

By Gary Zellner

The endurance bug has been with me for about 20 years, but I haven't been riding long compared to most avid cyclists. In my 20's, my interest was centered on hiking 14ers, long backpack trips and Grand Canyon Rim-to-Rim-to-Rim adventures. In my 30's I added marathon running. It wasn't until I was 39 when I started cycling with any sort of focus. 2009 was my introduction to mountain bike racing and my fifth consecutive year where I did more cycling than anything else for fitness and fun. For me, cycling has been a great way to stay physically fit, develop new relationships and fuel my internal competitive nature.

I'm weird compared to most people, unless you're an avid cyclist or endurance athlete, then we're probably similar. My internal competitiveness results in the constant setting of new goals. For months and months my focus will be on training and planning for the "big day". Sometimes there's success and sometimes I fall short of achieving the goal, but I always have fun. The instant it's over, ideas start popping into my head about how to be faster, stronger and more efficient for the next time. The point is I use "goal setting" to drive myself. I can't help it any more. There has to be a goal almost all of the time. It doesn't really matter what it is as long as it's challenging. As soon as one race or event is finished, my mind starts strategizing on what needs to be done next time and how to change to be better. It drives my family nuts.

At the end of 2008 I set a new goal...to race mountain bikes. I had primarily ridden on the road for my first four years of cycling, but had never raced anyone on a bike except for myself or a few of my buddies on an occasional group outing. My feeling was that learning to race a mountain bike would make me a stronger all-round rider. The primary reason I joined the Optimize Endurance Services (OES) Mountain Bike Team was to challenge and educate myself. It was clear that if I wanted to get stronger, I needed to ride with people that could make me suffer to new levels while teaching me how to improve. Rob Lockey and the whole OES team did exactly that. I've learned a ton about training, nutrition and the capabilities of my body while learning how to better handle a bike. These are the tools that enable me to set new cycling goals and then achieve them.

My 2009 race season started out with the Cherry Creek Time Trial series. The purpose of this was to get an introduction to racing while considering that it would be a different experience in a cross country MTB race. My strength is endurance, but more importantly I needed racing experience. For MTB racing, I entered the Winter Park Cross Country Series and three 50 mile MTB races in the "Sport" or "CAT 2" category. To feed my road bike desires, I also participated in several road endurance rides including the Triple Bypass. I didn't place in any races, but generally finished in the top third of my category. My goal of racing mountain bikes was solidly achieved with the bonus experience of snapping my carbon MTB frame in a rather uneventful wipeout during the August 1<sup>st</sup> Winter Park race.

With the 2010 racing season right around the corner, my bike frame issue has been resolved and my new goals established. My focus will be on the 50 mile MTB races and taking significant time off them, while having even more fun than last year. I may be a year older,

but now I'm smarter and I know I can be faster, stronger and more efficient. I also know that there's a lot more to learn from the OES Mountain Bike Team.