

Tour De Quebec Part II

Saturday morning's TT was a pretty cool event in itself. One lane of the Boulevard De Champlain was blocked off for racing and the parking lot was part of an attractive little waterfront park, just a short, steep drop down the escarpment from the museum of culture, and right on the St. Lawrence. The course was a dead flat 5k with a ripping tailwind, point to point so no turnaround. About 1.5k from the finish there was a 200 meter riser, but it wasn't really enough to matter, the race was flat and super fast. Aaron Fillion of Ride With Rendall won with a blazing 34mph ride and a time of 5:32. Nathaniel rode to a strong top-20 with a 5:52, but most importantly, Tremble stayed close enough to the leaders—on his road bike with no disc wheel—to solidify his GC hopes and settle into 12th overall. The rest of the team rode solidly, but with the times so fast, the gaps were small and sure to make little difference with three sages yet to come, and two of them hilly.

Double stage days are always a bit of a chore, but a word to race organizers from the point of view of the beleaguered and travel-weary racer: At least one of the stages on a double day MUST be close to the host hotel, and there should be enough time between stages to eat and digest a meal, take a nap, etc. With our (awesome, beautiful, and affordable) accommodations Mt. Saint Anne accessible only via rt 138, which was under construction, and the TT starting 45 minutes late in the morning, it was a hectic day getting ready and out the door again in time to make the 6pm start to the criterium. All in all we spent over 2 hours in the car, which is a lot for day two of a stage race. In the future I think this problem could be solved very effectively by doing a 4-6k TT on the access highway to Mt. Saint Anne. The road is dual carriageway and plenty wide with a gradual climb for most of it and a steep climb at the bottom. 2k down and 3k back up would be easy and no transfer would be necessary. But back to the racing.

The criterium was in a residential neighborhood on the outskirts of Quebec City with the finish line at the front steps of a large, Gothic cathedral. The course offered plenty to pray about: half uphill and half down with a sweeping downhill off-camber final corner. The race was fast from the very beginning, and the front group began lapping riders a mere 9 laps into the 50 lap race. Our guys, Bikereg/Cannondale, Canadian powerhouses Garneau and Planet Energy, along with the legendary Charles Dionne (Fly V Australia, flying solo) fresh off of two stage wins at Fitchburg, all took turns jacking up the pace and the race really started to take its toll. This was apparently not what the promoters were expecting as the officials began to panic about what to do with half of the field now losing minutes less than halfway through the 3rd stage of the race. It took them quite awhile to begin to pull lapped riders and in the meantime, those of us near the front continued to have the frustrating experience of having 10th or 15th place in line become 25th or 30th place as a group of lapped riders would get caught and keep riding, leading to more open gaps, etc. Eventually the race sorted itself out and with 15 laps to go, 'cross stalwart Derrick St. John launched himself solo and for some reason was neither joined nor chased. He built himself up an impressive gap and stuck it for the win in style, so kudos to him. Tremble, Al and Nathaniel all made the front group and Al and Nathaniel both put in big attacks at 10 and 9 laps to go, respectively. Neither stuck however, and Dionne inevitably won the field sprint for 2nd with Nathaniel in 12th, close but not close enough, and Al and Tremble securely in the now demolished 34 rider peloton.

At the start of Saturday's 110k circuit race just South of the city and just around the corner from the finish of Montreal-Quebec, the GC standings were already looking brutal. Some riders had lost as much as 18 minutes in the crit, and many had lost 4 or 5. Tremble was holding onto his 12th, hoping to move into the top 10 and the circuit looked to suit him. Beginning in a suburban neighborhood the course wound its way through 3 tight, crit style turns out onto a stretch of open highway, then made a left to a fast descent, a bit of horrible pavement, a 2k flat stretch, and then a 300 meter, 15+% climb back to the flat finishing stretch, and all of that in just over 10k. As we were doing 10 laps there was sure to be some attrition, but who, when and how much was an open question. And it was raining. A lot.

The first several laps were aggressive with small moves going but nothing getting more than a few seconds. The whole team was aggressive with Sullivan and Mukunda making promising early attacks. Dan Greenfield got a good gap with a Louis Garneau rider and lasted a lap but came back on the hill—after Danimal had dropped the kid who he outweighed by at least 60 pounds. Nice one Dan! The pace remained high but on the 5th lap there was a bit of a lull as the rain picked up and the guys at the front who had been covering moves started to get that cold and hungry look. Nathaniel saw opportunity and rolled off, being quickly joined by Charley Vives from Planet Energy and a Louis Garneau rider. The trio rolled it full gas with Bikereg/Cannondale's Thom Coupe and Steve Weller chasing equally hard on the front of the field. After murdering themselves for two full laps to establish a gap of a solid minute, the cavalry came up to the break in the form of a solo and determined Josh Dillon from Bikereg. Josh was clear that he didn't care about the stage but only wanted to gain time toward the overall. The rest of the break proved unable to deal with his flogging and Josh eventually rode clear on the climb with 1 lap to go. Being the first rider from the break to get scooped up by the field, Nathaniel did the only thing there was to do and rallied Al to the front to help chase down his former break mates, which they did in short order. Nobody was catching Josh, though and once again Dionne owned the field sprint. Tremble however capitalized on his teammates' work pulling off 6th on the stage and moving up to 10th on GC. Rain soaked, cold and hungry we headed back to the hotel to clean everything we owned and get some sleep.

Sunday proved to be the hardest, and silliest circuit race any of us have ever seen. Rumors had been circulating that the 100k, 17 lap race would include a hill we had been driving past to and from stages all weekend. It had a sign on it that advertised 21% and was about 500 meters long. It was the sort of hill that appeared to defy logic in its steepness and it really seemed like you could bump your forehead on the road in front of you if you leaned over the handlebars too far. Sure enough, that was the hill, and depending on who you were and how tired, riders were anything from despondent to elated at the prospect of climbing it 17 times. The rest of the course was either dead flat or screaming downhill, so gaps on the hill would be more or less permanent. Let the wild rumpus begin...

The first couple of laps were hard enough to hurt anyone who was already hurting, and Nathaniel was out of contention early on, suffering une jour sans. Sullivan got caught behind some uh-oh and had to unclip on the hill, thus ending his race, as well. Mainer, Tremble, and Al, however all made the front group and looked relatively comfortable, with Mainer proving to be one of only 5 guys in the race capable of attacking the hill, which was damned impressive. Mukunda was cooling his heels in the second group looking good and apparently feeling better and better as the weekend wore on. After numerous convincing looking breaks were brought back or simply cracked themselves, the selection of GC favorites happened and, unfortunately for us, we were just on the wrong side of it. Dionne won the stage, Dillon won the overall, and Tremble lost a couple of seconds to drop to 12th overall. That was a bit less than we had hoped for but still a strong showing in a stacked field of 120.

All in all we had an incredibly good time and the racing was super high quality. The race organization was helpful, the hotel was first rate, and each

individual stage offered its own unique challenges. With a little bit more prize money (only paying 10 deep on GC in a big pro 1/2 stage race is a little rough) and some logistical reshuffling, like moving the TT, this could absolutely turn into a highlight of the Northeastern racing calendar. We will definitely be going back, and brushing up on our French in the mean time.