

**PALANUK: Mental stress is toughest aspect, riders say**

*Continued from page 1*

depicted as the ultimate singletrack experience.

“You go into the event thinking you will have an idea of what it’s like, but, really, there is nothing we could have done here to prepare,” Joel said.

The event draws 600 riders from 36 countries. It is supported, meaning they take gear, bikes, and set up tent cities as they travel the province. Joel said that it was amazing the degree to which the small towns and their people completely bought into the event; they took days off work to help, the fans were out in the middle of the woods dressed up, playing music, having as good a time as the riders.

An international flavor was part of the experience.

“You go into your tent for the night, and as it quiets down you hear whispers in different languages. It was really cool,” Joel said.

Part of the challenge of this event is the mental stressors that are in play. Both Joel and Shawna explained that going blind into the type of riding that BC presented

was a challenge. The climbs were straight up, strewn with roots and technical rocks. The descents were no less forgiving. They said there is nothing like this in Oregon. The nature of this riding leads to a mental drain. Having to be atuned, sharp, and have clarity and quickness in reflex can drain a cyclist just as much as the most brutal climbing. Mental fatigue and stress was their worst symptom.

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— Joel Palanuk

The event exists as a fine balance of energy expended vs. energy saved. Joel mentioned that he tried to not waste energy unrelated to his mission. It would be easy to complain or be frustrated at times, but, that is all wasted energy. On a seven-day event, toward day four the body adapted to day-in-and-day-out riding. Joel cited Day 6 as the turnaround.

“I felt refreshed, I had good legs that day,” he said.

This anecdote echoes a lot of cyclists in stage races, where they need to continue to ride, not allowing the body to begin extensive recovery, where the soreness and fatigue can catch up.

The couple used nutritional shakes after each stage just to bump up their caloric intake. At mealtimes the event boasted a healthy spread of salads, fresh seafood, and hearty sides. Both Joel and Shawna agreed the food was much more than that of a typical cafeteria fodder one might expect from a rolling semi-truck kitchen.

When prompted to compare this to other events, the Sisters riders said there was no comparison.

“We’ve done stage racing on the road, long 100-mile events, and many many races, but this is in a class of it’s own,” Joel said.

This event was the most difficult, the most logistically challenging, and had some of the most extreme conditions they’ve raced in.

The event management was on point; both Joel and Shawna were amazed at how well they moved people.



PHOTO PROVIDED

Joel and Shawna Palanuk rode well in a grueling British Columbia race.

Organizers shuttled riders on buses, ferries, all the while setting up their tent, prepping food, and shuttling gear. They provided bike mechanics, massage, chiropractic, and doctors. It was truly first class, the Palanuks said.

One particular thing they enjoyed was when they saw their family on Stage 6.

“Riding into the finish, our boys were standing there, that was a special moment to see them,” said Joel.

Although they had a great experience; they weren’t so sure they’d go for another round.

“The training, and the preparation is tough for us, it really divides family time,” Shawna said.

When asked about their next big ride, they said that the rest of the summer will be spent riding with the boys, and enjoying the slower paces off the race course and the flatter terrain in Central Oregon.

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