

My Third GranFondo NY and My Third Climb Up Mont Ventoux (Both within One Month!)

By Jay Jacobson (member since the 1990's)

Could I do it? Since I haven't attempted either of these challenges in the past 3 or 4 Years, I decided early in 2017 to check myself out on hill climbing and long ride endurance. In April I rode my favorite century (Piermont-West Point-Newburgh-Beacon-Piermont) three Times. I self- tested myself on climbing at Speer/Next Day, Ash and Perkins. Because I was able to complete the centuries in less than 10 hours including rest stops and didn't have much difficulty with the climbs I enrolled for GFNY.

A good day for it! The GFNY 2017 on May 21 involved 8500 feet of climbing and 100 miles of cycling, mostly in Rockland County, NY. The day turned out to be one of the four days this Spring with perfect weather. Rockland County never looked more beautiful!

Among the 4500+ entrants waiting on the lower level of the G.W. bridge early that morning, I ran in to NYCC members Grace P., Manny, Olivia, Bob Schmon. Maura, Dineida and Kazoo. My objective was to finish this epic race before the timing computers shut down.

Great planning and execution In addition to the brilliant weather the 2017 Fondo seemed to best my 2 previous Fondos with respect to its management and coordination, food and rest stops (which I only used once) and closures of automobile traffic. Police from 20 municipalities performed superbly insuring the bicyclists had priority on their roads.

It seemed like in the first 20 miles or so there was less dangerous bunching then in past races of cyclist at the start, on the Alpine ascent and entering Piermont on Rockland Road. GFNY founders Lidia and Uli Fluhme should be saluted for their constant efforts and improvements over the years. Their apparent success with the NY event has spawned between 10 and 20 GFNY's in such places as Uruguay and Indonesia for them.

A challenging and memorable experience Joan greeted me in Piermont with a musette bag and a kiss so I could skip most of the time consuming rest stops. There were entrants from dozens of countries and it seemed that Brazil had sent the most entrants of any foreign nation. I enjoyed my brief chats with them along the way. There were some very challenging climbs in Stony Point and Tomkins Cove, which are not on the routes I have taken on NYCC rides.

By the time I reached West Nyack on the return leg, it was apparent that I would achieve my goal of reaching the Fort Lee finish line well before the deadline. It turned out that there were only three men (no women) in my age group. The other 4500 or so were all younger and many of them finished after we did or didn't finish at all.

An hour and half before the deadline I was thrilled to hear my name on the P.A. as I approached the finish line and I waved to the spectators applauding me. I felt good, not totally spent and I easily cycled an additional five miles or so to my car. Now I am thinking about the GFNY 2018!



7500 more feet of climbing! June 21 found me in Provence on the 3rd day of Backroads “Cotes du Rhone Vineyards & the Luberon” which started and ended in Avignon. It was my 39th tour with this extraordinary company! The tour was flawless in every respect (weather, leaders, fellow cyclists, accommodations, cuisine). Exquisite scenery included lavender fields, hectares of vineyards and mountains Cezanne used as a backdrop for his paintings. Mont Ventoux (our climbing goal!) was frequently in sight watching us from most directions. For this day our 18 cyclists had an option of “going up” Mont Ventoux, “The Giant of Provence” 13 miles of climbing with no dips, 7.5 gradient climb, a frequent stage of the Tour de France

Only two of our group of 18 opted to tackle it. A “bloke” from Melbourne, Australia, Kevin, and I decided to do it together. We agreed to do it at a “leisurely” pace with no specific time objective. We made a few brief stops and completed it in about 3 hours. The Backroads support person, Laurie caught up with us in her support van as we were about halfway up and kept driving just ahead and just behind us the rest of the way up.

My time for this 3rd attempt may have been a little longer because I was racing a bit in my previous attempts (which were both successful) We enjoyed the dry and moderate weather with no extreme heat or winds..

After we passed the tree line, it seemed to get a bit steeper or maybe I was a bit tired but the ascent got a little more difficult, but was manageable for us.

Tom Simpson was an English cyclist in the 1967 Tour. He collapsed and died near the peak. An autopsy indicated that he had taken drugs. We passed a monument for him on the side of the road just before the end of our climb. An observance was planned for the 50th anniversary of this event on July 13, 2017.

I recalled that I didn’t particularly enjoy coming back down on my previous ride there, My wrist got stiff from braking, I got cold and my helmet got loose from the wind and the strap tightened around my neck so I opted to be a passenger in Laurie’s vehicle for the way down. I spent the rest of the day relaxing at the hotel’s beautiful pool. It turned out that my Piermont next door neighbors brother-in-law from England conquered Ventoux the week we did. I learned that he had a serious accident on the downhill and is still in a French hospital recovering.

Incidentally after my second Ventoux climb a number of years ago I wanted to show my wife, Joan what it was like. Since I don’t drive a stick shift car I rented the only automatic car available, an Italian Lancia. Halfway up the mountain, its engine malfunctioned and it never was able to reach the summit!



Cooling down After a few more glorious cycling days that tour ended on a high note and I spent the weekend in Aix-en-Provence and readied myself for another 6 day Backroads tour (my 40th), On this one I was one of twenty six cyclists leaving Provence for the French Riviera. Although this tour didn't have anything comparable to the Mont Ventoux climb I enjoyed the larger (26) group with interesting people, the changing but gorgeous scenery as we approached St. Tropez and got our first glimpse of the Mediterranean.

Like the Grand Fondos' Fluhmes, Backroads' Tom Hale has developed a product which has given thousands of cyclists much enjoyment and in my opinion they deserve the financial returns they have reaped.

The Backroad tours were followed by a reunion with Joan and spending some time on the magnificent beaches in the area.

Now I am back in New York and looking forward to doing a lot of cycling and leading New York Cycle Club rides. Hope to see you on them!

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