



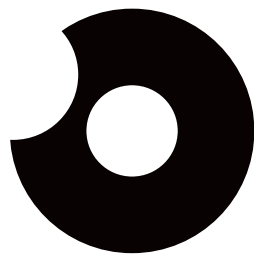
# It's Not About The Hole

WHEN THE GREAT CHAMPION FOUND OUT THAT EVERY DOUGH-NUT HE ATE WOULD TAKE THREE MINUTES OFF HIS RACE TIME, HE REALIZED THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING TO DO: FORGET ABOUT HIS GUT, HIS GOUT, HIS INFLAMED PROSTATE, HIS SENSITIVITY TO SUNLIGHT AND HIS KICKSTAND, AND PEDAL HIS WAY TO TRIUMPH IN A GLAZE OF GLORY.

BY STEVE FRIEDMAN

ILLUSTRATED BY  
JACK UNRUH





Like a lot of knuckleheaded but ultimately life-affirming decisions I have made in my life, I decided to enter a doughnut-eating bicycle race with too little information and far too much certainty. I owned a bicycle. I had nothing against doughnuts. What could go wrong?

"You could die," my good friend Jack pointed out. "Or you could puke. Or you could have a really embarrassing heart attack. Or you could eat so many doughnuts that the rest of the riders turn on..."

"Okay," I said, "I get the point."

"Plus," Jack said, "do you really think it's a good idea to be entering a race in your physical condition?"

Jack was annoying, and so relentlessly grumpy that many of his friends called him the "Angry Voiceover Artist" (that is his profession), but he had a point. I am what jeans manufacturers used to call "husky," possessed of what tubs on Internet-dating sites refer to with patent dishonesty and touching self-delusion as an "athletic build," or a physique my mother always assured me was "big boned." In past generations, I would have been venerated, my physique admired. "A good eater," my grandmother used to coo, as I shoveled plateful after plateful of brisket and noodle kugel into my seven-year-old mouth. Even today, on quite a few atolls in the South Pacific, I would be considered a catch. So it's not that I am ashamed of my body, or of my affection for the midnight snack. Nor am I unaware of the toll I have paid for indulging my appetites. I have recently been diagnosed with gout, weight-related sleep apnea, acid-reflux disease and

cholesterol levels that my doctor has pronounced "alarming." Or maybe she said "life threatening." At that point in our visit, I was sulking because she had just poked me in the gut and said, "I think it's time we did something about that."

I didn't like the way she said "we," but she had a point. But what were we to do? Change my diet? I think I read somewhere that stress could cause cholesterol levels to spike almost as much as a cinnamon roll. So I should cut out the late-night snacks that soothe me? I should court a heart attack? I thought not. Regular exercise? Sure, and why not start boning up for an advanced degree in astrophysics while I was at it?

Self-denial, discipline and regular attention to chores had never been my long suit. I was more of a big-picture guy. So I needed something big and simple. I needed to bust a grand and seismic move in order to get Jack and the doctor off my back, and to find my way to wellness. Also, my girlfriend and I had recently split up, and lacking the funds to travel to Rangiroa or Vanuatu to find a blubber-loving honey, I figured slimming down might serve to brighten my romantic future in the Lower 48.

"It's going to be the beginning of a new me," I told Jack one afternoon, as I was sucking on a five-shot Americano to rouse myself from a groggy nap

that had been brought on by a deep-dish pizza with Canadian bacon I had eaten for lunch.

"But dude," Jack said. "It's a doughnut-eating bicycle race. Doesn't that kind of defeat the purpose?"

Did I mention that Jack is skinny? Or that he eats a protein bar for breakfast and oatmeal for lunch, and, on the afternoons when we meet to drink coffee and discuss the perfidy of women ("I think it's genetic," Jack says) and bemoan our respective chronic bachelorhoods, whenever I pour a little sugar into my five shots of espresso, he mutters "white poison, white poison, white poison"?

I would not let Jack's negativity stop me. I had enough to worry about without him. The race would be 36 miles through the rolling hills of eastern Pennsylvania. True, there would be rest stops after 12 and 24 miles, where doughnuts would be served. True, for every doughnut a rider ate, three minutes would be subtracted from his or her final time. True, good eaters like me had a certain advantage in a race like this. But still, a daunting task awaited me. I had only a month until Labor Day, when the race would take place. I started training.

First, I bought a book on doughnuts. (Who knew that Cambodian Buddhists own nearly 80 percent of the independently run doughnut shops in Southern California?) I started adding a doughnut or two to my banana-nut muffin breakfast. (Mountain climbers spend time at altitude to get their lungs in shape; this seemed no different.) I wondered whether the Lehigh Wheelmen (the race organizers) would be serving crullers, or glazed, or even jelly-filled, as that would influence my race-day strategy. I boned up on the physiology of caloric expenditures. I meditated on the fact that doughnuts have also been known through history as "boil cakes" and "dumfunny's," and that in Lehigh, Nebraska, it's illegal to sell doughnut holes. This seemed profoundly unjust, but I was too busy fashioning myself into a doughnut-eating instrument of ruthless speed to right every one of this cruel world's most egregious wrongs. I would leave that to others.

■ "Hey, Bluto," said Jack one morning, as I wiped a dusting of white powder from my chin, and mentioned to him that contrary to popular wisdom, not all doughnuts were the same, that in fact jelly doughnuts were less fattening than plain ring ones, because while a ring doughnut might be physically lighter, it had a greater surface area exposed to the oil than a round one. "Don't you think you'd be better off actually getting on your bike once in a while, rather than becoming the world's foremost authority on fat Buddhists and weird doughnut facts?"

I had asked him repeatedly not to call me Bluto, but he had a point. So, two weeks before the race, I got on my bike. I made it an entire 6-mile loop

around Manhattan's Central Park. For a split second, I felt a flush of pride, which quickly turned into a suspicion of possible stroke. I felt my forehead. Dangerously clammy. I took my pulse. Ominously racing. I suspected exercise-induced arrhythmia. That, or plummeting blood-sugar levels. I sprinted to a nearby Greek diner and swallowed a doughnut (vanilla icing). I felt better, and made a mental note to ratchet back the mileage. When I got home I had another doughnut.

For an entire week, I did a loop a day around Central Park, and afterward, over doughnuts and coffee, studied doughnuts. I decided that I loved the simple cake doughnut the best, for its humility and quiet dignity in the face of more fashionable and (I thought) meretricious double-chocolate frosted and French twists and custard-filled. I also studied the heroes of cycling, searching for a role model. Knowing little of EPO or blood bags in Spanish refrigerators, I chose my hero solely on the majesty of diet. Jan Ullrich endured a professional lifetime of near misses and gained 10 to 20 pounds between seasons. I adopted Ullrich's nickname for myself, and started referring to myself in the third person.

"Dude, you want to see a movie tonight?" Jack asked one afternoon, as he nibbled on a protein bar and I worked over a plate of coconut-custard-filled doughnuts, just in case that's what would be served on race day.

"I would like to," I replied, "but the Great German Beast must train."

"I think the doughnuts are affecting your brain chemistry, Bluto," Jack said.

At the end of the week, my gout had flared up, which was really disconcerting, considering all the training I had done. I called my doctor. What did she think we could do about this latest development?

At her office, I discovered I had gained four pounds during my training regimen. I also learned, during my least favorite part of the exam, that I had an inflamed prostate.

I left with prescriptions for an anti-inflammatory, for the gout, and an antibiotic, for the prostate. And an admonition to lay off the doughnuts.

A week before the race, I knew I had to step up my training—problematic, because I now had a sore big toe, from the gout, an inflamed prostate, and a constant and nagging anxiety about sunburn, because one of the side effects of the antibiotic was a sensitivity to sunlight. I bought a hat and sunscreen, and I took my bike to the local bike shop and got a new seat with a cutout for the prostate.

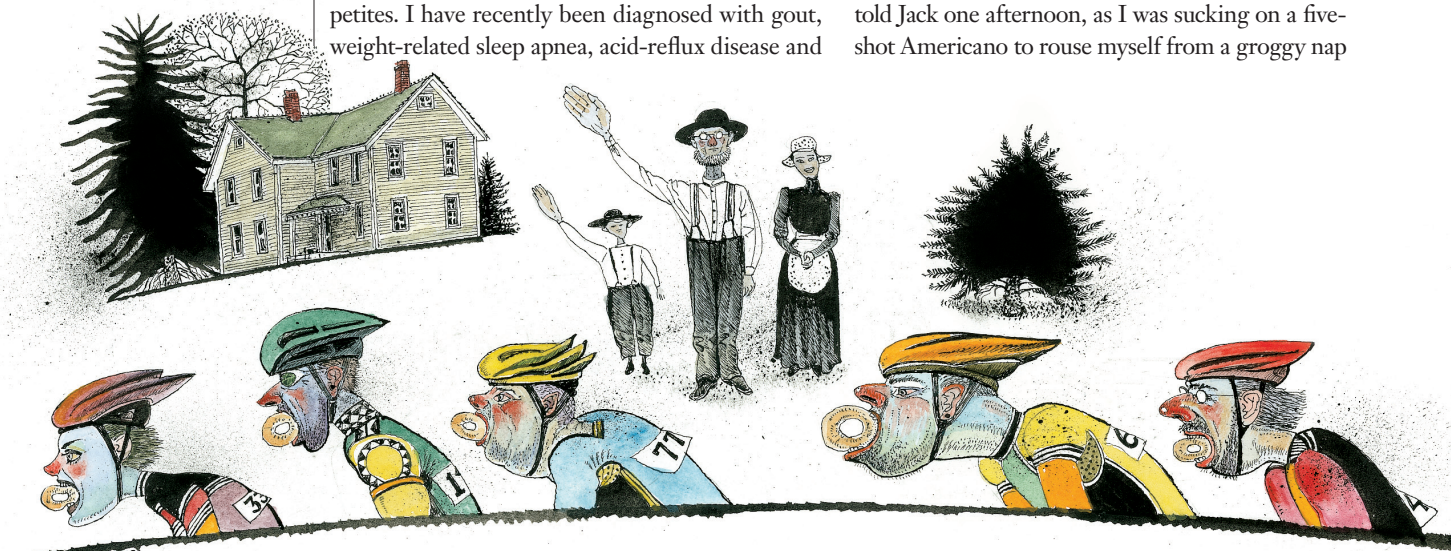
"And I'm entering a race," I told the shop salesman, "so I want to make some other adjustments on this baby."

"You're entering the race with this?" he asked, looking at my bicycle the way a fifth-generation butcher might regard a five-day-old Quarter Pounder.

"Yes," I said, "I am." I said it with as much dignity as I could muster.

"I am not going to remove the kickstand," he said. How had he read my mind? "On a bike like this, you want a kickstand. Plus, it weighs nothing."

I made it an entire 6-mile loop around Manhattan's Central Park. For a split second, I felt a flush of pride, which quickly turned into suspicion of possible stroke. I sprinted to a nearby Greek diner and swallowed a doughnut (vanilla icing). I felt better.





I didn't like the way he said "like this," but he had a point.

My new seat, called the VeloPLUSH (emblazoned in gaudy yellow) made my prostate feel better, and I doubled my distance, so that by the Saturday before the race, I had upped my regimen to 12 miles a day. Over breakfast (a cruller, a glazed and a long-john) that Saturday, I asked Jack if he thought I should have pasta that evening, or if I should wait until the next night, less than 24 hours before the race itself.

"The Great German Beast is thinking maybe both nights," I tell Jack. "For carbo-loading purposes."

"Dude," Jack says, "you need help."

"But I've been reading up on race strategy and maximizing fuel effi—"

"Bluto, dude, you don't need to carbo-load. You're going to be eating doughnuts all day! It's called the Donut Derby!"

■ There were 212 riders, and as far as I could see, I was the only one with a kickstand. I was also the only one without clip-on pedals. Others mounted their Colnagos, their Treks and LeMonds and Cannondales. I sighed. Innovators and leaders have never allowed themselves the comfort of the herd, and they had suffered

the inevitable and unfair criticism for decades if not centuries before history recognized their genius. The Great German Beast, for example, has long been, in my opinion, grossly misunderstood and would one day be remembered—a lifelong tendency toward gluttony, a history of recreational drug use and his most recent blood-doping disqualification notwithstanding—as a great ambassador for the sport.

I considered my competition. There were the scowling, lean and hungry speed jackals on their customized titanium mounts. I suspected I could outeat them. There were also fat, flabby and weirdly cheerful riders, on tandem bikes and in sandals, many of the men bearded, many of the women with long braids of gray hair. For a shameful moment, I regretted not blackening the VeloPLUSH with a Magic Marker, then caught myself. I patted the VeloPLUSH, made silent amends. I said a few words to my gun-metal gray, flaking, 500-pound, 25-year-old Panasonic 10-speed. I dabbed at a few stray globs of SPF 50 sunscreen on my nose. And we were off.

Within a mile, the skinny racers were out of sight and the most corpulent of the gluttons had drifted back. I was riding among others of my kind—husky, athletically built, big-boned good eaters. After 6 miles, I was gasping. Apparently, some of my fellow doughnut eaters had not closely read the description that the Lehigh Wheelmen had posted on its website, the one that described this adventure as a "fun ride." They were riding in packs. They were switching leaders. They were in this to win! The Great

## If That's How You Roll... 4 RACES WITH PLENTY OF DOUGH—AND NUTS

The year was 1989. Most American cycling fans were reveling in Greg LeMond's second Tour de France victory, but four men in Illinois, brainstorming events for their Mid-America Bicycle Club, concocted the idea of spoofing the zeitgeist with a race in which triumph was dependent on the ability to eat doughnuts. "Gluttony seemed appealing," says Tour de Donut cofounder Roger Kramer. "We decided to reward people for eating by taking minutes off their time. The champion would need more than just speed to win." ■ Over the past 18 years, the Tour de Donut has inspired similar races around the country—and a documentary, *Tour de Donut: Gluttons for Punishment* ([tourdedonutmovie.com](http://tourdedonutmovie.com)). —Jennifer Mack

THE  
ORIGINAL

**TOUR DE DONUT**, Staunton, IL  
**INAUGURAL YEAR:** 1989 **MILES:** 32  
**DATE:** Second Saturday in July  
**DOUGHNUT STATIONS:** Two **TIME DEDUCTION:** Five minutes per doughnut **BAKERY:** Jubelt's  
**INDIVIDUAL DOUGHNUT-EATING RECORD:** 32 **PRIZES:** \$50 for male and female overall winners; medals for top three **PUKING PENALTY:** None. "It's not how many doughnuts are digested, it's how many pass your esophagus," says Gluttons star Tim Ranek.

The terrain is somewhat hilly, but the biggest challenge is tolerating searing heat and sweltering humidity on a full stomach, says Kramer, who won the race in 1995 with 15 doughnuts. Competitors are pushing the technology of condensing the glazed ovals, with one woman using a potato masher to press three or four doughnuts together at a time. ([bebikeclub.com](http://bebikeclub.com))

**TOUR DE DONUT**, Greenville, OH  
**INAUGURAL YEAR:** 2007 **MILES:** 25  
**DATE:** Sept. 8, 2007; Aug. 2008  
**DOUGHNUT STATIONS:** Two **TIME DEDUCTION:** Five minutes per doughnut **BAKERY:** Eikenberry's  
**INDIVIDUAL DOUGHNUT-EATING RECORD:** TBD **PRIZES:** Lead Belly trophy for male and female time-adjusted champions, medals for fastest cycling times, and T-shirts for racers who register a "negative time" **PUKING PENALTY:** "You puke, you lose," says organizer Roger Bowersock.

The course has a traditional midpoint doughnut stop plus one at the finish line that promises to be a decisive face-off. Bowersock estimates the winner will clock a doughnut-adjusted negative time. ([colavitaohiocycling.com](http://colavitaohiocycling.com))

**DONUT DERBY**, Trexlertown, PA  
**INAUGURAL YEAR:** 2004 **MILES:** 35  
**DATE:** Labor Day **DOUGHNUT STATIONS:** Two **TIME DEDUCTION:** Three minutes per doughnut **BAKERY:** Krispy Kreme **INDIVIDUAL DOUGHNUT-EATING RECORD:** 26 **PRIZES:** Spare Tire Belt for top male and female doughnut eaters; box of doughnuts for best in each age group **PUKING PENALTY:** "Chum and you're DNF," says Karen O'Brien Winkler, former vice president of touring for organizers Lehigh Wheelmen Association.

The race our author did starts and ends at the Lehigh Valley Velodrome and follows many of the same roads as the Derby Ride, which we selected as one of the country's best group rides in our July issue. ([lehighwheelmen.org](http://lehighwheelmen.org))

**TOUR DE DONUTS**, San Diego  
**INAUGURAL YEAR:** 2001 **MILES:** 30–60 (45 in 2007) **DATE:** May 2008 **DOUGHNUT STATIONS:** Five **TIME DEDUCTION:** 30 seconds per doughnut **BAKERY:** Varies **INDIVIDUAL DOUGHNUT-EATING RECORD:** 24 **STAGE RECORD:** 13 **PRIZES:** Gluttonous Champion jersey awarded to overall winner for one year **PUKING PENALTY:** "Puke at any time before the last stage and your doughnut count is halved," says self-proclaimed director of gluttony Chris Nekarda.

In the only multistage doughnut event we know of, at the end of each section, riders eat as many doughnuts as they can in 15 minutes. This year's 45-mile, 1,300-foot-vertical-gain race was brutal, says Nekarda. "It averaged 10 percent for 2 kilometers with the final kilometer averaging 14 percent." ([ucsdccycling.org](http://ucsdccycling.org))



German Beast was not happy. So on the next hill, he made his move. I rose from the VeloPLUSH, started pumping. I passed one group, then another. I passed a third group—all aluminum and carbon, all clip-on pedals. The Beast was sick of being laughed at. “*Auf Wiedersehen*, boys and girls,” I grunted as I rocketed past a group of matching green-spandex racing uniforms.

A half mile later, the Beast felt sick. Wanting-to-puke sick. Wanting-to-quit sick. One group passed me on the next hill, then another on the next and the next. As I wheezed and mewled, a group of fatsos pedaled past. Damn them! Where was the first doughnut station? It was supposed to appear after 12 miles! I’d pedaled nearly an hour already. First they said it was a fun ride, now the race organizers had spread disinformation about the location of the doughnut rest stop? Did the Lehigh Wheelmen make “congenital, pathological liar” part of the job description for race organizers and publicists? When I got home, I planned to complain to the appropriate sanctioning bodies.

When I finally arrived at the first rest stop—a group of picnic tables underneath a shelter, with boxes and boxes of glazed Krispy Kreme doughnuts spread out, each doughnut with a popsicle stick rising from it—I had a doughnut, just to settle my nerves. Then I

had another one, because I was still upset. I held on to the sticks, because in order to earn my three-minutes-per-doughnut deduction, I needed to turn in the sticks to a Lehigh Wheelmen stooge, who would document my doughnut consumption. I thought of the 24 miles to go, and felt a headache coming on. So I had another doughnut.

Mmmm. That tasted good. I could eat 10 of these little devils. I could eat 20! But then what would happen? I might die of gout. Plus, I thought that no matter how carefully I kept my stress levels down, 20 Krispy Kremes might elevate my cholesterol. No, I decided, the Great German Beast would not gorge on Krispy Kremes. He just needed a little nutrition. He should not have skipped breakfast this morning. Perhaps he should have trained more efficiently. Possibly he should have heeded the advice of Jack, and his doctor, and his most recent girlfriend, who told him one unfortunate evening, when she woke to find him on the couch, staring at a Charles Bronson film festival on the television and dealing with a pint of Chunky Monkey, “You’ll never love a woman the way you love your sweets, Piggylardo.” He had hated when she called him Piggylardo, but she had a point.

But true champions do not regret the past, nor do they dwell on their handful of romantic setbacks, nor do they fantasize about the sad and lonely lives that await their empathy-challenged exes. They look forward. A few doughnuts would give the Great German Beast the fuel he needed to show those who had dared pass him.

I decided I would draft behind groups of riders for the rest of

the race to conserve energy, and because I had a stomachache and pedaling hurt. When the people ahead of me glanced back—in irritation, I thought—I made small talk. I might have been a parasite, but I would be a chatty parasite. A parasite who provided good company.

“Great day for a doughnut derby, huh?” I asked. “Great doughnuts, huh?” I said. “How many doughnuts you eat?” I inquired, in neighborly fashion. Most didn’t answer. Might the Lehigh Wheelmen care to know that so many of the participants are clearly violating the “fun ride” part of this fun ride? I made note of the grumps’ race numbers. The appropriate race officials would be hearing about the violators soon enough.

They drifted away. I drifted back, and back, until I was drafting behind a shapely and lithe redhead on a perky purple Trek. With great effort, I pulled alongside her.

“Fun ride,” I said, just to break the ice.

“Mmm,” she said.

“How many doughnuts you eat back there?” I asked.

“Huh,” she said. Or maybe she said, “One.” I wasn’t sure. The wind was blowing.

“I had three,” I said. “I’ve worked out an equation that takes into account caloric intake and expenditure.” I explained to her the common—and potentially dangerous—miscalculation so many people make regarding total calories, plain doughnuts and jelly-filled.

She said nothing. She was interested, I thought.

She pedaled faster. I was losing her. Also, gasping.

“Did you know that more than 150 years ago, Henry David Thoreau was once served a breakfast of eels, green beans and doughnuts?” I managed to choke out. Then she was gone.

I rode, I ached, I cursed the lying Lehigh Wheelmen, whose idea of fun, I was beginning to see, was to advertise mountains like the ones we were ascending as “gently rolling hills.”

My goutish left big toe hurt. My prostate was a little sore, in spite of my VeloPLUSH and many doses of antibiotics. My stomach ached, and I longed for more doughnuts. I thought I was in the top 30 percent of the field. If I could pack away 15 doughnuts at the next stop, I thought I might have a shot at medaling. That would shut Jack up. But something funny happened during those 9 to 15 miles between doughnut rest stops. I began to envision a life of seminormal fitness levels. A life without gout, or high cholesterol. A healthy life, in other words. Had this strange vision settled on me because I was a natural-born cyclist, finally at home in my element after too many decades spent clutching cartons of ice cream, staring at television in the predawn darkness? Was it a doughnut high? A simple matter of endorphins? Some nasty consequence of the antibiotics and too much sun? When the Great German Beast pulled into the second doughnut stop, he wasn’t sure.

I knew that if I could stuff five or six of the glazed Krispy Kreme doughnuts into my mouth very quickly, I would be able to eat another four or five before I realized exactly how stuffed I was. On the other hand, I sensed that double-figure doughnuts might work against this feeling of health and ease and fitness that had



Panel 1: Dog: "Look to that car, you've got got a pretty handsome!" Car: "I'm not handsome, I'm a Volvo 740 GLE, a Swedish masterpiece. Waaaa"





begun to wash over me, and to which I aspired. A great champion should not think too much, but the Great German Beast couldn't help it. So I thought, while I worked over a doughnut. To gorge, and to accept the odious rewards of instant gratification, or to deny oneself and to soldier on? Oh, the Lehigh Wheelmen are devious brutes, to have created such an existential crisis of a "fun ride." I ate two doughnuts, and mounted the Panasonic.

■ I was in the final 12 miles (if you could trust the Lehigh Wheelmen, which I knew to be impossible). I had already covered 24 miles, of which I was immensely proud. Me and my kickstanded Panasonic. These would be first 12 miles of the rest of my healthy, low-fat, doughnutless life. My gout would disappear. When my doctor said "we" henceforth, it would be with admiration and some affection. Jack wouldn't call me Bluto anymore. I passed people. A couple of wheezing hogs tried to draft behind me, but the Great German Beast would not have it. We charged up hills, around corners. We still had a stomachache, and a sore toe, and a nagging prostate, and a kickstand, but we were whipping some serious doughnut-laden ass. I charged past eight Cannondales, with matching racing uniforms, riding in synchronized formation.

"Eat Panasonic dust, pretty boys," I muttered, smiling to myself as I imagined them staring slack-jawed as my wagging VeloPLUSH sped furiously away from them.

"What'd you say, dude?" yelled the leader of the pack.

The Great German Beast is proud, but not stupid. "I said, 'Great day for a doughnut!'"

I sprinted the last 2 miles, passing five people, including a fat guy in a Twinkies T-shirt, a 10-year-old girl and a couple on a tandem bike who looked to be in their 60s.

When I crossed the finish line, a female Lehigh Wheelman (a Wheelwoman?) marked down my race number. I sought out the race organizer, Brian Cincera, a Lehigh Wheelman who seemed deceptively nice. I told him I was 50, that my raw time was two hours 40 minutes, that I had managed to pack away five doughnuts.

"What kind of medal will I get?" I asked. I was so psyched. It would be nice to start a new life with a medal. I looked forward to e-mailing my former girlfriend, to let her know that she was no longer bedding a cycling champion.

He looked at me with bemusement and pity.

"Dude," he said, "you got smoked."

■ I finished 20th of 28 people in the 50-to-59 age range, even though I was probably the youngest rider in the group. I finished 127th out of 212 people overall, in DAT (Doughnut Adjusted Time). Many rode faster, many ate more doughnuts.

I could not have pedaled any harder. I know that. A great champion needs to be honest with himself. But I realize that if I had eaten 15 doughnuts, I could have won the doughnut-eating title for my age group, and moved up from 20th to 14th place in DAT for the same group. I won't dwell on my doughnut failure,

though. A great champion moves on. It is now three weeks since the Donut Derby. It is three weeks since my last doughnut. After the race, inspired by that approximately eight-minute patch of well-being and weird optimism that enveloped me midrace, I have continued cycling six days a week. Just a couple of days ago, I made it around the park twice in 42 minutes, kickstand, VeloPLUSH and all.

I'm sunburned these days (the regimen of antibiotics lasts a month). I eat more salads now. I don't wake up in the middle of the night, gasping for air. I've lost a few pounds. Last week I rode over the George Washington Bridge and into New Jersey with Jack. He rode his purple mountain bike. We stopped at a park with a view of the Manhattan skyline. He was wearing his new helmet, which he had painted black and emblazoned with lightning bolts "because the chicks will dig it." After I told him he really might benefit from seeing a therapist, and after he called me "gout boy," we hopped on our bikes and resumed our ride.

It was a sunny day, but I had slathered my SPF 50 lotion on. We were at the bottom of what looked like a 2-mile ascent, but I had survived the "gentle hills" of the Lehigh Wheelmen, so I was not worried. Jack pulled ahead. I pedaled steadily.

Would I continue my new life of fitness? Would my gout and prostatitis recede into the dim recesses of my once-husky memory? Would I join the Lehigh Wheelmen and buy a bicycle without a kickstand? Would Jack and I ever find girlfriends who appreciated us?

"These are all questions the Great German Beast thinks about," I yelled to Jack, as we continued our ascent, beneath reddening leaves, above slowly moving sailboats.

He said something, but he was pulling away, and I couldn't hear him. Did I mention that Jack can be very competitive sometimes?

"What?" I said.

"I think I liked you better when you were a doughnut-eater," Jack said, and picked up his pace.

At this, the Great German Beast, wearily but with grim determination, once again, one more time, rose from the VeloPLUSH. He pulled to within inches of the Angry Voiceover Artist's purple mountain bike, drafted for a minute, and then, a half mile from the top of the hill, he zoomed past.

"See you later, oatmeal-head," I yelled.

A great champion never surrenders. ⑩

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