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FEATURE



RAIDing the State

Iowa Falls native Jesse Off acknowledged supporters as he moved through downtown. He won Saturday's 'Ride Across Iowa in a Day' event, completing the race in 16 hours and 10 minutes.

TOP PHOTO SUBMITTED/BOTTOM TWO PHOTOS COURTESY RIDE ACROSS IOWA

Off wins endurance bike race in 16 hours

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Bike enthusiasts who participate in RAGBRAI every year have seven days to complete more than 400 miles along that route.

But those who attempt to tackle the 'Ride Across Iowa in a Day' event - known to many as RAID - probably think the former is a piece of cake.

Saturday's (Oct. 7) 335-mile bike trip across the state featured a local flavor, as Jesse Off - a 1996 Iowa Falls graduate - returned to his home state to compete in the race. Not only did he participate, but Off recorded the top time, finishing the event in roughly 16 hours and 10 minutes.

Off said he entered the race expecting to contend for the win, crediting his years of experience and training. The only unknown factor was the fact he had not participated in the RAID event before.

"It's always exciting to win a race event like that, where endurance plays a big role," Off said. "When we started, there were 34 people lined up to race, but I know not everyone was able to finish."

Some competitors had the chance to do half-races, and they began their competition in Webster City before moving toward Dubuque.

Off said he typically hits a "low point" after the first 150 miles of a bike race, but he found some unexpected emotional fuel from seeing family and friends cheering him on as he made his way through Iowa Falls.

"That was cool to see. It kind of gives you that extra motivation you feel is lacking during those low points," Off said. "I went through over 11,000 calories during the race."

Competitors began their quest meeting in a hotel parking lot in Sioux City, before finishing on the other side of the state (Dubuque). In between, bikers peddled through many communities, trekking across the state in less than 24 hours. For those who have experienced it, the race is one of the ultimate tests of endurance.

The conditions also determine how riders fare over the day, and temps reached the mid-70s by afternoon.

Off's interest in cycling began while he was attending Iowa State University, majoring in computer engineering. He eventually moved west, when a company offered to move him to Tucson, Ariz.

"I first started racing with bikes in the early 2000s. My first racing season was 2001. In Arizona, it was called United States Cycling Federation (USCF), so it was a lot of local clubs. There's a race schedule, and the sea-



Darkness encompassed the participants during the start of Saturday's 'Ride Across Iowa in a Day' event. The race began in Sioux City and moved east toward Dubuque.



Family members greeted Off at locations such as Iowa Falls and Webster City. He said seeing familiar faces gave him the motivation and drive to continue the lengthy jaunt across the state.

What is RAID?

RAID is an annual ride/race across the State of Iowa. This year's route was 335 miles in length, from Sioux City to Dubuque. In response to public interest, organizers created two RAID half rides, about 167 miles each, for those wanting to participate, but not yet ready to tackle the full 335 miles. Riders must wear helmets and must obey all Iowa traffic laws, and are required to arrange their own vehicle support.

son starts in January and finishes in the fall," Off said. "That's where I met my wife, Lynn."

Initially, Off said he purchased a road bike and decided to see how far he could ride in from an endurance standpoint. During 2001, he made the decision to bike all the way from Tucson to Iowa Falls. That trip took him two and a half weeks. Lately, he's been participating in gravel racing, which are longer events and test mental and physical endurance.

He said the keys to success are consistent riding.

"You can't follow a seven week pro-

gram and be good at these races. A lot is mental endurance. When it starts to hurt, you know that you can handle it. Eating properly on the bike and keeping your fuel as much as possible. Knowing signs your body gives you. I will go too hard for an hour, but I know I can recover because there's an easier portion coming up," Off said.

Off uses a very specific nutrition program that works for him. For Saturday's RAID race, the event began at 4 a.m. He woke up at 2:30 a.m. to put down 600 calories of liquid. At 4 a.m., his goal was to roll out of bed and begin the race.

He said endurance bike races are more of a battle within than versus fellow riders.

"Priority wise, you have to finish. When you feel good about that, I focus on minimizing stops and pushing the pace to get a good time. Then you start doing it like a race and get competitive. If you think competitively, six hours later, you will be toast. A race probably occurs in the last 100 miles," Off said. "Cycling is a life adventure that you can do when you are 70-plus years-old...if you focus on fitness and taking care of your body." ■