

# The Agony of the Heat

By Richard Chaykin

Florida in November is still a hot and humid place. No one can predict the potential weather for Cyclefest this year. There is a good chance that the heat we have been experiencing is going to continue with above normal temperatures. What does that mean for a rider? The factors the rider must consider modify one's preparation for the event.

## Acclimation

Number one is getting acclimated to riding in this type of heat.

## Attire

The next would be choice of attire. The kit would be best served with material that wicks. Wicking allows evaporation to occur. The moisture on the skin will act as a form of "air conditioning" as the air pulls it off the skin.

There are so many choices of these forms of material available today.

Another is the use of a long sleeve jersey. I know you are looking at this and saying is he crazy! Well a long sleeve jersey protects the arms and also will accumulate moisture and have the wicking effect. This choice of jersey is a personal choice as some just don't want to wear one in hot weather. There are even special wraps that are worn around the neck which help with cooling. They are water activated and for a while will help moderate skin temperature. These cooling products are great in that they help to keep the skin temperature down.

## Hydration

Hydration is another factor that must be increased during hot weather. The body is going to internally heat no matter what the temperature but in hot weather there has to be a way to keep it cool. Fluid consumption is one way. Up the amount of liquid that normally would be consumed. Taking a squirt of water on the head also helps to reduce skin temperature. This will also work on the back to help reduce skin temps.

Some like to ride with the jersey zipper undone. Again, this allows for more wicking and skin cooling. As a personal aside I no longer do this as a wasp got into my jersey and stung me multiple times. I am not saying that this is going to occur but if you are allergic to their venom it is something to keep in mind.

## Pace

Pace is another factor. This is going to depend upon your level of fitness and if one is accustomed to riding in heat. This is a double edge problem. The faster one rides the sooner one is off the course. The issue here is that one's core temperature is going to increase. The opposite also creates issues. A slower pace means longer exposure to the heat and increased core temperatures. The question becomes knowing one's true fitness level, the choice of route, and the weather for the day.

## Rest Stops

Rest stops become very important during hot weather. This is a chance to get out of the heat and allow for some cooling to occur. Make sure that one refills any hydration system that is being employed. Drinking water or a sports drink is important while in the rest stop. Pour some water on your head and back as this will definitely cool you off without effecting any riding skills.

**Make sure to fill whatever hydration system is being employed with ice at the stop.**

While cold water may not internally cool one off during a ride it will help to cool the skin. Use paper towels or rags and soak them in cold water. Place them on your neck and around the wrists. This will help to cool your body.

Drinking lots of water is absolutely a must and the more one drinks the cooler the internal temperature will be.

## A Personal Cautionary Experience

While this information is pertinent to all riders it becomes extremely important to those on the 79 and 104 mile routes. These rides are the glamour rides and therefore a ride where one's ego becomes engaged. They are the ones where the most danger lies.

It is going to require long periods in the saddle which in turn allows for mental fatigue to become a factor. This leads to poorer thinking as to where one is on the ride as well as the physical stamina that is still available. The weather being taken out of the equation can lead to issues but when hot humid weather is thrown into the mix it becomes potentially dangerous.

From personal experience there have only been a few rides that I have not finished. One day I started out to ride 50 miles. My preparation was for 50 miles but it was a nice day and I went for 100 instead. I was in an area that was unfamiliar to me and I was without the necessary food or fluids to maintain the ride. Being alone one could start to feel the degradation taking place as there was no escaping the heat and sun. The road started to become fuzzy and mirages

appeared. My judgment was impaired but this was really unknown to me. The idea of just finishing kept pushing onward. Finally, out of all supplies I bonked.

I was sitting on the side of the road just trying to get myself together until there was enough strength to continue. This never occurred. I attempted to pay someone to take me home but no one would. A gentleman with a pickup stopped and picked me up. He took me to his house and his wife saw me and wanted me to be taken to the hospital. I had no idea that my condition was that bad. I refused and luckily was taken home. What was experienced were changes in my thinking with mental confusion being one. There was the inability to react to situations accurately and very dry skin. I was lucky that day.

So, when embarking on one of these rides realize that the SAG service for the 104 mile route will be cut off at 1:45 PM at mile 69. Riders reaching mile 69 after 1:45 PM will be diverted to the 79 mile route.

The last rest stop closes at 2:30 PM in Myakka River State Park. If you are still out on the road without SAG support it will be a difficult last leg basically on one's own. This will add some pressure to riders to finish up faster than they expected. All of these factors of time, temperature, pace, and experience are now coming into play.

### A Shorter Route May Be A Better Route

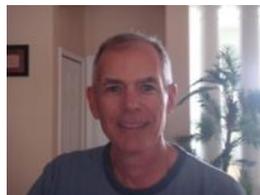
It is better to ride a shorter route that is within one's experience level and be more comfortable in this ride. Have fun on whatever ride you chose as this is the purpose of the event. Below are signs for sunstroke. Read them and realize they can happen to you so take care.

### Signs of Sunstroke

- This is something that should be taken very seriously! If you are subject to one it could land one in the hospital. The signs can be very subtle at times but unmistakable. This list is not in the degree of severity. Remember that if one comes across someone suffering from this get help immediately. If it is you get out of the sun and get help! Here are the signs of a sunstroke:
- Really hot skin that will be abnormally so.
- Dizziness and or fainting. This is one that is hard to miss.
- Extreme fatigue. This will be way beyond what would normally be experienced during a hot weather ride.
- Nausea. This is not a usual occurrence for riders and must be taken seriously.
- Vomiting. This is a step beyond nausea and a significant sign that one is overheated and in trouble. Get medical help immediately.

- Mental confusion. If one is experiencing this hopefully you are with someone else that can realize that there is something wrong. Experiencing this by oneself maybe more difficult to comprehend but another sign that one is in trouble.
- Seizure. This is one sign that cannot be overlooked! Here again hopefully one is not alone if this should happen. Just keep the person safe until help arrives.
- Excessive sweating. Again, this is going to be above the normal amount of sweating that one would do and coupled with other signs might indicate that one is suffering from a heatstroke. Get out of the sun and into some shade!
- Rapid heartbeat. This would feel as if your heart was going so fast that it feels as if it would explode. This is a serious sign and not one that should be shrugged off. This calls for immediate medical help.
- No sweating. This is the opposite of excessive sweating. The skin would become abnormally dry.
- A severe headache. This type of headache would be almost crippling and would be enough to cause one to stop by itself.
- Increased body temperature. Sometimes this is difficult to tell but coupled with other signs means that you are heading for problems. Get immediate help and under some shade in an effort to allow the body to cool down and do not attempt to go back to riding.
- Shallow breathing. This is one of those signs that are easier to realize. With exertion breathing should be deeper but with heatstroke the opposite occurs, loss of consciousness. If one is at this stage there is a major problem and hopefully there will others around to help. Coming upon someone in this state calls for immediate medical attention.

Heatstroke is not something that should be shrugged off and left untreated. Call for help immediately even if the person doesn't feel that it is necessary.



About the Author

Richard Chaykin is a retired physical therapist and longtime rider. With questions about this article please contact Richard at [richardchaykin@yahoo.com](mailto:richardchaykin@yahoo.com).