



No. 4515



It's not about the speed

PHOTOGRAPH BY GREG SIPLE STORY BY GAGE POORE

→ OF THE 43 CYCLISTS who started out on the inaugural TransAm Bicycle Race (4,233 miles from Astoria, Oregon, to Yorktown, Virginia) this summer, only 22 finished. Thomas Camero, of Hood River, Oregon, signed up for the event knowing *he* would finish. It's a conviction made more remarkable considering he was the only participant carrying a significant load — his entire rig weighed in at 168 pounds when he stopped at the Adventure Cycling headquarters in Missoula — and because he was the oldest racer at 73 years old. Mike Hall won the race in 17 days, sleeping little and carrying next to nothing. Camero finished last after 116 days. “I signed up for the race after reading the announcement that there would be no entry fee, no prizes, no support, no drafting, and no T-shirts. My kind of race,” Camero wrote. “My approach was to eat everything, hydrate, and never, ever give up the quest — even in the Ozarks.”

No stranger to long-distance bicycle touring, in 1967 he was the second cyclist, to his knowledge, to cross the border from Mexico to Central America on his ride from Mazatlán to Panama City, riding a 10-speed and wearing Bermuda shorts and tennis shoes. He's ridden from Jasper, Alberta, to Yellowstone; Tucson, Arizona, to Acapulco, Mexico; Hood River to Washington, DC; and sections of Adventure Cycling's TransAm, Lewis & Clark, Northern Tier, and Pacific Coast Routes. During four separate trips in Cuba, riding cheap used bicycles purchased upon arrival, he carried a guitar with him as a means to access the local music scene. In the U.S., he made a point to collect used violin and guitar strings that he could pass on to the Cuban musicians he met who accepted them with much appreciation. “They use telephone and window screen wire, fishing line, and just about anything else.”

Camero claims he's treated incredibly well by strangers while on tour, not because of who he is, but because of his chosen mode of transportation. While his bicycle surely contributes, his infectiously positive disposition is impossible to dismiss. During the TransAm race, he took time to fill out the activity booklet and became a Junior Ranger at every national park along the route. He also took time to stop at a few distilleries (his lowest water bottle often housed a bit of whiskey) because as he would say, “There always seems to be a cause for celebration.”

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