

# Racing Around the Clock at Bike Sebring 12/24 Hour Race

By Wendy Gardiner



Pete Masiel and Wendy Gardiner

BIKE SEBRING 12/24 HOUR RACE

The Adventures of Pete and Wendy  
[www.peteandwendycycling.com](http://www.peteandwendycycling.com)

It starts when we are kids. We want to know how far we can run. How high we can jump. How fast we can throw a ball. How long we can hold our breath under water.

And when we're all grown up and become endurance cyclists, we challenge ourselves with how fast can we ride and for how long.

Riding a bicycle for 24 hours may seem ridiculous to some, but completely normal to others. So it depends on whom you ask.

To put things in perspective, in 24 hours a person could watch 48 television sitcoms; watch 12 movies at the theatre; see the sun rise and set and rise; go to work, go to sleep and back to work; and drive non-stop from Miami to Maine.

But instead of those things, I rode my bike for 338 miles at the Bike Sebring 12/24 Hour in Florida on Sat., February 17. My long and event-filled weekend began Friday morning at 5 a.m. when Pete and I had breakfast and began loading the car.

We were meeting our friend, Lee, where we would ride with him to Florida. But getting two people, two bikes, tools, food, blankets, pillows, and a tent was a task when the vehicle is a two-door Acura Integra. It took over an hour to load the car.

But with everything packed, including the extra bike wheel sticking into the back of Pete's neck, we made our 20-mile trip to Lee's house where we unloaded everything as Lee looked on in disbelief. How could two people need so much stuff for 24 hours!

With three people, three bikes, and supplies to last a week, we headed to Florida. On the way we stopped at mine and Pete's favorite restaurant where we love

to eat on long rides – KFC. No low carb, low fat foods for us; it's time to load up! We enjoyed the Pepsi (I only drink the



Pete and Wendy at the Bike Sebring 12/24 Hour Race awards ceremony Feb. 17, 2007

real stuff on long bike rides), fried chicken and peach pie, knowing that in a few hours, it would all be burned up.

Ten hours after leaving Atlanta, we were at the Bike Sebring 12/24 Hours registration getting race details. After that we quickly unloaded the bikes and supplies in front of Don's RV, where we were staying the night with his wife, Joy, and their friend, Troy.

We moved quickly in the cool night air, setting up the tent, readying our bikes with NiteRider lights, placing the sensor that tracks our mileage on the skewers, and loading up Don and Joy's vehicle

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where our supplies would be taken the next afternoon.

I was beginning to wonder why I was doing this. Friday's evening temperatures dipped into the low 30s with strong winds. By this time Saturday night, we would have ridden nearly 14 hours.

The spaghetti I had made in the crockpot overnight was the perfect pre-race meal. Joy, Don, Pete and I shared bike stories while taking a few minutes to relax before the chaos of race preparations continued.

As a kid, all I did was wheel my bike out of the garage and start riding. No special clothing, shoes, or pedals were required. I don't even remember pumping up the tires. But getting prepared to ride 24 hours takes numerous hours to prepare and organize the supplies needed.

The 24-hour race also had a 12-hour race component. In the 24-hour race, racers competed in either the RAAM-qualifier (Race Across America) with no drafting, or the drafting event where racers could work together to battle the winds.

The 12- and 24-hour race started promptly at 6:30 a.m., while Pete and I started at 6:35 a.m. No matter how much time I have to get ready for a race, I always need a few more minutes!

Our day started by riding three laps on the 3.7-mile Sebring raceway. It was a flat course with long straight-aways, sandwiched between left- and right-hand turns. Pete and I worked a little harder than planned to make up for the late start. I heated up fast and removed my legwarmers and shell gloves at the end of the three laps to expose my legs and fingers to 35-degree temperatures.

After a couple of miles, I thought maybe it was not such a good idea to remove my gloves. It didn't take long to lose most of the dexterity in my fingers. Pointing out road hazards and shifting gears were chores.

Pete was now out of sight on his goal of riding 425 miles, so I was alone to watch my fingers turn blue and to see the skin on the backs of my hands begin to crack.

About an hour into the 89-mile course, we passed a pasture that had sprinklers near a fence that had been running all

night. The water on the fence had turned to ice and the ground was frosted white. I looked at it and realized I definitely wasn't the sharpest tool in the toolbox. What was I thinking when I left my gloves 18 miles back?

Surprisingly, my legs felt pretty good in spite of the goose bumps. My best defense against the cold was to keep moving. I played leapfrog with a group of cyclists that consisted of several girls from the Sorella Cycling Team in Atlanta. Their teamwork and camaraderie were awesome.

The rules called for no drafting, so when I caught up with their large group, I would go around, only for them to swarm around me again. I apologized for not being more social, but they understood since one of their teammates, Julie Gazmarian, also was competing in the RAAM-qualifying category.

The 89-mile course was an out-and-back. I saw the first racer heading back towards me. Well, I guess there was a cyclist in there. What I saw coming at me looked like a yellow torpedo. It was about three feet high and appeared to be about 18 inches wide at its midsection between tapered ends. It appeared that this torpedo was traveling at least 15 to 20 mph faster than me.

By estimating the distance on my Polar 625X heart rate monitor, he had to be at least 20 miles ahead of me already! It was about 15 minutes before I saw the cyclist in second place.

By the time I reached the turn-around point, I could feel my fingers again. It was now in the upper 40s and I was feeling good. My legs felt strong and my spirits were high as I briefly chatted with cyclists that I would pass, and with those who

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*Pete and Wendy in Don and Joy's RV just moments before the start of the Bike Sebring 12/24 Hour race.*

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passed me.

I finished my first century in 5 hours, 40 minutes. After completing the 89-mile course, racers were then directed to an 11-mile loop that we were to ride on until 6:30 p.m. This course had headwinds on three of the four sections, with one section having headwinds and a hill climb. With each lap, I dreaded the winds and the climb until I finally realized they weren't only affecting me, but everyone else.

It was at that point I changed my outlook – ride easy into the winds tucking as small as I could into the aerobars, or drops, and take it easy on the hill climbs. But the fourth section was the reward. Right at the last right turn of each lap, I downshifted two or three gears, stood up and pushed hard, picked up speed, and cruised in my aerobars at speeds up to the high 20s. I felt incredibly strong and relaxed and confident.

After about 10 minutes, I was at the end of the lap at the start/finish area where racers pass pit row. All the vehicles and support crew were in this area, along with someone grilling and selling burgers all day. Great. My mouth watered with each lap. The smoke rose up and greeted the racers on every lap. So I opened up a vanilla bean GU packet and kept rolling.

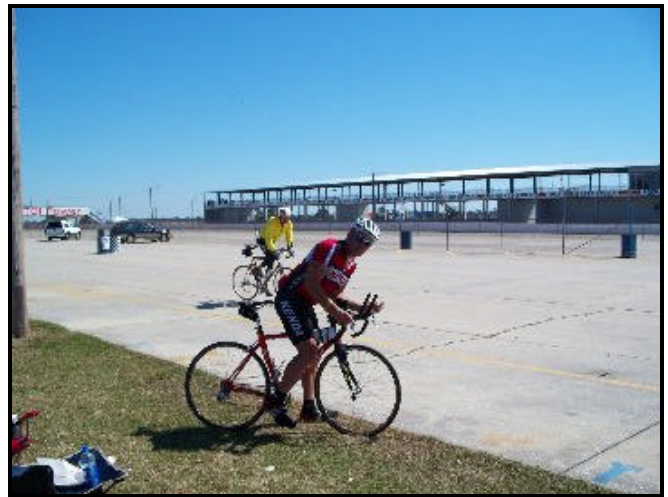
Back out on the 11-mile loop again. And there goes the yellow torpedo again. More headwinds. Turn right. More headwinds. Climb three small hills. Descend. More headwinds. Turn right. Haul ass. Finish line. Burgers. GU. Yellow torpedo... And repeat eight times. You get the picture.

As the clock ticked closer to 6:30 p.m., racers were directed to now race on the 3.7-mile Sebring racecourse. By 6:30 p.m., I had ridden 200 miles. Pete and I stopped to add more clothes, eat and put the NiteRider Moab lights on our bikes.

Our plan was to make brief stops and keep riding as long as possible, but had to make a prolonged stop to get things organized from the transition of having our supplies at pit row and now moved to the race course.

Don's wife, Joy, kindly moved our supplies in their vehicle to our new staging area. Although we moved as quickly as we could, we estimate we lost about 90 minutes at this stop. Pete started riding while I did last-minute preparations to our area. During the day, he had left items for me for my rest stops, so I wanted to make sure I made his evening transitions as easy as I could.

All of the 24-hour idiots...I mean racers, were now on the race course pedaling incessantly. This course was one with no breaks. Constant pedaling was required as it was a struggle for me to get much above 17 mph. The friendly chatter during the daytime hours gradually declined as night fell.



*Pete in a hurry to get back on the race course.*

I enjoyed feeling the cold night air on my face, the smooth surface of the course under my wheels, and the feeling of sheer independence I felt while riding at night. My NiteRider Moab lights lit up the course not just in front of me, but to the sides to where I had excellent peripheral vision. One racer was amazed at the lights' beam and asked what kind of lights I had.

Pete and I can't thank Jack at NiteRider enough for his generous support of us in our pursuit of endurance cycling and our goal of racing in the Race Across America (RAAM). After riding several distance events, I've learned that having the right lights is imperative to my safety and I wouldn't settle for anything less than a top-of-the-line product like NiteRider.

To guide the racers along the course, the race officials dotted the course with red blinking lights. By 2 a.m. the red blinking lights on the course, mixed with the red blinking lights on the racers' bikes in front of me began to play tricks on my mind.

I had now been awake for 22 hours. Although I had the brightest beams out there, my eyes darted left and right to follow the course.

Twice I caught myself riding straight onto another portion of the car's racecourse that was not part of our race. By now, no one was talking much. And the people I saw became even more

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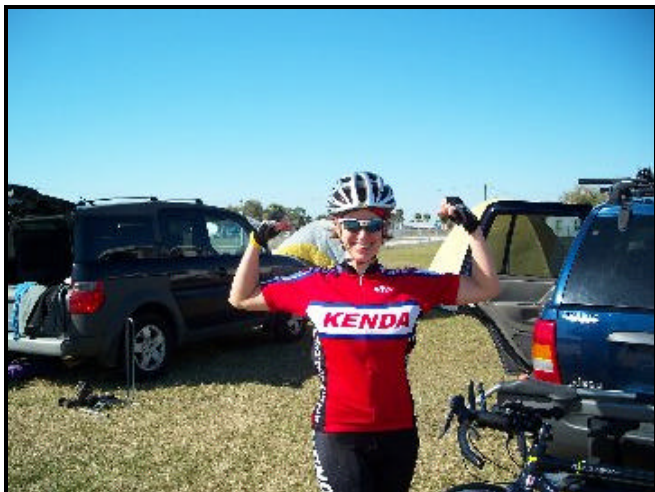
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scarce. Racers were dropping out or taking sleep breaks. And I hadn't seen Pete for what seemed like hours, so I figured he was napping, too.

Just before one of my laps, the red light on my Moab lights came on signaling the battery was low and that it would utilize the LED lights as backups. I contribute what happened next to operator error, as I had not charged up my lights enough. Brand new NiteRider batteries take many, many



Wendy feeling strong after completing the first 100 miles of the Sebring 12/24 Hour Race.

hours over several days to charge, where I had only charged them for one day.

About seven minutes into this lap, my rear red light falls off. Another racer tells me it was just my tail light and to not worry about it and to keep going. So I did. And about a minute later, my lights go out. I stop and am standing there in total darkness all alone with no lights and no recollection of where I was on the course.

Within a couple of minutes, two other racers went by, so I caught up with them to ride on their lights. I don't think they even saw me. Fortunately, the pit area was less than a half-mile away. I replaced the battery and started over again for another lap.

On each lap, the pit area was full of crew members wrapped up head to toe in

sleeping bags, sleeping, or staying half-way awake with warm cups of coffee. Their eyes glazed in the early morning hours as racer after racer past the start/finish area.

I guess it was me being partially goofy and also wanting to do some entertaining, so I sang a song to the small, frozen crowd. Many of these same people had cheered me on about 10 hours earlier on the 11-mile loop, so now it was my turn to cheer them up.

As I approached the start/finish area, I downshifted into hard gears, stood up, pedaled slowly and sang to the rhythm of my pedal stroke – “Rolling, rolling, rolling... Oh my hiney's swollen... Rawhide!” And then I was gone, but still within earshot of their laughter and applause.

So the next lap I came by and yelled, “Does anyone have any extra quads I can borrow?!” Laughter also erupted. If anything, these people are going to have trouble remembering details of the race in its 21<sup>st</sup> hour, but they'll remember some nut singing a song about her swollen hiney.

Around 3 a.m. I saw Pete at our supplies. He was upset because his Polar 625X heart rate monitor and NiteRider lights interfered with each other. The mileage that was recorded on the monitor was actually 30 miles less than what the race officials had for him. So thinking he wouldn't make his goal of 425 miles, Pete backed off, took extended breaks, and quit riding, when I did, when the rain came.

When I saw him, he realized he could have achieved that goal if he hadn't stopped. However, my monitor, with the way it was set up, was fine. And I knew that I wasn't making my goal of 400 miles.

So I took a prolonged stop for some gourmet Ramen Noodle soup in a Styrofoam cup. Chicken flavor. I guess that means there's no chicken in there, but the flavor of chicken. Whatever it was, it was delicious at 3 a.m.

At 3:25 a.m. the rain started. And at 3:30 a.m. I stopped. There were about three racers remaining on the course with one of them being Julie Gazmarian. Julie is a strong, determined endurance cyclist who knew what it took to reach 400 miles and qualify for RAAM.

And one of the most important things in races like this is to stay on the bike. Congratulations to her for qualifying and for a stellar performance at Sebring! And congratulations to Dennis Grek for accumulating 522 miles in his yellow torpedo.

As soon as I stopped, my body began shivering from the chill in the air and my rain-soaked clothes. I changed into warm,

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baggy sweat pants and shirt. What a relief to be out of spandex.

My eyes burned and my lids drooped as I struggled to stay awake. But I succumbed to sleep as I rolled up in the sleeping bag and napped on the sidewalk.

I don't know how long I slept there before I was awakened by Pete, Lee, and his girlfriend Jamie telling me that it was almost time for the awards. In my confusion, I had no idea I was winning an award myself; I thought I was going to show support for my fellow racers.

But I did win an award – first place for my age group. Pete won second place in his age group. We smiled in our pictures. Chatted with fellow racers. Drank warm coffee and overall looked pretty good considering we had been up all night getting a week's worth of miles ridden in 20 hours.



We accepted our awards, said our goodbyes, *Pete and Wendy taking time to kid around during the 20th hour of their 24th hour bicycle race.*

loaded the car and off we went to the nearest restaurant to begin replacing the 7,000 calories I had burned and the 13,000 Pete had burned. It was difficult eating when I couldn't keep my eyes open.

After breakfast, Pete and I slept in the back of Jamie's minivan while Lee drove. We struggled finding comfortable positions, which required our legs be straight to compensate for the knee and quad pain.

### Our Special Thanks to the Following People

*Jack at NiteRider* for lighting our way to the podium. Our NiteRider Moab lights were the best lights out there!

*Jim and Stefon* at Kenda for their support the past three years.

*Jeff* with Polar for providing heart rate monitors for our races and training.

*Joy Mayne* for her support of us during the race. She had our supplies and meals ready to keep us on the road longer.

*Don and Joy Mayne* for letting us stay with them in their RV Friday night at the race course. I slept so good and felt so comfortable staying with them.

*Jamie Miller* for providing support on the century course.

*Lee Childers* for driving us back to Atlanta when Pete and I could barely keep our eyes open.

*Jackie Tyson* of Peloton Sports for helping put us on the road to RAAM (Race Across America).

Pete and I slept for most of the ten-hour drive back to Atlanta and then slept almost 12 hours the next day. It would take days, or perhaps a couple of weeks, to fully recover.

We made groaning sounds with every movement to stand up, sit down, and to go up or down steps. And as many athletes do to improve their performances, we analyzed what went right, what went wrong, and how to do better next time.

Next time? I couldn't believe I was actually talking about a *next* time. But so is the life of an endurance cyclist. We may be beat, but we're not beat down. And just like kids, we'll find something else to challenge us.

Maybe for my next challenge, we'll see how long it takes to ride across the country.

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