

## Chapter Twelve

### 1985

In late 1984, there was another failed attempt for the 24-hour track record this time, because of unusually cold weather. The Guy On The Bike had had it with outdoor velodromes. The closest indoor facility was in Montreal, the site of the 1976 Olympic Games. March 13-14 was the date for the next attempt. After the disappointment of his two failed attempts, he was hoping that the third time would be the charm!

Because the last two winters in Phoenix were rainy, he chose the Big Island of Hawaii for ideal training weather. He had discovered a new training technique that was developed for Francesco Moser, for his attempt at the Hour Record. He was anxious to try it in the mountains, and see if he could achieve the same success as Moser.

Two months of excellent training went by, followed by a brief stop in Arizona, and then on to Flint. He would see for the first time the custom bike that his friend, Matt Assenmacher, had built for the attempt. It was a beauty. A metallic purple, that glistened in the light. Then the flight to Montreal, while some of the crew drove over with a back-up bike, just in case. This would prove to be a valuable asset.

Greg Martin and Lee Frantz were there as crew chief and mechanic, respectively. Close friends, Ron and Deb Schlis, would help as first-time crew members. He had officials from the governing body of cycling the UCI; and the Canadian Cycling Federation to document the ride. He would also have a drug test immediately following the event.

About 8:30 on the morning of March 13, The Guy On The Bike began his assault on the World Record. Hour after hour, he pedaled with consistency. He was right on schedule. Well into the night, a spoke on the rear wheel let go, and forced the cyclist to pit. Rather than try to replace the rear wheel, a somewhat lengthy process, the decision was made to hop onto the spare bike. This was also an Assenmacher bike, owned by a cycling friend, John Akins.

Over the duration of the ride, only 12 minutes were spent not pedaling. Track bikes have just one fixed gear, meaning that one is not able to coast at all. Dawn had finally come and the rider could "smell the barn." The last hour seemed to take forever, but after the bell went off, signifying 24 hours, a new world record was set.

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He had beaten Jim Elliott's mark of 502.3 miles and a European rider's road record of 514 miles. The new record was 516.2 miles. His three-year dream to get the 24-hour track record had now been realized. The Guy On The Bike was now the fastest man in the world for 24 hours!

Good fortune was about to come his way. While he had been training in Hawaii, his friend Jeff had sent a letter to Red Roof Inns, a hotel chain, seeking sponsorship for his rider. After company officials had seen the televised coverage of the RAAM by ABC's **Wide World of Sports**, they were interested in talking with The Guy On The Bike.

Dave Wible, director of public relations, arranged a meeting with the rider and the owner of Red Roof Inns, Jim Trueman. Dave had said that Mr. Trueman had been impressed with what he had seen on television. During this meeting, his respect for the cyclist was reinforced. He learned that the rider had taken out a bank loan to subsidize his recent world record. Talk about self-confidence!

Mr. Trueman had a history of helping out athletes with financial needs. If he saw that they had the desire to work hard and the talent to succeed, but lacked money, he graciously extended help. He was a self-made man who had built an empire from scratch. He was from the "old school," where "one's word" and a firm handshake was all that was necessary. He would never put on any pressure for his people to perform. Though he never said it, his essence was such that you knew he only wanted you to give your best effort. These were the same traits that the cyclist admired in his late father.

The Guy On The Bike was truly grateful for Mr. Trueman's aid. Through Red Roof's Indy Car program, they would also bring in Ford Motor to supply support vehicles. Now, for the first time in his career, he would have all his bills paid for training and racing. It was great to finally be a true professional cyclist.

## 1985 RAAM

The '85 RAAM would have a significant addition, in the form of one Jonathon "Jock" Boyer. He was an accomplished professional rider, who had competed in the Tour de France several times. He had narrowly missed winning the World's Road Racing Championship as well. Many experts said he was second only to Greg LeMond as America's greatest cyclist, at the time.

Jock had publicly stated that he was going to ride faster and sleep more than the other riders. That he was going to do what the other rider couldn't even conceive of doing. Jock would intimidate and strike fear into all the other riders, except for one, The Guy On The Bike. Fresh from a world record and with two RAAM's under his belt, he had his own game plan.

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“We’ll see about that,” The Guy On The Bike told his crew. Even Jim Lampley, the ABC-TV announcer, told the world, “His crew may advise him on what to do, but The Guy On The Bike marches to his own drummer!”

The race would turn out to be a “neck and neck” battle for first place between the two riders. From California to the Blue Ridge Parkway in Virginia, they were never more than 30 miles apart. The Guy On The Bike would hold a slim lead for most of that time. He certainly had proven that he had the “speed” to match Jock. In fact, the two riders had earned new monikers regarding their unique traits. Jock was labeled “The Greyhound” for his speed, and The Guy On The Bike was called “The Bulldog” because of his tenacity.

But that afternoon on the Parkway, disaster struck. Rain and fog had settled in on the narrow, two-lane road. The stress of the race had caused The Bulldog to develop painful canker sores in his mouth, making it difficult to eat or drink. Instead of leading, he was now chasing Jock. Paranoia was setting in as he sensed that he was holding up a long line of traffic, and that an irate motorist was going to take it out on the source of his frustration, The Bulldog. He pulled off the roadway. He refused to budge as his crew encouraged him to continue. It’s difficult to put into words what goes through a rider’s mind after six days on a bike, with no more than a total of eight hours of sleep. The mind can “play tricks.” He was in the middle of a “meltdown,” a “perfect storm” where all things bad happen at the same time.

He had wanted to meet with officials to express his displeasure with this section of the race route, but to no avail. To their credit, the crew had tried everything. They were distraught. What could they do? Their rider was STUBBORN, in a bad way. His mother had called his father an “Arkansas mule” when she was exasperated with him. Apparently, The Bulldog was displaying his father’s gene! One last hope, they were finally able to track down the rider’s best friend, Jeff, with whom he was able to communicate via the telephone. Jeff seemed to have the “magic” words to encourage his friend of the importance of getting back on the bike. This whole “meltdown” would take four hours before he got back on his bike.

During his down time, Lynn, his massage therapist, was able to obtain a mouthwash that specifically treated canker sores. The solution was helping to heal the problem. He was feeling much better now. The question now was, could he make up this time deficit?

He got back on the bike and continued his pursuit of Jock. Later that night, the fog, which had started in the afternoon, became as “thick as paste,” as Jim Lampley noted. Visibility was down to zero. The cyclist was using the centerline

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for guidance. Not exactly the safest thing to do, but it was the only way to follow the roadway.

People who lived in the area told the crew that it was the worst fog they had seen in 30 years. Frustrated with his snail's pace and the unlikelihood that he would catch Jock, The Guy On The Bike got off his bike and went into his motor home. In a rather stern tone, he told his crew, "Don't awaken me until the fog is gone." Little did they all know that an hour up the road, there was no more fog.

When the dawn came and the fog had lifted, there was a decision to be made. Quit, because Jock couldn't be caught after so much time off the bike, or just see what could be salvaged and how much of a dent could be made in this seemingly unachievable goal of catching him. What do you think happened next?

Now well-rested, The Bulldog strapped into his pedals and rode virtually non-stop to the finish line in Atlantic City. Race officials along the route, who had seen him, said that he was "possessed" and riding like a "madman." Jim Lampley told the world, "It was the fastest final push in the history of the race. But, in the end, it was too little too late. His valiant effort was lost in a fog in the Blue Ridge Parkway."

Jock Boyer would win by four hours. The two competitors had experienced a great battle. It was well fought. During the race they had a growing sense of respect for one another. Though they would never compete against one another in RAAM again, they would in other road races.

But there was a bond that was formed. An unspoken one, if you will, that only those who have done battle at this level, and under these conditions, can know. They would go on to become friends and offer help to one another when it was needed.

A lesson: It may be hard to lose, but if one can hold one's head high after defeat, and learn from the experience, then one is not a loser. Remember, there is always next time!