



Melfar 24-Hour

Eat And Ride To Your Limit!

by Sven-Erik Olsson



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It was Leo Jensen that took the idea of 24-hour racing from American soil to Middelfart in Denmark and persuaded his fellows in cycling club Baghjulet [The Rear wheel], a club for recreational cyclists, to organize a 24-hour road cycling event. The first race was in 2004. Jensen and his club can look back at a tremendously successful Melfar 24-Hour Cycling Challenge in 2007. The race was a part of the UMCA's World Cup and saw an unprecedented line of record breakers.



Over 200 riders lined up for the start.

Melfar24 is run on four different routes. The clock regulates entering a route.

The faster riders are able to make two rounds on the first route within the time frame available. The main depot at the start has all kinds of food, including a barbecue in the evening and a hot soup in the wee hours. There are cakes, snacks, water, cola, coffee, oranges, grapes to grab and as much energy drink you can gobble down your throat. If you get tired you can rest on a chair in the tent or you can lie down on a mattress in a sports hall near by.



Melfar24 starts with a 78-mile route. It takes the riders on small roads or roads with designed cycling lanes around the island Fyn. The landscape is typically Danish countryside, with fields and small groves of trees. The second route is a 20-mile route with an ascending start and the rider exposed to headwinds and fairly heavy traffic. After a long descent the route takes a path that more resembles the first route. Since the route is run again and again it is a particularly demanding part of the race. Being fast on the first route pays off, allowing for a second entry along its path. The third route is the 11-mile night

route. After passing an industrial area the third route goes by the sea and the view of the Lille Bælt bridge is breath-taking especially before it gets really black. The final hour a two-mile short route is entered.

The weather was typically Danish with strong headwinds. It seems that every which way you go the wind does a quick calculation and turns. From reports of

other riders I learned that there was a tailwind for those who rode fast enough to do a second round of the first route. There was a period of rain during the night ride that slowed the riders down. Had it not been for this I am sure that results would have been even more impressive. I rode last year also and weather conditions certainly were improved this year. In 2006 it rained at the start and since that turns the Danish flint stones exposing their nasty sharp edges there was lots of punctures.

Melfar24 is a race that caters for every type of cyclist. It really is 24 hours at your disposal. Though you have to go some 40 miles to the first stop and "All You Can Eat" depot you really have to push yourself to leave the race with a negative caloric tally. And a large number of riders did push themselves. The three years reign of the record 416 miles set by Mikael Mikkelsen at the first event in 2004 was crushed over and over again. A staggering twelve cyclists broke the finish line with longer rides and the two top contenders David Broo and Allan Carlsen share the new record at 455 miles.



David Broo, a Norwegian, was first by a three seconds margin. He is aiming for RAAM and this year's warm up is a trip from Nordkap to Gibraltar in July and the Paris-Brest-Paris in August. Allan Carlsen is a Dane competing in mountain bike for German Team ALB€GOLD. He is also the team physiotherapist. In the women's division Lene Christensen, Denmark, won with 326 miles.

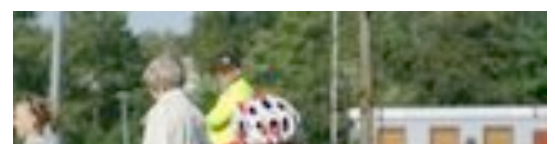


The number of participants was 219. This means Melfar24 drew a record crowd for the fourth year in a row. Of these 219 a hundred pedaled 310 miles [500 kilometers] or more. Six broke the magic 700 kilometers [435 miles]. This ambitious lot was well catered for, as were my wife and I and others who chose a more relaxed pace.

The Norwegians made a strong impact in Melfar24 this year claiming three of the five top spots. My club fellows, John Barkman and Jan Christiansen, from Swedish long distance cycling club CK Distans took place ten and eleven.

Danish triathlon competitor Klaus Ursin accomplished another impressive feat. He came from a recent completion of Iron Man Lanzarote and finished with 213 miles. Klaus is blind and rode tandem with Brian Overkær. American Drew Winnie of Bristol, VA, USA rode 272 miles capturing place 132.

Spirits were high all through the race, with a distinct interregnum due to an incident in the evening. There was a television showing the football match



between Denmark and Sweden in the qualifying series preceding the European Championships. Denmark had evened a 3-0 deficit to 3-3 when the referee blew the whistle as a Danish player gave a Swede a punch in solar plexus inside the Danish goal zone. Red card and penalty shot was the obvious consequence. This caused a spectator, a Dane living in Sweden (sic!), to go over the top and enter the field delivering a punch in the face of the referee and attempting to have another go when stopped by Danish players. The referee stopped the match and proclaimed Sweden as a winner with 3-0. This capped everyone's mood for an hour or so. Soon the race itself prevailed and it was a fantastic race indeed. Next race starts May 31 and ends June 1 in 2008.



Racing for the finish.

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