

FT. BRAGG, MAY 27 2006  
by Matt Mason

In its second year, the Ft. Bragg race's turnout grew in numbers and talent. We saw that on Saturday at the time trial and knew that Sunday's road race would be different than last year's sparsely attended event. There was a similarity, though: heat. The 4 pm start time compounded the effect of the high temperatures.

The Masters Team lined up a solid squad: Rodney, Blair, Dave (Petree), Michael, Rich, and I (Matt). Between a deceptively difficult course, a still smallish (27 racer) field, and competition such as Charlie Brown, Derek Powers, Kurt Massey, Dave LeDuc, Pat Raines, and Mac Cannon, the field stood little chance of staying intact.

It didn't and fortunately Michael was alert to the first serious break early on the first 16 mile lap of this 64 mile race. The break would stay away and its repercussions destroyed the field. Surprisingly, LeDuc and Massey, who had forged an alliance and were arguably the two strongest riders in the race, missed the move. It was a near-given that they would try to bridge to the break. I managed to latch onto Massey's chase group when he launched, and LeDuc shortly came across to it. Even with their horsepower, it took nearly 30 miles for the chase group to catch the break. Behind, Rodney and Dave had managed to make the front group of a fast-dissolving field. Rich and Blair were chagrined to find the rest of the field around them throw in the towel at the end of lap two.

At the front, Michael, having ridden with the longest and strongest break of his career, seemed relieved to have a teammate join him at the front. The front group shortly saw Massey, Brown and Raines launch with 1 lap to go, followed by LeDuc. Lacking the horsepower to control them, the rest of us at the front jockeyed for 5th.

We played the finish -- a fast, largely downhill sprint -- for Michael. Despite shifting problems that kept him from getting to his 53x12, and having attacked several times on the last lap while the competition sat on, he came through strongly for 8th place. I was 10th. Dave and Rodney came in among the next positions.

It was a solid performance all around for the team, and a breakthrough performance for Michael. He rode nearly 60 miles off the front against remarkable competition and still had the mental and physical wherewithal to play offense in the closing miles. Congrats, Michael.