

Poolesville, by Brian D

The Poolesville Road Race has become one of the most talked about races in this region because it is unique and hard. The 1.1 mile dirt/gravel/potholed section of River Road is probably the most loved or hated section of any course. I ended up with 3rd place so I'm right now in the camp of loving that section of road but I can certainly understand the frustration that it causes.

AABC had 5 riders in this race but we all started off at the back which probably wasn't the best positioning if we wanted to jump into a breakaway or help set the pace. The race started out as a 75-man group ride for the first lap and with a strictly enforced centerline rule, it quickly became clear that moving up was going to be a bit of a challenge. The good news about the gravel section of River Road is that it does thin out the herd and that did give us the opportunity to move up towards the front. The first lap on River Road probably knocked 10 riders out of the race and the loud pop of a tire just to my left was the first sign that finishing was always a question mark at least until we took four turns on this section of the course. My goal for the race was to be near the front to jump into any good looking breakaways or avoid large mishaps that can occur with 40 people in front of you. A few of my teammates were able to get to the front more quickly and I could see Jeff G. taking a few turns on the front which helped my determination to get up there. The second lap on River Road presented the best opportunity so I made a move to the right, jumped a crevice, barely avoided a small pond of rainwater runoff and soon was near the front. After the dirt section ended, I did finally make it up to Jeff and the others that had been enjoying the unobstructed view. Since I had not worked all that hard on the first 15 miles, I decided to employ a strategy that Steve Riskus mentioned before the start of the race. His advice was that the last steep hill up Club Hollow that makes a quick right and then a left would be a good time to attack. I thought, what the hell, let's see what happens so I hit it up the hill a bit harder to see if pack would respond. After making the turn onto Westerly, I looked back and noticed that no one in the pack was chasing so I decided to see what I could do on my own. I ended up with a solo break of nearly ten miles including a wide open stretch of River Road that was much better than breathing in the dust from others. I called the motor referee up a few times to see how much time I was able to gain on the field and had 35 seconds at one point. I noticed a small group of chasers coming right after the first steep pitch, was told by the ref that I had 16 seconds, so I hit it hard again to see if I could stay away. It became clear that I wasn't going to stay away from the 4 chasers so I sat up, changed water bottles, caught my breath and soft pedaled until they caught me. I wanted to be rested so that I could stick with this group and hopefully make our larger break stay away. The group was clearly motivated to stay away so we took turns on the front and had a pretty effective rotation going. The pack started with me, one from Bike Rack, a Coppi and two NCVC but one NCVC couldn't stay on and he dropped off pretty quickly. The remaining laps were pretty uneventful with the only drama being that we couldn't get a "gap time" from the motor referee which is probably why we kept going pretty hard. When we got within two miles of the finish, up the last steep hill (site of my original attack), the other guys stopped working in tandem and clearly wanted to suck wheels until the sprint finish. I know that some people call this "strategy" but I was a bit worried that we still could get caught so I decided to keep pushing hard and hoped that I might shed one or two of these strategists. I didn't shed them, so we made it to the 200 meter mark, I kept going hard but the strategists showed their race smarts and two sprinted ahead of me and I claimed third place behind Bike Rack and Coppi. I felt great about the result, realized that I could have reserved some energy for the sprint but really don't care because I know that my effort was enough to make the breakaway work. Kudos also to Jeff, Riskus and Kenn Angelly who all finished strong. Riskus apparently gave a clinic on subtle blocking and even sacrificed his body for the team.