



## SEARCHING FOR EPIC

*What are the elements of an “epic” ride? Is it the group of riders that keeps the morale high? Is it the challenging terrain testing the limits of the cyclists? Rapha, the high-end British clothing company is traveling the US looking for those elements.*

There are 2 teams covering this country, a West Coast and East Coast squad, both tasked with the mission of finding “epic” rides and document them for an upcoming hardback book. This ongoing mission will undoubtedly produce a book that is worthy of occupying a space on your table for years to come. The book will not only cover the routes so the reader could ride the course themselves, but it will be backed up with the type of amazing photography that Rapha is known for. To cover such a daunting task they have assembled a select cadre of riders. The purpose today was to document the ride and capture the pure epic nature, and with any epic adventure their needs to be support. Following the riders as much as possible was a sag wagon filled with not only the essentials like bananas, Fig Newtons and Coke, but also the talented photographer Daniel Sharp [danielsharpphoto.com] shooting on film to capture the pain, suffering and triumph of the ride. A true connoisseur of photography will appreciate the texture of shooting with film. Film is apparently not dead, just neglected. I was lucky enough to be invited on one of the West Coast Rapha rides and be part of the collaborative effort to document the adventure. I joined them on the Cloud Burst Summit ride during their California tour.

With Sherpa-like devotion the van followed us as we rolled out of South Pasadena. This quaint little town has many eclectic coffee shops, galleries and boutiques lining the main street, a perfect starting point for our pink Rapha jersey-wearing riders. Today’s ride was going to take us through a few of the neighboring towns until we reached Highway 39, a 7-mile rolling climb that would take us to the backside of Glendora Mountain. Instead of turning right and scaling Glendora Mountain, we would continue straight to Crystal Lake. From there we would ride across a plateau to Highway 2. After that, it was one more climb to Cloud Burst Summit. Then it would be a descent into Pasadena for Italian food and story telling. The amount of elevation this day would be well over 10,000 feet, but to take it up a notch from a 10 to 11 on the epic scale was that Los Angeles was in the middle of a heat wave and the temperature would be in the 90’s.

The pace was gentlemanly, allowing conversation to flow freely as the sweat did from my face. However I knew that once the road started to climb it would be game on. As a racer it is second nature to look at who I’m with and make quick assessments on who

was riding well and who would keep me company when I fell off the back. A quick scan of the Rapha riders’ cadence and pedal strokes showed that these riders spend many hours a week pounding the pedals. We had a slight whisper of an Englishman who looked like he could climb like the devil. At the other end was a stocky bull of a man who looked like breaking crank arms was a daily inconvenience, like having a flat tire. I had no grand illusions of setting the pace; I was concerned with survival. My weapon of choice was the Specialized Roubaix SL with compact gearing. While my racer friends mock my choice of compact gearing, I am secure enough to know that when the road points up or that I’m going to be spending hours in the saddle, the compact ratios are going to be a savior and the smooth ride of the Roubaix will make the hours click by easier, at least that was the plan.

Sure enough when we approached the climb to Crystal Lake the pressure was applied. It wasn’t a deliberate act to see who the alpha dog of the group was, it was more of a Darwinian selection that weeded out those who could keep the tempo steady and those would have to catch back on during the descents or when we would regroup. As the group was spread out along the serpentine Highway 39, the sun beating down on us and salt already drying on my Rapha jersey, I knew it was going to be an epic adventure.

We regrouped several times throughout the ride. At these points the riders would pull out of their back jersey pockets small Rapha reporter-style notepads to write down the elements of the ride so far. Food was recorded, how they felt and the conditions of the ride, all documented so that future travelers would know what to expect. Due to storm damage and general disrepair there were sections of the ride that we had to ride around a gate designed to keep vehicles from continuing. It was at these moments that I had to do a gut check. The umbilical cord of the follow van was broken and there was no longer a plan B to fall back on if things got too tough. However, that is what an epic ride is about. The challenge of completing a ride that most people would never consider trying and pushing past your own preconceived notions of what you think you can do. Once you accomplish a ride like this, everything else becomes easier.

The following day the Rapha riders, still road weary, traveled north to tackle the Santa Barbara area and the climbs that it offers. I skulked home with my legs feeling like lead weights. These Rapha rides will continue through this year and next, leading up to the aforementioned book that documents each epic adventure. Even if you don’t crave the desire to throw yourself into one of the Rapha rides that will leave you shattered physically, the imagery of these rides will lift your morale enough to inspire you to ride a little longer and farther than before. And that’s what epic is all about. 📖

More Information: [rapha.cc/continental](http://rapha.cc/continental)

