

Ultracycling: Past, Present and Future

by John Hughes, Managing Director of the UMCA

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I first raced the Davis, CA, Double Century in 1976 – it was a timed event then and three years later I organized my own series of brevets, qualified and then rode and finished Paris-Brest-Paris '79.

I had 22 years of ultra experience when Lon Haldeman and Michael Shermer asked me to be the Managing Director on the UMCA starting January 1, 1998.

I. What is Ultracycling?

Ultracycling is not limited to a particular format nor by geography. Rather, it is characterized by:

Challenge, not distance. Ultracycling is distinguished by the challenge that an endurance rider faces when he or she tries to excel on the bike whether it is riding a century, completing a brevet series or racing RAAM.

Behavior, not rules. Individual cyclists participate in a wide range of events and we enjoy the variety: centuries and double centuries, brevets and 1200 km randonnées, road and off-road, drafting and non-drafting races and ultra records. Distances range from 90 to 3,000 miles.

An inspiring dream. Riding a bike is fun in moderation at a relaxed pace with friends. Riding 100 miles is a bit crazy – not to mention riding a 1200 km randonnée. Every sport has a pinnacle to which the participants aspire. Runners remember Frank Shorter and hope to run in the Olympics. Road racers fantasize about competing in the Tour de France. Randonneurs look forward to P-B-P. If ultracycling didn't have RAAM, we'd have to invent it. RAAM inspires us to push our limits – even though many of us will never race in it.

International character: Since 1975 North Americans have participated in P-B-P and the first European entered RAAM in 1984. Our behavior demonstrates that ultracycling is very much an international sport.

II. Foundations of the UMCA

John Marino and Michael Shermer founded the UMCA in 1980 and then RAAM in 1982. Since then I watched participation in RAAM and the UMCA grow and decline. UMCA membership peaked at about 1200 members, but when I became Director at the end of 1997 there were

only 700 members. If the UMCA was going to survive, we needed to rebuild the organization. I identified six elements that would be the foundation of the UMCA:

- ⇒ Broad Definition of Ultracycling
- ⇒ International Character
- ⇒ Accurate Information
- ⇒ Programs
- ⇒ Infrastructure
- ⇒ Organizational Flexibility and Responsiveness

Broad Definition: Some argued that ultracycling is only RAAM and RAAM-style events, or only solo events, not team events, or only non-drafting events at least a certain length such as 12-hours or 200-miles. Each of these narrow definitions only appeals to a small number of riders. With 700 members we had to redefine the sport more broadly to survive.

International Character: Every year ultracyclists are crossing oceans and riding on different continents. For the UMCA to grow we needed to include and support riders and event organizers in many countries.

Solid Information: Before I became Director, *UltraCycling* primarily included war stories from riders about their experiences. Several books had been written on endurance and ultracycling; however, only the devotees of the sport read these. Ultracyclists needed authoritative information on training, equipment, technique, nutrition and mental factors.

Programs: Programs encourage participation and build events. When Don Banas and Rod Doty started the California Triple Crown in 1990 there were four double centuries in California and 32 riders earned the Triple Crown. Chuck Bramwell became CTC director in 1992 and by 1997, before I took over the UMCA, 377 riders earned the CTC and had 11 doubles to choose among. We needed to develop UMCA programs to attract riders and support event organizers.

Infrastructure: Complimenting the broad definition of ultracycling we needed a more comprehensive calendar that included both US and non-US events: classic ultra

events and races, as well as centuries, brevets, randonnées and tours.

Organizational Flexibility and Responsiveness: I'd watched USA Cycling lose members and saw dissatisfied racers start new state organizations. The UMCA must be flexible and responsive, not bureaucratic.

III. How Far Have We Come?

Definition: Both *UltraCycling* and the UMCA programs use an inclusive definition of ultracycling.

International: In 1990 Franz Spilauer, who won RAAM '88, organized the first RAAM qualifier in Europe. By 2006 riders could qualify for RAAM at six events outside the US. The John Marino Competition included seven events in six countries outside the US. A half-dozen Americans went to Europe to compete in LeTour Ultime and 37 riders from 13 countries outside the US raced in RAAM. Fabio Biasiolo and Chris Hopkinson represent the UMCA in Europe and Marko Baloh is our European correspondent.

Information: Starting in 1998 with help from expert Contributing Editors we turned *UltraCycling* into a solid journal of information. My goal was to provide authoritative content to the members, *not* to use the magazine as a vehicle for advertising. That year we published six issues of 48 pages; for 2006 we published six issues averaging 76 pages.

In 2000 we rebuilt the website as an information resource with a complete site index. Then we compiled and reprinted useful articles into books for members: *Preparing for Long Rides* and *Crewing with Fuzzy*.

Challenging programs: Since 1997 the membership has grown from about 700 members to 1,659 at the end of 2006. The growth in members is a direct result of the redefinition of existing programs and the development of new programs:

◆ In 1997 24 members rode 51,059 miles in the National Points Challenge. In 1999 we renamed it the UMCA Mileage Challenge (UMC), in 2004 we added the Larry Schwartz Year-Rounder Challenge to the UMC and in 2006 we renamed it the full program the Year-Rounder Challenge. In 2006 257 riders logged 576,747 miles in the Y-R.

◆ In 2000 we started the John Marino Competition with 14 men and three women and a dozen races. In 2006 91 men and 21 women raced in 41 events.

◆ In 1997 57 riders from eight countries qualified for solo RAAM in one of seven events. In 2003 we began

promoting qualifying for RAAM as a worthy goal, even if the rider didn't plan to do RAAM, and we awarded plaques to every rider who qualified. In 2006 183 riders qualified for RAAM in 17 events including six outside the US. One third of the racers came from Austria, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia and Switzerland.

◆ In 1997 ten ultracycling records were set. In 2004 we ramped up the ultra records program and in 2006 we added 42 records to the books.

Infrastructure: The UMCA now offers insurance to RAAM qualifier and JMC event organizers. We have expanded the website to include a comprehensive set of resources for riders to attempt to set a record. In 2006 we added an on-line database of all riders who have qualified for and/or competed in RAAM.

<i>UMCA Growth</i>		
	1997	2006
Members	700	1650
UMCA events outside US:		
To Qualify for RAAM	1	6
John Marino Comp	None	7
European reps	None	3
<i>UltraCycling</i>	3 issues	6 issues
Website	Down	500 pages
Year-Rounder	24 riders	257 riders
JMC	No	112 racers
	41 events	
Riders Qualifying for RAAM	57 from 8 countries	183 from 14 countries
Records set	10	42
Insurance for Events	No	Yes
On-line Resources:		
Intern'l Calendar	No	Yes
Records Support	No	Yes
RAAM Qual'd Riders	No	Yes
RAAM Veterans	No	Yes
Organization	Private business	Not-for-profit
Elected Board	No	Yes
Constitution	No	Yes
By-Laws	No	Yes
501 (c) 3 tax-exempt	No	Yes

Organizational: So that the UMCA can include a broad set of events in our programs we deliberately don't have a uniform set of rules. The organizational structure is simple. We don't have committees; rather, riders and event organizers work directly with the cognizant chair.

When I became Director in 1998 the UMCA was a private business owned by the owners of RAAM. In 2002 I filed the Articles of Incorporation to change the UMCA from a privately held business to a not-for-profit corporation with a Board elected by the members. The Board and members approved the UMCA Constitution and the Board approved the Bylaws.

I then wrote and filed the application with the Internal Revenue Service to be designate the UMCA as a 501 (c) 3 tax-exempt organization (not-for-profit) which the IRS approved. Since 2003 we have received a total of \$56,183 in donations.

IV. Looking Ahead

Every year several hundred members choose not to renew their memberships. As strong as the programs are, we must reach out to potential new members or the UMCA will shrink and eventually die.

Definition: Including a variety of types of events in UMCA programs has been quite successful. The next step is to broaden geographically the events we include *without* imposing a standard set of ultracycling rules.

International: The UMCA Constitution says "The purpose of UMCA is to promote long-distance bicycling, also known as ultra-cycling, around the world." Europeans have been racing in American events and the very successful JMC points series. As a service to riders and event organizers outside the US we are extending and renaming the points series the Ultracycling Cup, divided into two divisions: the European Cup and the Americas Cup.

Historically the UMCA 24-hour race in Iowa has been billed as the World Championships. I am committed to a set of real championship events and moving the events among venues. In 2005 and 2006 we designated

different races the European Ultra Championship and the North American 12- and 24-Hour Championships. For 2007 we are starting the World Cup of Ultracycling. The World Cup, races selected from the European and Americas Cup, will determine the World Champion.

Information: The next step is to publish web materials in several languages. A second project is to produce a handbook for Team Racing. Team racing is becoming quite popular both in RAAM and in RAAM qualifiers.

Programs: We are beginning two new programs to reach out to different riders. We are supporting women with the Anne Marie McSweeney Scholarship Program (Page 5). We are starting the Dave Holmes Rider Development program to encourage relatively young riders to participate in ultra events.

RAAM is the pinnacle of the sport, motivating riders. It's also a powerful magnet. Each year we receive multiple requests to sanction new RAAM qualifiers in and outside the US. We will leverage the power of RAAM image to attract riders to UMCA programs.

Infrastructure: We will continue to develop the calendar on the website as *the* definitive calendar of international ultracycling events.

Organizational: As we include more events from outside the US an important principle is that the event organizers know their riders, laws and cycling rules far better than the UMCA. When we include an event in a UMCA program the organizer runs the race under his or her own rules, the UMCA just uses results to determine how many points a rider earns in the Cup series or whether a rider has qualified for RAAM.

Equally important is making the Board, officers and chairs more international.

V. Conclusion

The six principles that are the foundation of the UMCA have served us well. We must continue to apply them innovatively as we develop programs fully to realize our mission: promoting long distance cycling around the world.