

How To Survive!

So. Day One, Stage One. What's going to happen?

The riders with aspirations of winning are going to go out, they'll go out hard and keep going until they have broken the weaker riders. They want to whittle down the field to the 'real' competitors and make sure they don't lose time. It's a destructive exercise and you need to decide if you want to be part of it.

Have a look at this graph of my 2012 race. The brown dots are Training Stress Scores - a measure of how much effort you've put in. Day One was by far the hardest of my race, days 2 and 3 less so. Day 4, when we finally took the lead was easier still. Day 5, with the



smell of beer wafting from Birdsville and a neutral final stage was easiest of all.

Considering the track, the hardest day is the second, followed by the third and the fourth. The first day is actually one of the easiest to complete, only beaten by the short final day. So my hardest day was on one of the easiest stages. Madness.

Do you want to get broken on Day One? If you're looking to complete the Simpson Desert Challenge and get one of the elusive 100% medallions that's a really bad graph. Some competitors who won't complete the challenge still get pulled into the sprint on the first day. If you're looking to complete the distance you want a more realistic strategy. Choosing a race strategy is something only you can do. The decisions you make will effect the outcome for you, but I can offer some advice.

No.1. Pace yourself. Take it easy on the first day. You should finish Day 1 fresh as the real challenge is yet to come. If you have a heart rate monitor set a limit of around 75% of maximum. If you don't choose a pace where you can still hold a conversation. This will feel crazy slow on the first day but I guarantee you won't be able to hold that rate later in the

race. There is a concept of being 'too tired to hurt yourself' - later in the race, pacing happens by itself.

No.2. 12.1km/hr is fast enough. Watch your average speed. I'm not saying dawdle along. Time dawdling could be time back at camp, eating and drinking and you want some spare time in case you have a puncture or the weather turns bad, but you don't need to go as fast as possible. I also use my average speed as a warning. I set my timer going when the sweep calls '5 minutes'. 5 minutes at 12km/hr is 1km. If that average speed reads 12.0 I know the sweep is 1km or 5 minutes behind me. If I have anything left, now is the time to use it.

You'll need to spike your heart rate over the dunes and there's no point riding at 12.1km/hr if you can easily go faster, but going too fast on Day One is more of a problem than going too slow.

Other than that, have a look at the course. Recognize that heading east involves dunes. Recognize that the temperature and wind is usually worse in the afternoon. You can't draft on the dunes but an afternoon stage heading north is a good time to find a friend and share the headwind.

The SDBC is a race of contradictions. It's not about being tough. Eat well, sleep well and camp well. Enjoy yourself. For my part, I'm looking forward to that beer in Birdsville. If they could bottle that first inch, they'd make a fortune.