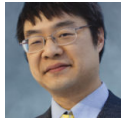


Seattle to Portland (STP) 2007 trip report, part 2 of 4: Spanaway to Toledo

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Note: This story makes much more sense if you read [Part 1](#) first. It won't be any more interesting, but at least it'll be a coherent sort of boring. **12:20pm**: We arrive in Spanaway for the lunch break (54 miles) [[pic](#)]. The consensus among seasoned riders appears to be that the Saturday lunch is pretty lame this year. It consists of a rice and bean wrap, a bagel, and a handful of grapes. I don't think it's so bad, but then again, I don't know what to expect either. Given that we lost a good chunk of time, I suggest that **S**, **Z** and I get a head start, since we tend to go slower. (**S**'s normal pace is a bit slower; **Z** is slower thanks to mechanical problems; and I'm slower because I'm making sure we don't lose **S** and **Z**.) "Grab our bikes and meet back here." **S** and I grab our bikes and meet back here. We can't find **Z**. By the time we find him, the rest of the group (the "fast half" I'll call them) had already decided it was time for them to go, too, so even our head start evaporated before we hit the street at **12:40pm**. I think that **S** and **Z** are ahead of me, so I pick up the pace. Flying down Highway 507 is a blast. The bulk of the riders head single file down the highway, with faster riders forming a "passing lane" just to the left. It's close quarters since the highway still has traffic on it, but everybody seems to know what to do and the miles fly by. I'm glad I have my bell because it saves me from having to put any more stress on my sore throat, which has been worsening throughout the day. Discussing the ride afterwards, **A** noted that when he did STP in one day, it was on this stretch of road between Spanaway and Roy that he joined a paceline and was able to go really fast. Not everybody thinks that this stretch of 507 is all that great, though. (Day Two.) And here's another rider's impressions of the cars on 507. (Day Two.) There was one tricky part about riding along this stretch of road: The white line at the edge of the road had divots cut out of it at regular intervals. For example, it would be clear for twenty feet, and then for twenty feet there would be pits cut into the road. And then clear for twenty feet, and so on. (The purpose is to warn drivers who wander off the edge of the road.) This made changing lanes tricky since you not only had to watch for traffic in the lane you want to change into, but you also have to time your crossing to coincide with one of the clear patches rather than the pitted segment. Apparently not everyone was able to negotiate this obstacle successfully. Between Roy and McKenna, around 295th St, I catch up to the lead group and ask them, "Have you seen **S** and **Z**?" No they haven't; I must've left them behind. I pull over at the entrance to the gravel facility and wait. Six minutes later, they show up, and I'm back

on the road. At the end of the day, **S** asked me, “So did you see the Y in Roy?” *What, Y as in YMCA?* “No, Y like a fork in the road. People were talking about ‘Make sure you don’t miss the Roy Y’ but I didn’t see it.” *The only Y I remember was back in Spanaway, where we turned right at the Shell gas station onto Highway 507.* It turns out I was right without even realizing it. The “Roy Y” is the point in Spanaway where Highway 507 starts. It’s called the “Roy Y” not because it’s in Roy but because it leads to Roy. We continue past the McKenna mini-stop without stopping because it’s only four more miles to the next mini-stop. **2:10pm:** Yelm (mile 72). We take a longer-than-usual break here because **Z** is suffering from fatigue thanks to a suboptimal bicycle. (“Where are the sofas?” he asks.) Inside the portable toilets, there’s a sticker that reads “Sanitary seat covers supplied for an additional charge, upon request of superintendent.” I don’t know what a supperintendent is, but I don’t want him hanging around in portable toilets. We are by now well into the hottest part of the day, and I have to resort to pouring water on my head to cool off. They do it on TV all the time and make it look so easy. It’s quite nice, but also a minor challenge to keep the water from dripping onto your glasses. The fast group heads out first, and some minutes later, us slowpokes get on our bikes and continue onward. Or at least we try to. We are sort of the head of a clump of riders who leave at the same time, and I’m not able to stop them after they miss a turn. I shout feebly (sore throat), but they don’t hear me. I finally catch up when they find themselves at a dangerous intersection with no Dan Henry to tell them what to do. “Hey, you missed a turn back there.” We all turn around and head back, but the damage has been done. We became the trailblazers for hundreds of cyclists who are now heading the wrong way. As we backtrack, we try to tell them, “Wrong way! Go this way!” but they either don’t hear us or don’t understand what we’re trying to say. They probably won’t figure it out until they get to the same dangerous intersection and realize, “Oh, they were trying to tell us we were going the wrong way.” Now on the correct route, we wait for a police officer to stop traffic so we can cross Highway 507 and ride on the Yelm/Rainier/Tenino trail. The first stretch of this trail is tricky since you’re in a big clump, but eventually things spread out and you can ride at your target pace. At mile 77, **Z**’s rear tire springs a flat. **S** goes on ahead, figuring that she’s the slowest of the group and could use the head start. (We won’t see her again until Centralia.) I pull out my patch kit and repair the puncture. A few minutes later, the tube is back in business, and we resume our travels. The bike mirror comes in really handy here, because I can ride ahead of **Z** and check in the mirror that he’s still with me. I’ve figured out that the trick for not getting too far ahead is to shift to a lower gear to slow down; that way I can keep pedaling at my natural cadence without accidentally pulling away. I’m exerting practically no effort at this point in the ride. We reach the crossing at milepost 84 and watch one of the two police officers directing traffic nearly cause an accident. There are two officers at the point where the trail crosses the highway, one standing on each side of the crossing, and each holding a sign that reads STOP on one side and SLOW on the other. The officers agree to stop car traffic, and one officer turns his sign from SLOW to STOP. The other, however, forgets to turn his sign, so it still reads SLOW. The first officer shouts, “Mike! ... Mike, turn the sign!” But Mike doesn’t seem to hear him. Instead, he’s distracted by a motorcycle coming down the highway that fails to come to a stop. He shouts at the

motorcyclist and waves the sign in the rider's face, nearly knocking the rider off the motorcycle. Mike angrily runs to his police cruiser prepared to chase down the motorcyclist for failing to stop, but his partner finally gets his attention. "Mike, I was trying to tell you: You forgot to turn your sign. It still said SLOW." The officers check their signs (STOP) and wave us bicyclists across. A few miles later, we reach the Tenino ministop but keep going because we're pretty far behind schedule at this point. **3:55pm:** We reach the Tenino railroad crossing just in time to watch the Amtrak Cascades 507 go past at 70 mph. I've ridden the Talgo trains many a time, but those are different stories for a different time. It was just interesting seeing the train from the outside. **5pm:** **Z** and I are in Centralia, drawing close to the official midpoint stop at Centralia College, but oh, we get stuck at another railroad crossing. And this isn't a fast crossing like that Amtrak train. This is a cargo train, so it goes nice and slow, and it drags a hundred boxcars behind it. The midpoint stop taunts me from only a mile away. (At least at this crossing, nobody gets impatient and tries to sneak between two train cars, like they did at the finish, or crawl under a stopped train like people allegedly did in Puyallup.) Centralia College is the stopping place for a large number of cyclists, so by the time **Z** and I roll in under the misters it's a pretty festive atmosphere. We missed the orange creamsicles on the way in, but **S** helps us find them. Ah, ice cream. **Z** has been taunted all day by promises of ice cream and met with abject disappointment at each rest stop when he discovers that they don't have any. But now, he has his ice cream. **5:35pm:** We still have another 23 miles to go before we reach our Day One destination, Toledo High School. Once out of downtown Centralia, the route follows Airport Road, with the airport on one side and farmland on the other. There I see the world's largest garden hose reel, about ten feet tall. We also catch up to and chat with a gentleman on a unicycle before resuming speed and continuing to Chehalis. (Here's the web page of a fellow who rode a unicycle in the 2005 STP.) In Chehalis, we diverge from the official route and instead take Jackson Highway, which runs roughly parallel to the east. This was the dreariest part of the ride. It's been a long day, we have 17 miles to go, the rural scenery becomes tiresome, there are hills, it sucks the life out of you. But we have to get there before dark, so we soldier on. (If it's any consolation, **J** says that the main route through Napavine and Winlock is equally dreary.) While riding along Jackson Highway, the lead group passes a woman in her sixties who stops her bicycle and starts to turn around. **S** senses that the woman may be in trouble, and she stops to ask her if she needs any help. Turns out that she's trying to get to the Bethel Church which is her Day One stopping point. (Many churches and schools make themselves available to STP participants.) The woman pulls out a map which has the route to the church highlighted on it. Unfortunately, she's nowhere near that route. We call the church's phone number, but nobody answers. When **S** asks her what she's doing on Jackson Highway instead of following the directions on the sheet, she responds, "Well, I got a green wristband, so I thought I should follow the green arrows painted on the road." Actually, the green arrows lead to Toledo High School. **S** spots a road sign and cycles to it to figure out where we are. (She also calls the lead group to let them know we've stopped to help a lost cyclist.) Meanwhile, I study the map and make small talk. *Have you ridden STP before?* I ask. "This is my first time." *Are you riding with anybody else?* "Nope, I'm by myself." *Wow, that's very, um, courageous of*

you. **S** returns with a location fix, and we realize that the woman is not too far from her destination, even though she definitely chose a suboptimal route to get there. We ride with her to Bishop Road and give her the rest of the directions (“turn left at Rush Road and you’re back on track”). I didn’t want to say “Good-bye”, since that sounds rather ominous, so instead I said, “See you in Portland.” For the rest of the trip, I used that farewell when talking to another rider. It has a very hopeful ring to it. After the woman bicycles away, **S** wonders aloud, “Doesn’t she have kids and grandkids that tell her not to go do stuff like this by herself?” The woman also happens to have the highest bib number I’ll see during the entire ride: 8973. Everybody on STP plays the bib number game, looking for the lowest and highest. Up to this point in the ride, my lowest is 41, part of a group of three riders numbered 41, 42 and 43 who passed me on the Yelm/Rainier/Tenino trail. This record will hold until midway through Day Two, when I see my lowest bib number, 17. (ZappoMan meets Rider Zero, which is the lowest possible bib number unless they have negative numbers.) **6:45pm**: It turns out that our delay for helping the lost woman doesn’t cost us any time, because when **S** and I reach (I am not making this up) Vista Road, we find the lead group sitting by the side of the road tending to a flat tire. **M** ran over a sharp object. And yes, if you look at the map, Vista Road is a dead end. Omen? Who can say. Okay, tube all patched up, back onto the road. Just twelve miles to go. The twelve most dreadful miles of the entire trip. **M** and **A** spring ahead, and I take the opportunity to join the lead group for a change, leaving **J** to make sure we don’t lose **S** and **Z**. We regroup at the Highway 12 crossing and ride past the John R. Jackson House, a building that I’m sure carries great historical significance for the area, but we weren’t really in the mood to care by this point. Not far past the John R. Jackson house is the Jackson Prairie Speedway, which is already roaring with the sound of auto racing when we cycle past. At least now we know what people in Chehalis do on Saturday nights. After several shouts of “Are we there yet?” we finally... Nope, just kidding. We’re not there yet. My sore throat by this point has gotten so bad I can talk only with some difficulty and pain. I try to get by with nods and hand gestures. At last, we... nope, still not there. What looks from a distance to be a high school athletic field is just a softball facility. The local softball team won the state championship in 2001, so this area is all softball crazy. Okay, finally we reach Toledo High School. The kitchen is making a new batch of spaghetti, so we can’t eat quite yet. We take the opportunity to stow our bicycles, move our stuff into the classroom we reserved (our group is large enough that we get an entire classroom to ourselves), take a shower, and settle in. By the time we finish eating, it’s nearing ten o’clock, and we really aren’t interested in doing much beyond falling asleep.

That was a long Day One. (You thought reading about it was long and tiring, try doing it!)

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