

The Boulder Octopus September 24, 2022

Formers Pros. Octo Vets and Virgins. Chill Millennials.

With twenty-four riders, I noticed an array of demographics for the first time ever... a few former pros, some Octo-virgins, multi-Octo-veterans, and a handful of low-key millennials.

The day started with a bang. Literally. Near the bottom of Flagstaff, we heard an explosion that was either terrorist attack or a blown car tire. It was massive but it was neither. It was the tubeless tire of a biker-Ian who drove up from Denver and evidently that change in elevation was enough to cause his tire to burst. Amazingly, he fixed the tire and got up & rolling but his tires and the gravel bike it was attached to was not the right tool for the trade. After a brief and valiant effort to maintain pace, he was the first rider to toss in the towel. He has vowed to return next year. Every time I have heard that before, the person who said it has indeed returned to get it done. We will see Ian again.

On the same climb I noticed another biker who had no mechanicals but got off to a very slow start. Like, at a snail's pace. It didn't make sense. He was about 5.5", maybe 130lbs wet. Looked like a seasoned vet. Halfway up Flagstaff I had two thoughts about him, 'just because you look good doesn't mean you are' and 'this guy is going home after two hills'. But he was all smiles when he finally got to the of Flagstaff. And on the next climb, Magnolia, he was gone. Gone such as front of the pack and motoring up Magnolia like he was on an e-bike. And that's how he rode for the rest of the day; near the front of the pack and seemingly at ease. Then, atop the biggest challenge of the day, Ward, he asks me if he can ride up Deer Trail which is located *on top of* the final climb...it's short and steep and painful even without 14K vert already in your legs. So I say, 'yes of course you can, are you crazy?' He said he just wanted to make sure he clocked in at more than 100 miles. I said, 'well, take a few laps around the parking lot when we finish up'. Then I told him what I was thinking about him at Flagstaff about seven hours ago. He said, 'I just like to start slow and warmup.' So if you ever find yourself riding a bike with Jonathan Woo, be sure to chat with him in the first thirty minutes.

For the first time in Octo history, we had a handful of participants younger than forty years old...like about six of them. One guy, Stan, was only 24! Everyone in their thirties looks the same to me so I really couldn't remember their names. It seemed that about four of them came here together. There was a gal named Alden who signed up for the Octopus about five months ago by sending me Venmo payment in the middle of the night. No email, no text message, nothing. 60 bucks showed up in my Venmo account without any explanation at 11pm on a Friday night. I asked her about it and she told me that her buddies 'overserved' her some cocktails that night many months ago and coerced her to sign up for the Octopus. So she did. And they all showed up. I gleaned that these millennials don't actually do long distance hill climbs on a regular basis. I think they chose to do this just because they're young and healthy and figured they could do it. And they did! They just churned their pedals and moved uphill at their own damn comfortable stress-free chillin' millennial pace. I don't think any of them know what lactic acid is. And they were just so happy. That will change when they get to mid-life.

There was another kid, Brian Wegner, who showed up on a bike with pannier rack and a handlebar mustache on his face the likes of Yosemite Sam. Brian is so young I suspect he doesn't even know who Yosemite Sam is. I figure this kid has biked across the country at least twice. I never found the time to quiz him about track record. It became clear that he came here to move at his cross-country pace and he was honest enough to know the Octo pace was not for him. Around hill three he told me that he's going fly solo and finish this thing. I've seen this before and I know it can be a bruuuuutal mind fuck to fly solo. When the group was descending Left Hand Canyon in fading daylight, we saw Wegner plowing up the 14-mile stretch of canyon. I think he was smiling...tough to see beneath his 'stache. Later, under the cover of darkness, he walked into the pizza restaurant and grabbed a slice like nothing had happened. No big deal.

There were a few men nearer to mid-life who battled through the second half the day in heroic fashion. They are seasoned bikers with lots of miles in their legs but 14K in a day can take its toll toward the end. As I rode with Adam Rothberg up that Lefthand Canyon at pace that was well behind the lead group, I asked him delicately if he might want to jump in the van at the top so as to catch up on the descent. He looked at me and without hesitation, 'Not a fucking chance. I am finishing this ride with my ass in the saddle'. The soreness that I saw in his legs and the mindset to ride through it was nothing short of awesome. He did. That is grit.

A smooth event hinges upon the reliable support of the van driver. This year, Bill Cooley, a bike tech from U-Bikes, was impeccable all day long.

From young to not young, from back of the pack to the front, from sunrise to beer & pizza, there existed a consistent ethos: gratitude. All day long, this group of people was thankful, patient, and humble...and for all but the peak lactic-acid moments, smiling. Joy was noticeable. I thank you all for showing up. It is great to share the day with tough and talented bikers who love a challenge...who simply love to ride.

Enjoy Your Miles



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About three weeks ago, the 2022 Octopus snaked through the Boulder hills on a temperate, idyllic blue-sky day.

Twenty-four bikers started the day. Nearly all of them finished.

We had a contingent of young riders not seen before, a few former pros, and of course, a handful of the usual suspects – the multi-Octo vets.

On behalf of the riders, I thank each supporter illustrated below for providing the schwag!

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