 minutes earlier.

Lampasas was up next, a distance of 142 miles total and a segment of 68 miles. The heat was building but it was tolerable. Again, I left my GPS off opting to focus on the beauty of Texas instead of watching numbers tick off on the display. I was joined by Charlie Fenske and Bob Riggs for most of this portion – two fine riders. I feel like I'm leaving someone else out for this segment and apologize for that. We arrived in Lampasas at 1900 hrs – not fast but it was a good segment for us. No stress, no real push – just easy riding.

When we met George Evans in Liberty Hill at almost 2300 hrs, he was sitting inside a local store working on his computer updating the tracking spreadsheet. George informed us that thunderstorms were closing in on Marble Falls and we shouldn't delay too long. We weren't surprised – the lighting and thunder in the distance were telling and George's information only confirmed our suspicions: we were going to get wet!

In the rider meeting before the start of the event, George had warned us in no uncertain terms: if there's lightning, seek shelter. "It's just not worth it." I took those words to heart and as we neared Marble Falls, the rain and lightning grew closer. Luck was with us and we happened upon Smithwick Community Center just off the highway that provided protection from the elements. It was literally seconds after we parked our bikes that the storm hit with a vengeance – rain, wind and lightning. Boom!

While Charlie and Bob watched the storm, I grabbed a piece of floor under the porch and laid down for a few minutes of rest. I have no idea how long we were there. It was late and we were all tired from a long day in the saddle. After the storm passed, we covered the last bit of ground into Marble Falls and quickly located the event hotel where Charlie and I were assigned to share a room. The first day and 209 miles were in the books.

Charlie was smart – despite our requesting a wake-up call, he also set his cell phone to go off at the appointed time. Good job Charlie, our wake-up was missed and without his phone's alarm, we would have overslept! Good lesson there, something about using belts and suspenders!

The next stretch was supposed to be one of the toughest of the event. Charlie and I agreed to go with minimum sleep and hit it hard and early after only an hour's sleep.

As Charlie and I pedaled out of Marble Falls, a rescue unit passed us and a fear passed through me wondering if it was for someone on our ride. Our route included some climbing on a dirt road out of Marble Falls and

more hills along the way to Dripping Springs. Dan suggested more than once that he was allowing himself extra time.

When we hit the dirt road section, I prayed that I wouldn't suffer a cut tire or a flat on that section. I was also concerned about animals. I knew the area was heavy with deer, rabbits, wild pigs and coyotes. As we topped one small hill, the emergency lights of the rescue vehicle confirmed my previous suspicions and that it was there for someone in our group.

Stephen Hazelton and Lara Sullivan had a wild pig hit their front wheel and their tandem went down hard. I won't go into their injuries but both were forced to retire from the event. Late word appears to be that both will make full recoveries though and we're all thankful for that.

At this point, we were joined by Gary Gottlieb and Dana Pacino on their tandem as well as Ken again. Charlie and I were happy for the company and we settled in for the ride to New Braunfels. I was excited about the ride into New Braunfels since it was a place we visited often in the late 70's where we'd go tubing at a place known as Stinky Falls. The ride down River Road along the Guadalupe River into New Braunfels was a blast! Unfortunately, we passed to the north side of town and I didn't get to see – or smell – Stinky Falls again!

With such good company, we soon put Lockhart and Flatonia in our mirrors as we cycled towards the overnight at Columbus. It was along these stretches that karma made two visits to our group.

One event was went a kid in a clapped out Honda Civic decided it would be cool to buzz our group. I was only about 50 yards behind the others and I spotted him coming up behind me. I was getting ready to bail off the bike when he served at the last second and went around me. Then, I watched as the little shit did the exact same maneuver to the others.

About 10 minutes later, we spotted a Texas DPS unit with a car pulled over off in the distance. As we moved closer to them, we realized that the officer had the same car that buzzed us pulled over and was wrapping up issuing a ticket to him. Gary confirmed that the officer also warned the kid about his muffler!

During the rider meeting, George also warned us about being chased by dogs. It was during this same stretch that the other event occurred. Again, I was behind the others by just a short stretch when a dog with ill intentions came blazing towards the riders in front of me.

How do I know his intentions? His ears were laid back and he wasn't barking – this Doberman appeared to have “attack” on his mind. Unfortunately, he forgot to check on-coming traffic and a Ford Explorer hit him broadside just as he crossed the highway. As he rolled to a stop, I could tell that he was dead.

I toyed with the idea of stopping but there wasn't anything I could have done. The Explorer didn't stop but the car behind me did. I really did feel sorry for the dog and wished that his owners cared enough to secure him. Despite my feelings, if there's a choice between a dog and riders, the dog will lose every time.

That day was also a challenge in other ways. The wind had been blowing all day from the north/northeast and had worn me down. When we hit the hotel in Columbus, Charlie and I were assigned to share a room and this time, we managed about 3 hours of blissful sleep!

When we awoke the next morning, it was clear that the wind hadn't abated overnight. When I moved my bicycle outside and leaned it against the wall, the wind kept blowing it down the wall! It was also quite cold. I decided that I'd attempt to ride with the herd and benefit from the strength in numbers.

After breakfast, we all moved outside and mounted up. As we pulled out of the hotel, we had to cross a 3" gap between the hotel's parking lot and the street. I had hit it hard the night before but forgot about it as we left the hotel. &^#%^@

My front tire, unlike another rider's, didn't flat right away. I made it about 350 yards down the road before the front tube let go. No one stopped for the other rider and my good buddy Larry didn't hear me calling out that I had flattened. The wind noise was just too much for him to hear me!

I considered my options at that point. It was too far to simply walk back to the hotel and it was too cold and windy to change it on the street. There was a fast food place off to my right and as luck would have it, they were open. Great – I'll simply wheel my bike inside and change it in the light and warmth of their dining room!

When I tried to open their front door, I realized that only the drive-through was open. OK – plan B: go to the downwind side of the building and change it there! I think it was Pam who flattened out of the hotel and as I was changing my tire, she went by. I yelled out and while her head went up, she couldn't locate me off to the side of the building.

After changing out the tube, I elected to go back to the hotel and grab another tube from my drop bag. I asked the volunteers if there was anyone else still asleep and was told there were five or six riders still in the building.

I quite frankly wasn't sure what to do. Ride or wait but after one of the volunteers topped off my front tire with their floor pump, I decided it was better to go than wait. My reasoning was simple: often, those riders who are sleeping in have more speed than others and can afford to sleep in knowing they'll make up the time with their speed.

I'm not one of those riders. I need every minute I can get so I bid the volunteers a "thank you" and set off again into the dark, the cold and the wind. About 45 minutes later, I suffered a small setback when I hit a piece of metal that not only flattened my front tire, but sliced it enough to make it unsafe to ride.

Thank goodness that I had a spare folding tire in my bag and that I had circled back to the hotel for an extra tube! Having said that, from that point up until about 1400 hrs, it was an extremely tough day for me.

We had already covered about 450 miles and I was essentially at the furthest point from the start. The idea of quitting made several appearances and since the hills and the wind showed no signs of quitting, I had to come up with a plan to succeed.

I thought about some recent posts on the rando list that discussed power versus distance. There seemed to be a general consensus that maintaining 50-60% of TFP was a good target for longer distances. OK – I did a couple of quick mental calculations, came up with a reasonable number, turned my Garmin back on and dial-up a 3-second average power reading setting. From that point on, I limited my power going uphill to that number as closely as possible even if it meant sacrificing a lot of uphill speed. On the flats, that kind of power limitation wasn't really an issue – it was good for 18-20 mph. This seemed to do the trick for me.

I had a late lunch in Navisota with George and a few of his merry volunteers. The wind hadn't calmed down any and the heat was building so it was great to be off of the bike at the control.

The saving grace was hitting the Sam Houston National Forest between Navisota and Huntsville TX. Riding in the park really lifted my spirits. The trees effectively blocked the winds and that made the riding easier. The trees took me back to my southern roots and reminded me of home. As I told George Evans later that day, this little section literally saved the day for me!

The online spreadsheet didn't have my arrival time in Crockett but the night spent at the Crockett Inn was a godsend. The volunteers, as with the other overnight stops, had food and drinks available for us. I was assigned a room and did my best to organize it so that the next rider to come in would have plenty of room to park his bike. I told the volunteers to let the rider know that he didn't have to worry about lights or noise – I'd simply roll over and go back to sleep if awakened.

I was told that my roommate arrived around 0230 and based on the spreadsheet, I assume it was Chris Heg. I recall hearing the door opened but the next sound was that of my mobile phone's alarm going off. I think I got about four hours of sleep and needed every hour of that.

This was the last day and now, it's not a matter of wondering if I'd finish but rather when. Actually, I had incurred several thoughts of quitting during the ride and I suppose that's natural given the record cold temps, the difficult, high winds and daytime temps but I was never seriously in danger of not finishing the event. I may be slow but I'm persistent!

When I ran into Larry that morning in the hotel, I took great joy in asking him, “Are you deaf?” referring back to my flat tire the previous morning. No worries – I was just giving him a hard time and quickly let him off the hook.

We decided to ride together to finish the ride but once again, I found myself slowly falling off the back of the herd. This time, it was due to getting excessively sleepy to the point where I decided to pull off the road, find a nice fire ant-free shady spot and take a nap!

After the nap, I felt much better and set off for my last day on the brevet as I headed towards Buffalo. Once in Buffalo, I stopped at a convenience store near the one on the route sheet and the girls who worked there were very kind to me providing me with both company and refills as I relaxed and tried to eat a few bites of food. Sometimes, a little kindness sure goes a long ways!

As I moved towards the official control, George pulled ahead of me and I stopped to talk with him. Apparently, the herd had noticed my absence and alerted George to be on the lookout for me. I told George about my nap and he assured me that I was on the right track. I started off towards the next control of Mexia assured that I was essentially on-track to finish the event with only about 100 miles to go.

I arrived in Mexia around 1430 hrs and quite a few riders were still at the local McDonald's. I spoke briefly to Gary who mentioned that they had incurred several flats and mechanical issues! He didn't seem to be the least bit deterred and his attitude that this was a great adventure reminded me about what randoneering is all about.

Keep in mind that this is Saturday, May 4<sup>th</sup> and the next day, Cinco de Mayo, meant that there might be more drivers out who had too much to drink. I wanted to ride with the herd but the extra time I took in Mexia to eat, purchase some more lip balm and grab an energy drink meant I was once again behind them. The green, rolling farmland that we traversed next was also a real joy to ride. Despite the miles covered, the wind, the heat and the cold morning, everyone realized we were on-track to finish.

As I hit the 40 miles to go point, much to my dismay, I came upon another ambulance. My heart sank with I realized it was one of our riders, my new friend Charlie Fenske, who I had ridden with the first two days. Here we are, 40 miles to go and Charlie is being loaded into an ambulance. The others assured me that Charlie was going to be OK suffering mainly from a jammed neck and that he wasn't likely in any real danger.

This section of road was a slight downhill. The right track had deteriorated and contained a sizable crack. That's what took Charlie down.

At this point, I was happy to see other riders due to my concerns with Cinco de Mayo so I elected to ride with them. Charlie's accident reminded all of us to be a bit more diligent over the last 2-3 hours and those final 40 miles were covered safely and without incident.

As Waxahachie loomed quickly in front of us, my mind, as it tends to do, wandered back to the previous 86+ hours and I thought about what finishing my second 1200 meant to me. It helped to confirm that the first one wasn't a fluke and that I could now perhaps accept that I'm a bona fide brevet rider!

As the time clicked towards 2200 hrs, I realized that we were going to finish at exactly 10 pm. Imagine our surprise when we saw the crowd waiting on us at the hotel! Those who had already finished were there – all the volunteers were there and I think even a few guests joined everyone outside as they cheered our arrival!

After our arrival, it was literally an all-out party – there was dinner waiting on us, we hugged each other, took tons of pictures and, we were given our precious, Texas-sized medals for finishing the event.

A special thanks go out to the Texas clubs and volunteers who organized and ran the event. A lot of people dedicated time and effort to insure our safety and well-being and everyone who participated in the event is thankful!