

VAIL OCTOPUS 2019 | Going Deep

The Vail Octopus is certainly for riders who know they can ascend 17,000 feet over the course of 10+ hours. But the Octopus is defined by bikers who think they probably can...and do....and do not.

Last weekend, the Octopus served as a forum for several riders to prove to themselves –and to others around them- that they had the grit to suffer, not surrender, keep battling...and most appropriately, accomplish. When you accomplish a goal, it can never be taken away. You have that experience to lean on forever. That brings me to the Octopus mantra which I thought was pretty dumb a few years ago: Pain is temporary. Glory if forever.

Of the sixteen starters, three strong riders showed up for the Octopussy. That's fine. I took their money. A couple of guys showed up for a good training ride. And ten riders showed up to very probably finish. And that it was we will remember from the day...those battles and the victories.

Dave Glugla rode the Boulder Octopus last year and somewhere halfway up the seventh climb, spilled the contents of his stomach onto the road. He recovered, finished the day and he promised himself he would not put himself through the meat grinder again. He did not. The 'kid' showed up with shaved legs, a twinkle in his eyes, and he rode with the front pack all day long. I think he broke a sweat on the fourth climb. He wasn't even the same kid I saw a year ago. It was an amazing transformation. Best comeback of 2019.

Erika Van Meter likes to ride at her own pace. She's a gal who does 140 miles of dirt on any give Sunday. She starts earlier than the rest of us contending that she can't hang with the paceline. She left thirty minutes before everybody else. We caught her 120 miles into the day.

Dr. Patricia George showed up for the Vail Octopus is 2017 but tossed in the towel after a few hills because it was too much of a strain on her training schedule...for her marquee events (ever heard of Silver Sate 508? It's not an area code. It's miles). But she was not happy that she did not finish that day. She planned to return. Patricia is a pulmonologist. Last weekend she rode for her patients who battle to just breath through the day. She climbed 17K vertical feet because her patients cannot, and she dedicated each hill climb to eight people who inspire her to win battles. You can see just a glimpse of that on the Octopus web site.

If you can feel her will at work, and you are motivated to support her effort to make a difference in other people's lives, you can learn more and do that here: <https://www.teamphenomenalhope.org/>

Ken Dammen is a military veteran, a police sergeant, and a SWAT Team Director...or as I like to put Special Ops Tactical Advisor. He has battled through a few Boulder Octopus' but the Vail ride is longer, tougher. Unfortunately, just before this year's Octopus, he spent too much time at sea level for SWAT Team training ops. (I'm telling you, over the years, way too many guys 'plan' to ride but then bail out because they've been out of town, and not ready, or can't get back in shape. Whatever.) Ken shows up with ocean air still in his lungs and grinds up each road like world peace awaits at the top of each hill. This guy has seen real battlefields. I imagine he thinks to himself, 'if I can survive my day job, I can beat these hills'. And one-by-one, all day long he did.

Ken Legeai is 'from New Orleans' but lives in East Vail, part time I think. Weeks before the ride told me that the Octopussy might be best for him. Anytime I hear someone say that, I tend to not debate it. He's around sixty years old and I could tell he had some serious miles in his legs. But on our way up climb *one*, he was at the back of the line and I thought to myself, 'yep. he's done after five...if he's lucky.' Nope. On climbs 3 and 4, a few guys half his age went home. At the top of climb 5, he crested the top, got off his bike with a bike smile on his face and said, 'my heart is racing'. I suggested a van ride home. Nope. Two hours later, top of climb 6. His heart was racing again. I suggested a van ride home. Nope. An hour later at the base of climb 7, he looked fresh as a spring daisy. Up top we were waiting for Ken and we got word that he was walking up the road. That was a first. I've seen pedals rotate slowly; painfully slowly, but I've never heard of anyone getting off their bike and walking up the road. I sent the van back down the hill for Operation Recover Ken. He would not get in the van. He got on his bike and rode up the hill. He made it. We topped out the final climb, it was nearly dark and word was that Ken was on foot again. We debated what to do. We decided to saddle up and grab him on the way down...but when we rolled ten feet, there as Ken cresting the final climb of the day. He had a smile on his face like he just woke up on a beach. You can see that smile on the Octopus web site.

Who's tougher? The person riding 165 miles without muscle fatigue? Or the person who pedals through massive muscle fatigue and heart palpitations while riding 165 miles. Yep. I think so, too.

Every each year after each ride, it occurs to me that biking, in its highest purpose, can allow a rider to challenge oneself, to overcome, and to gain some mental advantage in life. The resulting experience and the wisdom of that accomplishment spills over into other aspects of one's life. And I believe that happens to be how we make our lives and the lives of people around us, a bit better.

I must be getting old.

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