


Riding my self into a State(s): Part 1

In Part 1 of this trilogy Terry Dickerson travels to Denver in the USA and experiences the best that the US highways authority can through at him; aided by his own stupidity, he makes a right mess of a short ride from the airport to Denver. In the second part the Rocky Mountains call and the third part is about riding a 300km audax from Denver.

In May I had to go to America for a welding conference (lucky me!); my destination was (near) Salt Lake City in Utah. However, I stopped off at Denver on the way to and from the UK. I took a bike; my main objective was to ride a 300km audax from Denver.

I arrived at Denver International Airport (DIA) at about 6 o'clock pm. From the Internet I discovered that one could cycle from the airport to Denver, I had plenty of time to ride the 25 miles to Denver before darkness fell. Setting off I followed the "  DIA Exit" signs; however, these signs disappeared after a while. As there were no signs that said Denver (or much else for that matter), I had to guess the way.

Mistake 1 I took a short cut on surfaced track that went down to the main road. After a couple of hundred yards I came across a section where the metalled surface had been removed. The section, which was about 12feet wide and the whole width of the track, had filled with mud. I had no option but to walk or ride through, I decided to walk. I was to find out this was no ordinary mud - it was special adhesive mud that stuck to my shoes and built-up on my tyres. Each step and each turn of the wheel meant another layer was deposited. On getting to the other side my shoes weighed about 5kg each and my 1" tyres were hidden under a 2" layer of gloop. Much of the mud was removed by vigorously stamping and banging. What passing motorists thought of this guy with huge feet pogoing like he was at a Sex Pistols concert I do not know - but I could imagine "its alright dear he's from England". Riding once more the remaining mud on the tyres would break-off, fly into the air and do their best to hit me in the face. I joined the main road from DIA

Mistake 2 I turned off the road I was on thinking that I would go to a roundabout or something similar, If I was wrong I could just go back on to the main road, or so I thought. However, the Americans do not do roundabouts! I ended up on a motorway type road with no easy way off. I rode about a mile up to a flyover where I could get onto another smaller road. The problem this time was the muddy bank that I had to ~~climb~~ scramble up to get to the smaller road - you guessed it, the mud was of the type previously encountered.

After more mud removal I set off towards Denver, which I could see in the distance. I soon felt a bump bumb bump through the handlebars. The front tyre was flat. Now it was about half-past seven, I had travelled about 10miles in one and a half hours, and I could feel darkness approaching. The only thing that gave me some cause for celebration was that that it was the front tyre that had deflated. I removed the offending article (thorn) and repaired the hole.

Mistake 3 In order to save weight and make transporting it easier I had only taken a mini-pump. This made pumping the tyres to the high pressure required near impossible. I later found out that about 70psi was all I could manage. This would have been ok for my normal fat tyres, but I had fitted 1" (actually about $\frac{3}{4}$ ") tyres, again to save weight. Pump pump pump pump pump pump rest ... pump pump pump etc.

Off I went down to a crossroad, no signposts; I of course picked the wrong way. A small detour later I was heading towards Denver (I hoped). Bang, the front tyre hit a stone and pinch punctured. I said some terrible words, many terrible words, many times! It was now getting dark so I put a new tube in the wheel. Pump pump pump pump pump pump rest ... pump pump pump etc. Now it was obvious that 70psi was inadequate to prevent the tube getting pinched so I rode very carefully. Lights on and off I went again. Cresting a hill I expected to see the lights of Denver - no - but at least there were buildings so I headed for them. By this time I had decided I was beaten and would take a taxi to the hostel. The doorman of the hotel wandered why I through myself at his feet and started kissing them. The hotel receptionist called me a cab (that's an old joke so do not think of going there). Retiring to the bar to wait for my ride I ordered a local beer, did it taste good, mind you fluid scooped out of the janitor's used bucket would have tasted good at that time. The taxi duly arrived and took me to the Youth Hostel.

Lessons learned: use heavy tyres in the states; take a proper pump; American maps are crap; American road signposting is crap; the roads in the US are poorly surfaced; take the bus next time.

In the next part, things get worse before they get better.

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