



February 2007

Team SOLE writing in transit from Argentina, licking our wounds and reminiscing on the good times that racing always brings.

We selected to race in the Xtremo6000 because of the always spectacular landscape and challenge that comes with racing in the Andes. It was also billed as a less than full length expedition that would take us to the very high mountains. This all appealed to us as a good way to launch 2007. Race Director Alito Luchini and his enormous, fine staff would not disappoint us.

Thirty hours of flights (50 for Petri of Finland), and a 5 hour washboard, potholed dirt road leads us to the isolated village of 500 people, known as Barreal situated just 10km from the foothills of the Andes, the world's largest mountain range outside of the Himalayas. This tiny town would become the friendly host to 56 teams and media from all over South America.

As usual pre-race activities begin with 'acclimatization' which includes finding our local Hacienda, unpacking gear, build the bikes, and sampling the local bottled spirits.

Gear inspection and rope certification goes without a glitch and we assemble our support team as planned. The organization provided our lead crew guy, Panchi from Buenos Aires. He's a racer, and studying in school to be an English translator. A big bonus for us. Our old friend, Pablo "The Magic Man" and his girlfriend, Alejandra, also happen to be in the area climbing Aconcagua and so joined us to make the perfect crew with a 1:1 ratio needed for maximum efficiency.

Pre-Race meeting, maps, pages of course directions all in Spanish and we are loaded up & headed to a giant salt/dry lake bed for the start and a 65km bike section. What would happen next could not have been thought up by even the heartiest of locals. Not 10 minutes before the start, from over the horizon a wall of black/brown/lightning/dust and 100km of steady wind. It's LOUD and the visibility is close to zero. To add to the fun, just 5 minutes before the start, the race map jumps from Petri's map case, and he takes off spinning his biggest gear chasing the map. Unable, to catch the map, and slowed by the proverbial starting line rear wheel puncture, he hitches a ride to the start line, making it with just a minute to spare. Race directors were kind enough to postpone the start for 2 minutes, allowing for our F1 like repair.

The gun goes off, and for several hundreds of meters, bikes, motorcycles, trucks and vans would scream downwind pushed across the dry lake bed by the 100km winds. It's hard to tell who is leading the race in this open desert style start. The rain begins, and it comes down with a vengeance, creating a secondary dust cloud as it pounds the bone dry surface. The fun continued for us as Petri narrowly avoids injury and flips from his bike

finding the crank attached to his shoe and not his bike. We're being passed by teams like a musclehead kicking sand on the Nerds of the beach. It was the fine boys, of the only other American team (the NAVY to the rescue), that were more prepared than us having the giant Allen tool needed to remount the crank.

Dropping down a giant downhill, dodging washouts and huge raindrops, passing several teams, we're met by a motto rider from the organization who explains that the race has been stopped due to massive flash floods, the support team vehicles cannot continue on the roads. The teams regroup at a new location. An hour later, race director puts out a new variation of the course and there is a mass restart on bikes. 56 teams together once again on a flooded, uphill, sandy double-track for another hammerfest. This will not be the last time we mention this, but the local Argentine athletes are amazingly fit - most teams have a pro level biker and/or mountain runner on board - they push the pace quite dramatically. We finish this section essentially tied for 1st and gear up for a 20hr/80km mountain run that takes teams to elevations of 4800 meters / nearly 16,000 ft.

The 10km river valley approach to the mountains had local speedsters out pace us, gaining some 30 minutes on us over 4 hours. Several deep water river crossings and general canyon running was the agenda before we approached 'the climb.' A 2000+ meter climb (nearly 7,000 ft), passing 3 medical inspections that would turn back any teams that were reacting poorly to the altitude. Starting the big grind in 5th place, we would chisel our way to third before reaching the top (just two all male teams managed to stay ahead). The climb was brutal for everyone as we all felt the weakness of our oxygen starved quads. The 6 hour downhill run was interrupted by a mandatory 2 hr stop zone where the 2nd place coed team also joined us. From there, Petri's keen nav and Paul's constant nagging to keep pushing, gained us the lead as we approached the big camp that put us back on the bikes.

An 11km uphill, sand grind was the start of the final bike section. The whole race was essentially to be decided on this bike section and it was our time to attack. Karen put the pedal to the medal, Petri and I took turns towing, and we had a blistering time. By the end of this 5 hr section, we opened nearly a 1 hour lead. This gave us some much needed breathing room for the ropes/ascending/tyrolean section followed by a brilliant predawn river run under the full moon..

We'd end the race with a 2 hour 'duckie' (inflatable kayak) section down the Rio de los Platos. This river is the result of about 100 small rivers coming off the Andes and by this time the water is moving FAST - likely around 10 miles an hour, with several class 2 sections. Certainly nothing that was going to test our technical river skills, but did require us to don our full Kokatat neoprene and paddle hard. Knowing the teams that we'd done battle with for 26 hours, we continued to look over our shoulders until we reached the river take out at Barreal. Nearly the whole village met us at the rivers edge, and escorted us for the 2 km run to the town center. Countless villages and media met us at the finish arch for a paparazzi finish that was nothing short of a blast. These folks take this sport serious, and have some passions in the right places. Just 10 minutes behind us would be the local San Juan all male team of pro mtn bikers that passed 2 teams in the

last 2 sections, winning the male division and taking 2nd in overall. The second place coed team would arrive strong, but over an hour behind.

As always, we Team SOLE thanks the countless friends, family and supporters that make it possible for us to gain fitness and expertise to challenge the most grueling adventure events in the world. We are proud to raise the US flag on the podium and think of our supporters back home.

We move to spend most of our spare time preparing the Baja Travesia, and the World Championship in Scotland slated for May.

As always, stay tuned to www.teamsole.com for more info.

Paul

Karen

Petri

Tom (absent this race, visiting Team SOLE base in last Feb)

