

# Racer's Letters

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## A RACER'S LETTER

Mt. Washington Race, At The Top I've always wondered, what was the attraction, the call, of riding up Mt. Washington . I had seen my brother, my brother in law , repeatedly do the suffering and training that was required to prepare you for the climb, and wonder what is it that requires you to give up so much time doing a specific type of hard effort, taking away time that could be spent on other, more enjoyable types of riding, or racing. After awhile, and with much prodding, I began to consider, then train, for a climb that had intimidated me for many years. I did my first climb in 2004, alongside my brother in law, with my sister waiting at the top. It truly was an exciting day, the wet weather couldn't dampen my enthusiasm. There was a feeling of camaraderie with all the people, highly motivated to do the climb, all around me. There is genuine joy in seeing the face of someone you just met 2 hours ago, after they have completed the climb. It's a fast way to make friends. After the race, however, I was ambivalent about the experience. I was proud of myself, but at the time I wasn't itching to sign up for it again.

As Richard Fries, at this year's awards ceremony said "As you are half way into the climb, you swear at yourself for being there, but later on, you find yourself starting to make plans for the following year." I guess any of the repeat climbers can agree with this.

For myself, I figured I'd give it one more try. I had a goal of finishing within the 1 hour 20 min. time, to get into the top notch category, then that would be it. I had come close, I figured if I tried a little harder next time, I could do it.

I think I took the mountain too lightly. I couldn't just mentally make myself go faster the second year, as if I wasn't trying as hard as I could the first year. This was proven to me at the practice ride in July, where, under perfect conditions I had a disappointing, slower time. Luckily, there was a month to go, and after some critical self assessment, I was able to begin to turn things around.

As anyone who has been there will agree, the top of the mountain, at the finish, is a scene of much emotion and confusion. Riders are somewhat disoriented from the climb, trying to find their drivers, not really sure what to do at the top. It's crowded, the announcer is on the loudspeaker, people are cheering. This year, the weather added to the confusion. There was very little visibility, the wind was a gale force. Everyone is stuck there, waiting for the time to ride down. Amidst this, however, everyone is happy, congratulating each other.

After I had changed, I was starting to make my way down to the parking lot with my bike. In trying to avoid the crowds, I passed by a couple, away from everyone else. The guy, probably her husband, had finished the climb. He still had his helmet and bike clothes on. She had regular clothes on, not a rider, but a supporter. I was used to seeing couples happily embracing all around. These two were crying, and locked in a tight embrace. I don't know what kinds of feelings were going through this woman, but her sobbing was so pure, and heartfelt, that I couldn't look away. I couldn't move. The whole bike race faded. I had never seen a display of emotion like this before. There were others affected the same way. To my left was a woman videotaping the scene. Before I could feel any anger at her for what she was doing, I saw she was crying openly too, as she watched. It was a beautiful experience that affected me deeply. I won't forget it.

Now I think I'm learning why people keep doing this. My time was 1.17.23 See you next year.