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Otis, Me and Caboose—The 1975 Davis Double Century

We had been warned for weeks prior to the Davis Double Century that a tandem didn't have a prayer on such a hilly course—one that included 7500 vertical feet. When my partner Otis Guy and I arrived at the start in Davis we were especially concerned to see that several Category 1 and 2 racers had shown up, including all the best riders from Peter Rich's Velo Sport team, but we were determined to give it our best shot.

After about ten miles we broke clear of the bunch. They let us go, assuming that they would reel us back in on the hills above Lake Berryessa (Mile 40). We thought so too, and figured we had better get as far as possible up those hills before being caught. By the top of those hills we were up by ten minutes. By the bottom of St. Helena Grade, near Calistoga (Mile 70), we were ahead by twenty.

We were going at a record pace and the supplementary food stations weren't even in place yet. We had expected to have a support vehicle follow us, but it had suffered a mechanical at the start line. We had filled our pockets with food at the start, but by St. Helena Grade, rations were running low. Furthermore our front wheel began detensioning on the 7-mile-long, 3000-foot-high climb. We could no longer both stand up for fear of the wheel's collapsing, so our climbing speed was hampered.

Midway up we could tell that the chase group was closing in, as support vehicles were surging ahead to see how close we were. We pleaded with them for a spare wheel, but all we received were progressively discouraging time reports. By the time we reached the summit our wheel was in sad shape. We stopped and deemed the wheel too dangerous for the descent.

Since our breakaway, we had been accompanied by Paul Grammons, also of Marin and a Davis DC veteran. Paul had been acting as our impromptu tour guide and was soon to be our savior. A freak May storm was blowing through and now it was sleeting at the top of Robert Louis Stevenson Summit on the shoulder of Mount St. Helena. The whole situation was making us pretty demoralized.

Then we heard from a passing car that Velo Sport ace George Mount had dropped out on the climb. It was our first ray of hope in a long while: The chase group was suffering too! Timidly, we asked Paul if we could exchange our flimsy front wheel for his front wheel. He had no

qualms at all. We made the change and the three of us sped on down the curvy road towards Clear Lake.

We were now in the middle of a deluge and Paul was having difficulty seeing through all the water and road grime splashing onto his glasses. I would look back while banked over in the turns and see Paul wrestling to keep his wobbly-wheeled bike on the road—two times he came very close to losing it. Halfway down Otis noticed that our borrowed front wheel's sew-up tire was taking on a queer appearance. He had never seen the likes of it before. The tire seemed to be rotating transversely on the rim, so that the top of the tire was now shared on one half by the tread and the other half by the silk casing. Meanwhile our wheel on Paul's bike was about to call it quits. We came to a stop near the bottom of the grade to assess the situation. I was just glad we had all been able to stay upright. But what to do now, with a pack of riders about to descend on us? Paul insisted that Otis and I keep the best wheel and continue on. But after Paul's heroic wheel exchange, Otis and I couldn't just leave Paul there. We were finished and that was that.

Just then we heard the faintest honk of a horn. Way down at the end of a long straight we could see someone jumping up and down, the flash of spokes above his head—a wheel! Our pleas were finally answered and we hobbled down to the truck. It was two employees from A & A Bike Shop of Santa Rosa. We gave them big hugs and slapped the new wheel onto the tandem—Paul getting his wheel back. We were now a very united threesome. The three of us were going to finish together or not at all.

At Middletown (Mile 85) the turn marshalls were in place, but there was still no sign of food. All our own food supplies had long since been exhausted. Fortunately I had brought along some packets of Dextrose and we headed up Big Canyon doling out those last doses of energy. By the last climb before the Lower Lake lunch break we were once again bonking, and badly! We could see the chase group speeding up the canyon below us. They were closing rapidly. Halfway up the climb, George Mount came by in a car and with his trademark friendly grin offered the pointed opinion that we were going to die. On the last pitch before the top they caught us. Velo Club Tamalpais teammate Gary Fisher called out from the pack, saying the top was just ahead. We mustered up enough energy to stay in contact over the top and, together, we all rolled into the Lower Lake (Mile 100) mandatory one-hour rest stop.

The three of us were on absolute empty. Food never tasted so good! I could feel that white bread and baloney racing through my veins to replenish my body's depleted stores. Instant assimilation. And an hour later—total restoration. Our

bicycles and bodies rejuvenated, we hit the road with the former chase group.

For the next 50 miles the clouds were clearing and a northwest wind was building as we all hammered along taking turns at the front. Paul displayed our tight alliance by shunning his turn, pulling off in our wake, annoying the others to no end. It was time to get away from this bickering.

On the last big downhill, coming into Bear Valley (Mile 150), a stiff tailwind was pushing us at 65 mph and everyone was strung out from our wheel in full tuck. Paul came up with the decisive move. He slipped to the back edge of our slipstream, did a little wobble and quickly closed the gap yelling, "GO!". We spun that 62 x 13 for all we were worth. The surprised pack, now in chaos, was instantly and cleanly severed from its head. Velo Sport et al stayed in hot pursuit as we sped down Bear and Cache Creeks. After twenty minutes they slipped out of sight behind us. The three of us sped on, occasionally getting a gap time from abandoned cyclists now in cars. After about an hour, Ron Miller and Don Davis drove alongside. Otis asked, "Are they hurting?" Their response was, "Yeah, they're really hurting!" We cruised downwind back to Davis, winning by twenty minutes in a record 8 hours, 59 minutes for the 206 miles.

Contrary to pre-race warnings, the typical reaction to our win was now,
"Well no wonder—you were on a tandem."