

How did the Rouge-Roubaix Start?

by Jon Anderson

In the mid 1990s, I often rode my bicycle alone in an attempt to shake the self-induced alcohol haze that lingered in my head from living a bit over the edge in the 70s and 80s. For no apparent reason, I would pilot my road bike down any dirt road that I stumbled upon. 30+ miles per hour; the sketchy feel of gravel under the 23c tires, the



lump that formed in my throat as I realized the tires were only occasionally fully in contact with the planet. My heart-rate maxed out on adrenaline and effort. Navigating the steep downhill curves full of resonance bumps—bike skidding and sliding toward a roadside drop off into a bottomless ravine. No ambulance within one hundred miles and cell phones where not yet invented. I was grinning like I did when I was 6 years old pedaling through the neighborhood with playing cards ripping through the spokes of my borrowed Schwinn Sting Ray.

I live for any bicycle adventure that explores the darker corners of life. This passion often resulted in encounters with shot-gun wielding locals with an under-abundance of teeth who happen to possess a little different outlook on life. If you have ever walked into a cafe, located in the middle of nowhere, on the opening weekend of deer season while wearing your Lycra bike shorts—you clearly understand the feeling I frequently encountered on my solo rides.

Sort of a two functioning brain cell approach to bike riding. I thought I was alone.

However, on our normal Sunday training road rides, as we cruised past dirt roads, David Alexander would frequently ask the group, "Where does that road go? You ever been on it?" and I knew Bob Clark lived for epic rides in the snow or any ride that turned down old, nasty, gnarly, bumpy roads. Listening to these guys sparked a single thought, "Maybe?" And, the Rouge-Roubaix was born.

We held the first Rouge-Roubaix on February 7, 1999. I set up the route base on some of my personal favorite roads, I advertised the event to riders from the Red Stick Racers and the Baton Rouge Bicycle Club, and fully expected to ride that morning alone. That morning I was amazed as 30 riders were ready to ride. 20 riders attempted the full route and 11 riders finished.

Today, if you Google “Rouge-Roubaix” you get hits from websites and blogs all over the country. That is simply crazy business. When we started the Rouge-Roubaix, I never actually expected riders to show up and, then, to show up again knowing exactly what they are getting into, well, I guess, I am not so alone after all.

Rouge-Roubaix —The Right Frame of Mind

Ever tear off your fingernail for giggles and grins? Can you spend an afternoon slamming your head against a brick wall because you relish the dull thump reverberating within your cranial cavity? Well, as odd as it sounds, that is exactly the mentality—or lack there of—a bicycle racer needs to compete in the Rouge-Roubaix Road Race. The Rouge-Roubaix is brutal, barbaric bicycle race designed for the racer with a taste for adventure, and a subliminal desire to torment one's self.

The Rouge-Roubaix Road Race starts in St. Francisville, Louisiana and makes a loop to the north before returning to West Feliciana Parish for the finish. The route is designed for a road bike—more or less. The organizer uses a non-traditional route that includes dirt roads, gravel, cattle grates, abandoned bridges, and creek crossings intermixed with sections of smooth fast asphalt. The final 20-miles of the race features two gruesome climbs: Riders must grind out a one-mile dirt climb from Fort Adams to Pond Store and navigate the short, steep, leg-breaking introduction to Old Tunica Trace.

The Rouge-Roubaix is designed for the hard men and women. Winning requires strength, endurance, determination, and equipment that will hold up to the abuse of the course. Riders can't just sit in and sprint; wheel-suckers will self-destruct! For most riders, simply finishing the race is an accomplishment. Given a choice between racing the Rouge-Roubaix and spending a couple of hours whacking your legs with hammer, many riders would opt for a six-pound sledgehammer.

So, if you think a bicycle race should be contested on a three-mile loop with 200 feet of elevation gain per lap—stay at home! However, for those racers that are disgusted with the sissy little road courses that masquerade as a bicycle race, you found the right place! The Rouge-Roubaix challenges your bike, your body, and your soul. And, this event will finally convince your spouse, girlfriend, or boyfriend that you really should be put away, for your own good!

Why Has the Race Grown?

Take a left off of Highway 66 onto Old Tunica Trace (if you happen to get to the Angola State Penitentiary, you missed the turn off) and ride this dirt section just once on your road bike; you will be back.

Additionally, Aron Messer who took over race promotion when I moved north and Mitch Evans, who took over the race from Aron, were very effective in getting the word out and growing this race. Mitch has done an outstanding job in communication, structuring the race (having to pull a \$100 bill from a big guy at the top of a hill for a prime), and meeting the rider's needs. Mitch changed the face of the Rouge-Roubaix; the race is now known all over the country.

Little Known Facts

- The first USCF race on the Rouge-Roubaix course was held on September 10th, 2000 under the race name of Tunica Tango. The route was 100 miles. Jason Sager won.
- The Rouge-Roubaix III (April 1, 2001) was the first time this event was held as a USCF race. Stig Somme won.
- The reason the Rouge-Roubaix changed from a ride to a USCF Race was because Eric Murphy bugged the crap out of me on bike rides for two years. When he wasn't talking about food (10 miles into a 100-mile ride) he was jabbering away about how the Rouge-Roubaix just had to be a race.
- The 1999 and 2000 courses were 85 miles (or so) and contained some additional vicious little dirt sections like Morris Road and Raccoon Road, along with the Low-Water Bridge (back when it was the under-water bridge). Because of all the crashes we had running this route as a ride, and because I didn't care to get sued, when we made the Rouge-Roubaix a race these sections were removed and replaced with the current 1st dirt section.
- February 7th, 1999 – 1st Rouge-Roubaix Survivors:
 - 85 miler: David Alexander, Trent Rives, Jason Sager, Tim Daigle, Rusty Bernard, Rosanne Simmons, Guy Ross, Mike Abshire, Jon Anderson, Steve Zeraunge, Ralph Cook. ** Note: Ralph's feat was particularly impressive because he made it on a hybrid. So when the pace picked up on the smooth flat roads, Ralph had to grind it out alone. All roads, except the final dirt section: Chris Daigle and Dick Erlicher

Rouge- Roubaix Winners, 1999 - 2010

Year	Date	Race	Winner
1999	March 7 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 1	Ride
2000	February 13 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 2	Ride
2000	September 10 th	Tunica Tango	Jason Sager
2001	April 1 st	Rouge-Roubaix – 3	Stig Somme
2002	March 3 rd	Rouge-Roubaix – 4	Steven Viquerie
2003	March 2 nd	Rouge-Roubaix – 5	Nathan Busch
2004	March 7 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 6	Brice Jones
2005	March 6 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 7	Jason Snow
2006	March 5 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 8	Michael Olheiser
2007	March 12 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 9	Michael Olheiser
2008	March 9 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 10	Aaron Boyleston
2009	March 8 th	Rouge-Roubaix - 11	Christian Helmig
2010	March 7 th	Rouge-Roubaix – 12	Mathew Davis