

Seattle to Portland (STP) 2007 trip report, part 4 of 4: St. Helens to Portland and beyond

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Note: You probably want to start with [Part 1](#). **1:33pm: S** and I arrive at the St. Helens High School food stop (mile 175) just as **J**, **M**, and **A** are on their way out. **S** is pretty wiped out by this point and heads over to the nearby McDonalds for a cup of Coke and an order of French fries. “What I need is fat,” she explains. (And she was hardly the only person to stop at McDonalds for “alternative fuels”.) Here’s how the math works out:

| high fructose corn syrup + caffeine + starch + fat = ready for the last 30 miles

Z arrives at the St. Helens stop and we tell him that we’re down at the McDonald’s. **S** confesses that she had been doing some mental calculus on the way to this stop. “Well, **A**’s wife is coming down to meet him. **A** is going to finish around 4pm, so his wife should be somewhere near here about now. I could give her a call and ask her to pick me up. She can take me to the finish line and drop me off, and I can pick up my stuff and take the bus back to Seattle as originally planned.” In other words, **S** was calculating all the possible ways of quitting. And she wasn’t the only one. While we sat there enjoying the sunshine, sipping on Coke and nibbling on French fries, I saw a pick-up truck with two STP bicycles in the back, and saw a mini-van pull up and two STP bicycles get loaded onto the bike carrier. It’s just 30 more miles, people! I manage to snap a picture of the bicycling family as they go past the McDonalds. I didn’t notice it at the time, but a closer study of the photos afterwards reveals that the women on the triple are wearing headsets with boom microphones, with cables running to some sort of contraption attached to the crossbar. I’m guessing that they set up a little intercom system so they could chat as a group as they rode. The father and son on the tandem didn’t need this set-up since the two people on a tandem are pretty close together, but on a triple, the person in front and the person in back are quite a distance apart. I thought this was a clever solution. Now recharged, the three of us hit the road. **S** tells me later that she felt twice as good coming out of St. Helens, thanks to the energy boost from the Coke and fries (and the loss of the headwind that dogged us for much of Highway 30), for a net gain of 5mph. **Z** stays with us for a while, but eventually he pulls ahead to ride at his own pace. I stay with **S** as we ride through Scappoose. Now, riding through nature is scenic and stuff, but I agree with **S** that riding through small towns is more interesting because of all the

stores and shops you go past. Like the Hi-School Pharmacies in St. Helens. (Who wants to buy their prescription drugs from a high school?) Or Grumpy's Towing in Scappoose. Or the Peace Candle of the World. We approach the Scappoose mini-stop (mile 189) with no intention of stopping, but we pull over because we happen to spot **Z** emerging from the crowd with ice cream. He told us afterwards that he timed his arrival at the Scappoose mini-stop perfectly: Just as he arrived, so too did the truck with the ice cream bars. **Z** joins us, but he once again pulls ahead and we assume we'll just see him in Portland. **3:41pm**: We reach the "Portland 10 miles" sign. **S** is doing much better now. The infusion of all those wonderful ingredients did its magic. We notice a lot fewer children. No kids on teetery bicycles or dads pulling a child behind on a trailer. The only exception was a group of three young teenagers, two on a combination tandem (recumbent in front, upright in back) and one on her own bicycle. They were doing a pretty good job of moving along. At about the same time (3:50pm), the lead group of **J**, **M**, and **A** arrives at the finish line. They arrive as part of the main wave of finishers. It's so crowded they can't even ride across the finish line; they somewhat anticlimactically walk their bicycles under the banner. (The unicyclist finished ten minutes ahead of them. **A**'s wife took a picture. And two minutes after them, a guy with a puppy trailer also finished.) As we get closer to Portland, we see more and more people stopped by the side of the road. I'm hoping that they're just waiting for the rest of their group to catch up, not that they're stopping to take a break so close to the finish. There's a rather large group gathering in the parking lot of an adult video store. I'm trying to imagine the conversation that led to that choice:

"Where should we meet up when we get to Portland?"

Let's meet at the adult video store at 55th.

"What?"

It's right by the park. On the right hand side. Can't miss it.

"Um, Bob, how do you know about this video store?"

Oh, um...

4:23pm: The last steep hill of the day is a short one, at NW Wardway St (mile 201). We pass by a gentleman at the bottom of the hill talking on his phone. He's asking his personal support vehicle to come by and take him up this tiny little hill. Dude, it's only 400 feet. Just push your bicycle if you have to. Halfway up this hill we pass a cyclist by the side of the road fixing a flat. Bad place to have a flat. I mutter some words of encouragement as I go past. As we crest the hill, we see **Z** waiting for us by the side of the road. The three of us ride together through the streets of Portland toward the finish, but it gets more frustrating, because you think you're done, but the road just keeps going and going, turning onto this road, turning onto that road, crossing the railroad tracks, going a tenth of a mile, crossing the same railroad tracks again... It's like, "Hey, I don't need a freaking tour of Portland. Just take me to

the finish line already!” **4:50pm**: At last our tour of Portland is complete and we cross the finish line to receive our finisher’s badge. **J** is there to cheer us in, and **A** takes a nice picture of our arrival. Statistics according to my bicycle computer: Time in motion: 16:38:38
Distance: 216.09 miles

Average speed (when moving): 13.0mph

Maximum speed: 31.8mph Other statistics (estimated): Travel time: 23 hours

Rest time: 6½ hours (28% of travel time)

Google Map Route **Epilogue** But wait, it’s not over yet. First, we drop off our bicycles at the bike trucks. The trucks don’t go as fast as the bus, so you need to load the bikes early. It’s much better that your bike waits for you in Seattle than for you to wait for your bike. Next, we find our bags in the baggage corral and grab a change of clothes and a towel for the free showers. We head out to the showers and find that the women have a distinct advantage: The line for the women’s shower is just ten minutes; the line for the men’s shower is forty. (I’m told that, contrary to stereotype, the men are taking longer showers than the women.) Since the wait for a shower is so long, I decide to use a portable toilet as a changing room. Upon emerging, I use a water bottle and a face towel to wipe myself down, bringing me from icky to slightly less icky. That’ll do for now. **Z** meanwhile gives up on waiting in line for a shower and goes the bathroom in the Doubletree hotel to change and clean up. As we were riding along Highway 30, **S** said that the first thing she’s going to have at the finish line is an ice cream shake. I responded that I’m looking forward to pizza. There was no ice cream shake at the finish line, but there was a pizza stand, so at least I got my pizza. **S** said that her new plan is to call her husband as we neared Seattle and tell him to go get a Blizzard and put it in the freezer so it’ll be ready for her when she gets home. I stop by the bicycle equipment stand and buy myself a replacement mirror. It’s the same model that **A** has, one with which he is quite satisfied. **6:20pm**: While waiting in line to board the 6:30 bus back to Seattle, we notice one of the bicycle trucks appears to have run into mechanical difficulties. There’s a person lying under the rear axle doing... something. We don’t remember seeing it when we dropped off our bicycles, so there’s a possibility that our bicycles are on the broken truck. We cross our fingers and hope for the best. On the ride back to Seattle, traffic on I-5 jams up near Centralia. I know exactly why, but nobody believes me until we see *them*: the monuments by the side of the highway. Northbound traffic always slows down there, and it speeds up once you get past it. (I have a modest proposal for fixing this, which I may write up one of these days.) A little further up the road is the billboard. I always keep an eye out for the billboard (which often has different messages for northbound and southbound traffic) whenever I travel along I-5. During the trip back, we tally our damage.

Rider Mishap

J (none)

M spill + flat tire

A	(none)
S	slipped chain
Z	slipped chain + flat tire × 3
me	(none)

Ah, but we counted our chickens too soon. Upon arrival in Seattle, we find that only **J** and **M**'s bicycles made it back. The rest of us must've been on the unlucky truck. (Not counting **A**, who is driving back to Seattle with his wife and son.) Need to update the chart.

Rider	Mishap
J	(none)
M	spill + flat tire
A	(none)
S	slipped chain + bike not delivered
Z	slipped chain + flat tire × 3 + bike not delivered
me	bike not delivered

On Monday, I drive to the University to pick up our bicycles. Fortunately, they all made it. The volunteer at the bike corral has more information on the truck problem. The problem wasn't just that one truck had a brake problem. That broken truck was blocking two other trucks! As a result, three trucks were stuck in Portland until well past midnight. The volunteers unloaded bicycles at 4am, poor guys. One guy is angry at the volunteer because his bicycle hasn't yet arrived. I guess the Monday truck is late or something, who knows. The volunteer is very good at remaining calm while the guy yells at him. From what I could tell, the guy doesn't actually have any specific demands, he just wants to yell at somebody. If I were the volunteer (and wanted to be mean), I would have said, "Okay, sir. Since your bicycle isn't here right now, I guess we'll have to declare it lost. According to the terms of service, our liability is limited to sixty cents per pound. Your bicycle weighs, what, 30 pounds tops? Thirty pounds times sixty cents per pound is eighteen bucks. Here's \$20. Keep the change." Maybe that's why I'm not a bike volunteer. (Okay, that's not actually what I'm thinking, but it's funnier. What I actually think is, "Yo, dude, don't push your luck or the guy is going to give you sixty cents and call it even!") The Thursday after the ride, **J** finds what looks like a staple embedded in his rear tire. It passes through the the middle of the tread and exits out the sidewall, miraculously missing the tube. He was this close to joining the "mishap club". **Final Thoughts**

Would I do STP again? Perhaps, provided I'm riding with people I know well. I'd try to make a point not to dawdle at the rest stops. (**S** says that she should have trained to a higher average speed, like say 16mph; that way, cruising at 14mph would have been much less tiring.) But it was definitely worth doing once.

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