

One Racers View on the Toughest Hillclimb in the World

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-This letter was sent by a racer to his friend in hopes to give an idea of what the race is like..

With the exception of the final 50 yards and a maybe a 40 yard section a mile out from the finish, I think the steepest continuous slopes are inside the first 2.5 mile of the climb. That's not such bad news because those are the miles you will be at your freshest. That being said, the gradient isn't static. There are long steep stretches 100 yards to say 1/3 of a mile long but then it will flatten out and let you breath for 20 yards or so before kicking up again. It's very difficult to find a rhythm in here with all of the undulations. But just watch your HR and don't go above that ceiling. Give yourself a cadence range, stick to it and just shift up when you come to a more mellow section or just take a little breather if you need to. These steep sections and "flats," if you may call them (min. 12% I'm guessing), continue up to ~ 2.5 miles where....

Things seem to get more regular. Just long, steep (not as steep as some of the previous stuff though) and continuous. There are lots of turns here. Not real switch backs, but you'll notice the rising inclines coming around the insides of the bends. Another point to mention is the road conditions. The first few miles of pavement seems more smooth and gives less rolling resistance than the paved sections between miles 2.5-5.5 and then final mile or so. However, there is good news here. If you pay attention (which most of my fellow riders did not, much to their disadvantage, I believe) there are smooth patches on most of these rougher sections from people driving their cars up the access roads. STAY ON THEM! If I remember correctly, the road winds a bit more and the scenery becomes less woody and more mountainous towards the upper parts of this section. Its a bit more near the top of this section before..... it just gets worse.

At around mile 5 you are going to be above the treeline and soon thereafter onto my favorite part of the mountain, the dirt. What this part of the hill lacks in relative steepness, it very much makes up for in technical difficulty and shear brutality (avoid rocks, potholes, standing up.... tires will slide out, and getting toppled off your bike, or worse, off the mountain by the winds). At ~5.5 miles, after coming onto the first section of dirt, which you likely recognize as quite difficult to ride up, you will come around a wide hairpin and likely crap your pants. The tremendously difficult section that you've just completed has a twin. A much uglier, nasty and steep one. This is where I got blown off twice and busted my chain on the practice ride. Smile, grit your teeth and keep pedaling. On race day this is where I started to get really tired, and thus angry, and then faster. The road is mainly dirt between 5 and ~ 7 miles with a one or two short, paved let-ups between. I was the happiest guy ever coming off that section because I was able to stand up, finally, after 2 miles of crunching in the saddle. That was short lived however. A few meters after coming off the dirt, you're gonna come around a left hand bend where I *almost* did something that I never thought I would do. I nearly had to walk my bike! I don't know if it was just from standing and getting the HR too high or whatever, but man, did that kill. I even cursed at a few hikers watching from the side of the road and cheering me on it was so tough. Good thing I was exasperated because I really didn't mean what I said and in no way was my slobbering, breathless rants coherent to the mile 7 cheering section. This is where the fun starts, really! People are everywhere inside the last .75 miles and the road flattens out quite a bit. Wind out your 26-23 or whatever ridiculously small gear that needs to be used to get up this trully ridiculus mountain but just look good doing it! You can even get aero and use the drops a bit. Crank it up, but save a little to put on a show and sprint up the final, and steepest section, right before the observatory. Cross the line, look back and your time and promptly collapse in a pile of spent muscle and lungs. You've made it. Eat some cliff bars and fall asleep.