

## The 19<sup>th</sup> Annual MDA Trans NH Cycle Ride - 2006

### Thursday – Traveling to the top of NH

Thursday is the travel day before we start “the ride”. Just like last year 13 riders and 3 drivers (mostly the same folks, now branded as Team Deroche) all meet at Steve Patterson’s house in Merrimack where we load up the bikes, luggage and people for the trip north. This year my wife Suzanne has volunteered to be one of the drivers and thus gets to travel with this gang of fairly crazy and fun people.

Our routine this year is pretty much the same as last year; stop in Colebrook later in the afternoon to connect with the cyclists taking the bus from Portsmouth and pick up a couple of more Team Deroche riders, then head up to the Tall Timbers Lodge in Pittsburgh for a great pre-ride dinner, campfire chat, and short night’s sleep before heading to the border VERY early Friday AM to start the ride.

This years’ rider registration is near our largest, with 97 riders doing the full three days and 8 to 10 more doing either the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> days. Being able to sign up for just one or two days of the ride is a new wrinkle that was added last year so people could raise some money and sort of “try out” a section of the ride to see how hard it might be.

The great news was that we raised over **\$160,000** for NHMDA this year, half again as much as we ever raised before. That number has us all feeling pretty darn good.



- Team Deroche hangin' out at the cabins at Tall Timbers -

The post dinner campfire bull sessions have become one of the things we really look forward to. Some of us see each other frequently during the course of the year; others only for this event. Paul Deroche recruited his nephews James (don't call me Jamie) and David last year (Cleveland and Dallas); they are back this year and David brought his wife Kelly along and talked her into riding with us. Also, John ( the Marlboro Man) Hayner (climbs like the wind, smokes like a power plant) who comes up from CT is along for his 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> MDA ride. And, of course, Suzanne Guidod from Rochester NY and Bill Schwab from Winchester MA round out the northeast contingency

It's neat that this event brings together such a broad spectrum of people from parts far and wide.

With the addition of Pam Patterson and Suzanne Guidod last year, Pam Wright (who's ridden this thing forever but somehow got drafted on to Team Deroche) and Kelly, the riding group is becoming way more "gender balanced" too.



**- Heading to dinner at the lodge -**

Like last year, this year's day-before-the-ride weather is lovely but the weather forecast is marginal for the ride days. We always plan to get wet on this ride; sometimes we do and sometimes we are lucky... time will tell.

The best campfire tale of the evening comes from Buddy "the diesel" Miller who regaled us with the story of his recent fly fishing escapade over in Bartlett. Seems that this rather large brown bird sat watching him fishing for quite a while and then simply decided to follow him home... repeated efforts to shoo the creature away had no effect... Buddy's last view out his rear view mirror was of this sad looking bird standing there on the dirt road looking like an abandoned child. Needless to say we are all looking for a story update the next time Buddy goes fishing in this spot.

Buddy's now "the bird man" for the rest of this years' ride.

Sometime in the middle of the night it starts to rain... stars were out when we hit the sack 3 hours ago... such is the fickle weather we always seem to get on this ride.

### **MDA 2006 Ride – On the Bicycle – Day 1**

Friday Morning dawns cloudy and a bit foggy but at least it isn't raining. It's hard to have to start the ride in the rain. A quick breakfast, pack all the stuff and do the 20 mile drive to the border. The bikes roll south at 7am sharp.



**- Getting ready at the border station in Pittsburgh -**

It seems like every year one of our team members gets a flat before the ride even gets going. Last year Bill Schwab was the victim; this year Buddy Miller is the "lucky" guy... TWO flats before we even get saddled up. What fun....



**- here's the MDA "6 million dollar man"**

The border "getting started madness" is actually a good chance to meet and greet all the folks who are back again and the "newbie's" who probably have no idea what they've bought into. Sometimes ignorance is bliss.

I always look forward to seeing John Carlson, who sets an example for all of us with his riding prowess as the "6 million dollar man" (see the better-than-new leg picture above) and "Iron Mike" Stepien, who's riding outfits can best be described as "distressed". This year's get-up is certainly no exception, though Mike's bike certainly was an upgrade from past years.

The ride away from the border station is "clean"... no crashes or notable malfunctions. The weather is cloudy and cool with not very much wind... as long as it doesn't rain this is really pretty good.

The MDA rider support teams do a great job for us... there are stops every 15 to 20 miles along the way... peanut butter and jelly sandwiches are the preferred food for recharging... they last a while and don't "kick back" much.



- North Stratford rest stop – 10 AM Friday –

Later in the day when the legs are gone you look for any energy kick you can get to keep it going.

This year the ride committee changed the route a little. Rather than take Route 135 out of Lancaster up through Dalton to Littleton we are riding Route 3 all the way to Whitefield and then taking 116 into Littleton. Both routes have tough hills; Weeks Hill, coming out of Lancaster, is long and can be really hot as there really aren't any trees along the road at all. Wouldn't you know that just about the time I'm getting started up this 1 mile +/- "grinder" the sun comes out just to enhance the "experience". Another reason this "bump" is more painful is because we're hitting it at the 80 mile mark and there just isn't a lot left to push with by then. My strategy is to keep my eyes on my front tire and not look up the hill to see how far I have to go; it's just too depressing to see how little progress I'm making if I look ahead.

I think I prefer the Dalton route .... There are three tough, shorter hills with breaks in between, and lots of trees along the road that provide some relief from the sun on really hot days.

The great riding conditions this year mean that everybody makes it into the Hampton Inn in Littleton in pretty good shape. This is our first time at this hotel...new and nice. We pretty much take over the place what with all the riders and support crew. My roommate (as usual) is Chris Murch; we end up with a king size bed and a lot of razzing... "What happens on the MDA stays on the MDA" ... yeah, ok.



**- The massage crew at the Hampton Inn in Littleton -**

Thank goodness for the massage crew! There's a huge crew this year, and boy are we grateful. A massage really helps reduce the aftereffects of riding a hundred miles. The riders really appreciate the fact these folks donate their time and efforts to the common fund raising goal.

Right at the bottom of the hill in front of the hotel is an Applebee's; Team Deroche gathers there to begin the late afternoon into evening "eat-a-thon" that this event really is. Beers and carbohydrates abound. Around 6pm we all are shuttled over to the Littleton Fire Station for an excellent spaghetti feed.



**- Dining out Friday night courtesy of the Littleton NH firefighters -**

The Littleton and Laconia firefighters really take great care of us on Friday and Saturday, feeding us both dinner and breakfast and providing us with fire truck escorts out of both towns. I've done this for 9 years and it still gives us all a kick when the sirens open up the roads through both towns for us.



**- hangin' out behind the Hampton Inn eating junk food Friday night -**

Of course, after dinner there is a need to consume some serious sugar; this drives a safari to the local Shaw's supermarket bakery for cookies and other consumables. The gang all ends up hanging out behind the hotel til bedtime (which is pretty early considering breakfast is at 7am back at the Littleton fire station.)

As dusk sets in it LOOKS like the weather is getting nicer. However, a peek out the hotel window at 3am shows it is absolutely pouring rain... hmmm.

### **MDA 2006 Ride – On the Bicycle – Day 2 – Littleton to Laconia**

Amazingly, Saturday morning light brings about the same weather as Friday; cool, foggy, damp but... NOT raining... could we get lucky again??? Time will tell. Off to breakfast, then pack up and be ready for the 8am fire truck escort thru Littleton. Then a really pretty ride on NH routes 116, 118, and 112 for around 30 miles to Woodstock.



**- Getting ready for the run to Laconia from Littleton -**

The BIG hill today is on Route 112 from about the 21 to 25 mile markers; better early. This is the pull to the top of Kinsman Notch on Route 112. It's a tough pull with a nice reward; a 7 mile mostly downhill screamer into Woodstock. I got a new bike this year and it feels better at high speeds than the old one... still, letting it roll into the mid 40mph area was about all I could get comfortable with.



What follows is a nice reasonable ride all the way into Plymouth on old Route 3 and then down towards Ashland where we cut on to River Road, which is kind of a back way down to New Hampton. River Road is a really pretty ride on a bicycle... I recommend it to anyone wanting just a nice recreational ride. It follows the river (**Pemigawasset**, I think), has a lot of scenic views and not much traffic at all.

The next leg is from New Hampton to Sanbornton on NH132. The good news is that (1) it's still not raining and (2) the road, which has been in horrible shape for several years, was just repaved and is really nice all the way to the next rest stop at the Sanbornton Fire Station. The bad news is that this stretch has one of those slight uphill grades that just seems to go on forever.

Once we leave the fire station the last 5 miles of this road is as bad as the earlier part was good... some really bad cracks, potholes and general crappy bordering on dangerous conditions unless you are really paying attention. Still, everybody makes it through with no particular issues... something to be said for cool, cloudy air and dry roads. On to Laconia and the Saturday night eat-a-thon.

We've always spent Saturday night at the Landmark Inn in downtown Laconia. Get the bike put away, grab a shower, get on the massage list, go find the Team Deroche crew at the local brew pub, all pretty routine.

Tonight it's a chicken dinner put on by the Laconia Fire fighters at the local Elk's club, a short walk from the hotel. At this event we really get into the real reason we do this ride.



**- Elizabeth Hunter on her dad's shoulders, with family, walking back from dinner Saturday night -**

Every year we dedicate the ride to a person who has MD; this year it is a 5 year old girl named Elizabeth Hunter from Bow. Her dad is riding this year and gave a really

terrific talk about Elizabeth's life with MD and how what we do is helping her quality of life. The whole family was there (including Elizabeth) and it is really moving to get in touch with how some people deal with the tough stuff that life sometimes gives out. It makes the ride seem comparatively easy.

You can read more about Elizabeth Hunter at <http://www.transnhbikeride.org/elisabeth.htm>

Also, this year the MDA committee recognized Ron Gale, a Salem NH fire fighter, and one of the drivers of this event since it got started, for his 19 years of involvement with both MDA and the bike ride.

And, the BIG news was the amount of money raised this year; somewhere over \$162,000 in pledges; by far our most successful fundraising effort ever. Team Deroche was recognized for raising something like \$23,000. We did well this year, too.

**At this point I'd like to thank all the folks that supported me this year... I really appreciate all the contributions you made to the cause.**

After dinner it's (guess what) the annual trek to Hectors Restaurant for Mud Pie and Guinness... our little group started this Saturday evening post dinner event quite a few years ago... now it seems like about half the people involved in the ride show up here... we virtually take over the place. The staff there is really accommodating because we really do disrupt the place; they take wonderful care of us every year.

### **MDA 2006 Ride – On the Bicycle – Day 3 – Laconia to Portsmouth**

Sunday AM dawns cloudy, kind of foggy, and cool... but, again, not raining... how lucky we are!!!

Today we need to be on the road at 7AM with the goal being to get to Pierce Island in Portsmouth by 1pm. The usual mad scramble to eat, get dressed, pack up etc. and get ready for the Fire Department escort up though Laconia and out to Gilford.



**-Gathering in front of the Landmark to start the Sunday ride to Portsmouth-**

Day 3 is always the easiest ride... shorter and flatter than any of the other days. The weather remains the same...virtually perfect for riding. The early part of the ride, from Gilford to Alton Bay, is on Route 11 along the south shore of Lake Winnepesaukee, a really scenic and enjoyable ride.



**- Rest stop on Route 11 near Alton Bay along the lake -**

Once we get thru Alton Bay, it is a straight, fast, flat, fun ride right into downtown Rochester to the fire station. Today we ride in stages and keep the group together for all the fire truck escorts we get when we ride on to the next stop



**- The whole gang at the Rochester Fire Department getting ready to go -**

Once everyone gets into Rochester we get escorted out of town as a group and ride through Dover and end up at the Newington Fire Station where we reassemble for the ride through the Pease Business Park and into Portsmouth.



**- Tom & Lindsay Herbert in their King & Queen of the MDA outfits -**

We always have two or three tandem riding teams with us... the long time tandem veterans are Tom and Lindsay Herbert from Concord (I think). You can see their self appointed King and Queen of the ride getups above that they put on for the ride into Portsmouth. They are good riders and really fun people. The ride into Portsmouth through the Pease Trade Port is always a bit crazy with all the riders generally using their water bottles as water pistols to soak all their fellow travelers.

Tom and Lindsay have a special advantage since the rear rider on a tandem can focus purely on weaponry while the front rider drives. They carry the water wars to a whole different level with this super soaker water machine gun they bring every year. They are like motorcycle Mafioso's nailing everybody.... It's quite a crazy ride to town for sure.

Once we get into Portsmouth we pick up yet another fire department escort for the ride to the cookout at the park on Pierce Island (part of Strawberry Banke). This is really the coolest ride because Portsmouth is so busy in the summer and we get lots of attention, cheers and all that stuff that makes it just a bit more fun.



**- Picnic and rider awards at Pierce Island – the end of the ride -**

This year's ride was special for a couple of reasons: First, because we raised a lot of money for a great cause and second because we were totally casualty free. It's unusual to get this many people this many miles without something happening, but as near as I can tell nothing did this year. And, the weather was kind... not too hot, not too cool, not too wet, not too windy.

Thanks again for making it possible for me to do this biking event. I'm already looking forward to next year; it's amazing how quickly you forget how much you hurt at certain points during this event... and that's a very good thing!