

time for late in the event when you may unexpectedly need it. Don't tarry! The clock is ticking!

Many an otherwise successful century rider or cycle-tourist is surprised by how swiftly experienced randonneurs get in and out of controls at brevets—a lot can be accomplished in five or ten minutes. They simply sign-in, eat fast, fill their pockets and bottles for the next section of the route, make a quick review of the route sheet, then they're away! If you aspire to do longer brevets, this practice should become a habit so that you can build up the maximum sleep time during the multi-day events (if that is a personal goal). You'll find you can socialize on the bike, instead of at the controls when you should be focused on other tasks.

When you reach a control point on any brevet, it may be a manned stop run by the organizer or it might be in a store. In the first case, you'll present your brevet card to be signed and stamped by the control worker. Your arrival time will also be recorded on a clipboard. If your stop is in a store, the clerk may perform the above procedure, or you may be instructed to simply buy something there and get a receipt that has a time and date stamp. Write your name on the back of the receipt; this is then turned in with your brevet card at ride's end. Don't lose any of this valuable paperwork. In any case, whenever you go to a store control point, be sure to buy something there. Randonneuring needs these good-natured businesses for checkpoints, and in turn, they need a little income from you. Don't be a cheapskate and ruin the reception for those riders behind you or for those in future events.

Besides the two most common checkpoint styles already mentioned, there are two more types of controls sometimes used on brevets. Not often seen in the US, you may encounter a British-style "information control". These are unmanned stops that require the rider to stop and observe some specific bit of local information selected by the brevet organizer. If there is an "info control" during your brevet, be sure to carry a pen or pencil so that you can record the required information or message onto your brevet card,

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If the 300k doesn't seem that much worse than the 200k, the 400k brevet is quite another matter. Too long to be considered a one-day ride, but not really a two-day ride like the subsequent 600k, this is the brevet that many riders fear most. Compared to the 300k, the extra 100 kilometers somehow feel much longer than the difference between 200k and 300k. No matter what your ability or average riding speed is, there will probably be a good bit of night riding and navigation involved. Then there is the challenging length itself: A 400k is fifty miles longer than an arduous 200-mile "double-century" and its 27-hour time limit gives some indication of what lies in store for the audacious randonneur. Again, like the shorter events, this brevet follows the same procedures and strategies. But since there will be so much more nocturnal cycling, adequate lighting and clothing will require more planning and preparation. Be sure to carry some extra food, fluids, and lamp batteries for the hours when stores will be closed. A good strategy is to bunch up with some riders during the night and work together to make the finish line in a group. This will make the dark hours go by better than cycling alone when a debilitating sense of loneliness can set in.

Now we reach the 600k brevet. Hopefully you've enjoyed the shorter events and are ready to really challenge yourself. As RUSA founder and Boston-Montreal-Boston organizer Jennifer Wise has written, "The 600k is definitely the litmus test of a randonneur. It has all the elements you need to conquer: distance, elevation, darkness, and personal pacing." But with a successful 400k under your belt, you should feel confident in tackling the 600k.

As in so many things about our *allure libre* style of randonneuring, one is free to choose their own pace so long as it keeps the rider inside the opening and closing times of the control points along the way. And so it is with the 600k; you should try to ride fast enough to get the job done efficiently, but not so fast that you burn out prematurely. And like the aforementioned brevets, all the paperwork procedures of signing into control points are the same on the 600k.

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under-the-saddle toolkit that needs replacement from a previous repair? Is your chain well oiled? Six hundred kilometers is quite a long distance, should you put some fresh tires on your wheels?

With your bike, clothing, lights, and other equipment ready to go, use the average paces you've ridden on previous brevets and centuries over similar terrain as the 600k and try to work out a realistic riding schedule. Keep in mind that most pre-ride schedules are only a rough rule of thumb at best, but going into battle without a plan is not a good idea. Being somewhat conservative is often the best way to go, particularly if this will be your first 600k distance. So, even if you've successfully ridden the previous brevets "winging it", try to formulate some sort of plan for the 600k—its long distance in only 40 hours of total time won't tolerate many mistakes. Most randonneurs find they slow down the longer the events become, and that is not counting a sleep stop. With your estimated pace, the route sheet, maps, and event starting time, predict when and where you'll be in the dark. Will it be a couple of hours using your lights before a planned sleep? More likely, you might experience four to six hours of cycling in darkness until you can lay down. Or will you pull an all-nighter and ride into the next sunrise? Then there is the worry of nothing but a steady diet of "bike food". Will you want a sit-down meal with hot food after 200 or 300 kilometers? How about a regular breakfast at dawn of the second day? Your plan of attack will help you decide how much to carry on your bike, especially in terms of clothes for the chilly pre-dawn hours, extra food for when the stores are closed, and also for the extra batteries your lights will need (assuming you don't use a dynamo).

At this point you may feel you are almost ready to make your brevet plan, but first, an important digression to consider before you finalize your riding schedule: Exactly why are you riding this 600k? There are two main reasons and each will flavor your overall plan of attack. First, the 600k may be the culmination of your season's efforts to earn the prestigious Super Randonneur medal, which is awarded to riders who successfully do a series of 200, 300, 400, and

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event on their schedule should feel confident in undertaking. (Please note that not every 1200k event will require a full Super Randonneur series of brevets to enter. The smart person will, however, still ride one in order to arrive at the start line fully prepared and confident in finishing.) Okay, you've decided on how to approach your first 600k. Away you go! As you work your way through the day (assuming there was the normal dawn start used by most events), ride conservatively and keep your pace a little slower than normal; your store of energy has to last a long time yet. Pick a pace that covers the ground efficiently without exhausting yourself. Eat and drink frequently. Don't exhaust yourself, but neither should you "bonk" or become dehydrated at any time—you'll burn up too much valuable time trying to recover from these problems. If the weather is hot, be sure to take in enough salt; plain water won't be enough to replace spent electrolytes. Keep the sunscreen handy since sunburn can really sap your strength long after the sun has gone down. Find some other entrants to chat with to while away the long hours in the saddle. Loneliness can be a real morale-killer on a 600k; slow down and find some company if needed. Finishing is everything in this game—don't become a DNF from cycling too long alone. Also, having a companion or two can be of help if you have to trouble-shoot a repair, or to keep from becoming lost. It is also best to be in a group after sundown. When cycling at night, cars' headlights will spot a small group much better than a solo rider. Make sure you have lots of reflective stuff stuck to your bike and on your helmet and clothing. Plain white jerseys show up especially well in the dark. Also, if you need to loiter at a nighttime control another 15 minutes in order to collect a couple more riders still getting ready to retake the road, that is a prudent strategy. Always be safe!

As you go into evening, try hard to reach your planned sleeping place. Don't stop prematurely unless you're dangerously sleepy and weaving on the road. If so, find a store or café with a caffeinated beverage—but be warned that getting some sleep in the next few hours may be very difficult, if not impossible. If you have lived "caffetne-free" for the previous months, you'll get a very useful surge of alert-

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along with your time of passage. The fourth type of checkpoint is a postcard control. Here at a rural post office, probably without a suitable business nearby, the rider will mark their time and then send a postcard to the organizer to verify she or he passed by during the ride. (A stamped postcard is usually supplied by the ride organizer and it may also ask some bit of local info, such as what color is the post office door.) No matter what control method is used, be sure to thank any and all checkpoint workers who have helped you earn your brevet. Be especially appreciative of the event organizer who has unselfishly volunteered countless hours to put on the ride.

Hopefully your long day in the saddle will be enjoyable, the scenery nice, and your companions and weather pleasant. But if not, take pride in the fact that you never gave up despite the various pains, adversities, and adventures that tried to defeat you. In true randonneuring fashion, you were determined and never gave up! You arrived at the final control point in time, turned in your brevet card, and with a weary smile, signed in one last time. Now that your first successful 200k brevet is under your belt, you can now be rightfully called a *randonneur* (if a male) or a *randonneuse* (if a female), a well-earned honor indeed. Congratulations!

With your first 200k results on their way to Paris, it could be time to try a longer event. The strategy to use at a 300k brevet is not much different than that for the 200k distance, and all the paperwork procedures are exactly the same. Obviously you'll be on your bike another 100 kilometers and, depending on the time of year and amount of available daylight, this might require a better lighting system than the 200k did. You'll probably want to carry some warmer clothes too. The time limit for a 300k is 20 hours and you could very well encounter some cold temperatures along the way, especially in spring or autumn. Along with better lights and warmer clothes, you'll also need to bring a reflective vest and ankle bands, per ACP/RUSA regulations, to help keep you safe while cycling in the dark. Look after your caloric and hydration needs too; you're going to be out on the road a long time and your "engine" will need a lot of fuel.

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600-kilometer brevets in one year. If so, then this 600k can be ridden using the full 40-hour time allotment. Get as much sleep as you can afford during the ride and cycle at an enjoyable pace that gets the job done in 39 hours or less. (One should always try to keep at least an extra hour in hand for some unforeseen situation like punctures and/or getting lost.) Splitting the brevet into, say, a 400-kilometer ride from dawn till midnight or 2 AM and then a 200-kilometer ride the next day, is often used by many experienced randonneurs in this type of situation. (Doing a 300/300 split makes most folks a little too nervous about how much has to be done the second day when the rider is more tired, but severe elevation changes or sleeping location constraints along the route may dictate this approach.)

On the other hand, perhaps this 600k will be used to qualify you for some greater adventure, such as a 1200-kilometer *grand randonné* such as BMB or PBP. Then you should, at least in the author's opinion, choose a different approach that eliminates your sleep time. Experienced *anciens* and *ancienes* know that a 600-kilometer brevet will not really prepare your mind and body for the profound fatigue that is part and parcel of doing twice that distance in 90 hours or less. I would strongly suggest that if you aspire to do a 1200k, then endeavor to do a sleepless 600k precisely because it is so much harder than doing it with some rest. Afterward, this will give you better confidence to tackle The Big One. The reputable and renowned Lon Haldeman agrees. He has told others that doing a preparation ride of at least 24 hours' duration is a key ingredient to success in a 1200k event. Have other randonneurs done their 1200k events successfully after having taken a sleep break during their 600k? Absolutely, and there have been many. But if asked to share one piece of advice to help the new randonneur doing their first 1200k, I'd say that doing the 600k without sleep is one of, if not the most important "character-building experience" they could do to ensure success. (But be very careful on the drive home after the event—your sleepless night may well catch up with you then! Better to sleep a while before you drive.) Riding throughout an entire night is quite an accomplishment that all randonneurs and randonneuses with a 1200k

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ness when you do ingest some caffeine on an all-night brevet. Anyway, try to enjoy your night ride; on a quiet country road nocturnal cycling can be a wonderful experience, especially if there is a full moon up and you've got some pals to chat with. It is exactly these sorts of sublime moments that keep so many randonneurs and randonneuses coming back for more year after year. If, however, all this is feeling too much like an unwelcome chore, try eating more since you're probably "bonking". Or put on another layer of clothes if you're becoming too cold. Perhaps you're in need of some company too. At any rate, if you stop for some sleep three to four hours will be enough. More than that and you will find your leg muscles have really stiffened up when you resume the ride. If so, cycle gently until you've thoroughly loosened up.

If you're doing the 600k without sleep, don't focus too much on when dawn will arrive. Just take the night ride in short sections, say, from one town or control point to the next. Sometimes the "big picture" can be too intimidating, especially if you ponder this enormous challenge at length. Instead, fix your mind on achieving small, more easily attained goals. If traffic conditions permit, ride side-by-side and shoot the breeze with another randonneur to while away the time. This will illuminate the road better than riding alone and is safer than drafting nose-to-tail in the dark. Extra caution is also needed going downhill at night since most randonneurs' lights are on the marginal side due to battery consumption concerns. As long-distance cycling guru John Hughes has said, "Never descend at night faster than your Guardian Angel can see!" At any rate, when doing an all-nighter, attitude is everything. Keep your spirits up and you'll do fine.

Lastly, take the foregoing with a pinch of salt. All of us come to randonneuring with different abilities, experience, and ambitions. Modify the advice given to best suit your personal riding plan. Be sure to also use prior randonneuring experiences as your primary guide when you attempt your first 600k. Ride safely, don't get lost, have fun, enjoy your companions and the scenery, thank the checkpoint volunteers, and above all, finish the brevet and get your medal!

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