



www.raceacrossamerica.org

Event Backgrounder

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The Insight Race Across America: Where it's from, what it is, and how it works

Created in 1982, the Insight Race Across America (RAAM) is now the longest running ultra-distance bicycle endurance competition in the world. In 23 years the race has been aired on ABC Wide World of Sports, ESPN, OLN, NBC, BBC and many other stations around the world. Two races occur simultaneously within RAAM: a solo and a team competition. This is not a stage race like the Tour de France, where each day a set distance is covered. In RAAM the gun fires in San Diego and the finishing line is 3052 miles away, on the other side of the continent.

The concept of a bicycle race across America can be traced back to newspaperman George Nellis, who in 1887 crossed the USA on a 45-pound iron high-wheel bicycle with no gears and with pedals attached directly to the front wheel. Following the railroad routes across the country, he made the crossing in just under 80 days.

Every ten years or so, the record would be reduced by a few days, but it was not until the 1970s, when John Merino got serious about finding how quickly a bicycle could be ridden across the U.S.A. that the modern movement of trans-national cycling competition began. Other riders began challenging the marks made by Merino, and by 1982 a group of these riders decided they were ready for a head-to-head race.

In its first year, the Race Across America (RAAM) was called the Great American Bike Race. Four riders lined up on the pier in Santa Monica and raced to New York. The winner was Lon Haldeman. Since then the race has been run every year, always west to east. For the past few years, the race has started in Southern California, in San Diego, and finished in Atlantic City, New Jersey. RAAM starts close to the summer solstice, June 21/22, to provide competitors the maximum daylight hours.

The event is about generating maximum wattage paced over day and night riding, delicately balanced with managing pain, sleep and nutrition. Minimal sleep is the defining feature of the solo competition in RAAM, and is what makes the event so unusually difficult. This tactic was introduced in the first year of the race by Lon Haldeman. When working in the support crew for his long-distance cycling wife-to-be, Susan Notorangelo, he learned it is possible to ride hard through the night and then keep going through the following day. The Notorangelo/Haldeman tactic was regarded as unbeatable in RAAM, and now all serious solo competitors plan to average of 90-120 minutes sleep in each 24-hour period during their ride.



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Over the years, teams of various descriptions have entered the race as well as solo competitors, and recently a corporate category was introduced when it was discovered that a company with workers participating in the event received a significant boost in cohesion and morale among its staff. For 2005, a 24-Hour version, 494 miles, from San Diego to Flagstaff, is being piloted as a means of making the race more accessible to a greater number of new corporations.

Broadly speaking, categories competing in the race comprise Solo, 2-Person, 4-Person, and 8-Person (Corporate only). Within these categories there are age and sex breakdowns, as well as sub-categories for different types of vehicle such as recumbent bicycles and the faired Human Powered Vehicles.

Since teams travel faster than solo riders, they start two days later. The Solo and 24-Hour Corporate and Team Challenge riders start Sunday 19th June, 7 a.m. PDT; Teams start Tuesday, 21st June, 2 p.m. PDT.

Both groups of riders start outside the Holiday Inn on the Bay, North Harbor Drive, near downtown San Diego, and parade through San Diego, taking a 13-mile route through the picturesque Balboa Park to Mission Gorge Road, near Grantville, north-east San Diego. The race proper begins here, although clocks are already running on EDT, which is the official race time, and all ETA quotes, etc. are given in EDT.

The race format is essentially a time trial: also called "against the clock" racing, and "the race of truth", this means no 'drafting,' or taking shelter from the wind behind a rider or other vehicle. This applies strictly to the solo riders, while team riders may draft off their team-mates, but not other teams.

The rider on the road must have a support vehicle following immediately behind from dusk until dawn. This is optional during daylight hours, but most riders prefer the security and motivation it provides.

There are no discreet stages in the race. Riders stop to sleep wherever they need to. Teams frequently report to race headquarters in Atlantic City. There are 57 Time Stations, spaced approximately 50 miles apart. On arriving at a Time Station, the rider's crew is obliged by the rules to call HQ to state the rider's or team's arrival time and the Time Station number, and any other noteworthy news. This way the HQ is able to track the progress and status of the soloists and teams.



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Over the course of the race, the riders spread out over hundreds of miles. Race officials patrol sections of this long line of cyclists, making sure they adhere to the rules of the event, and issuing time penalties where due. Riders must stay on the shoulder of the road, and stop at every stoplight and sign.