



## Getting ready for the Lumberjack 100 by Matt Acker



Whether you're preparing for your first Lumberjack 100 mountain bike race or you're a multi-time finisher it's always helpful to have some hints and tips leading up to the event. Having raced a few Lumberjack 100s myself I figured I'd put down some thoughts on how to prepare before and during the event. Obviously, leading up to the event it's always a good idea to get some solid base miles and training rides in, so I'll skip past the early training portion and jump to the period a few weeks out from the race. When it comes to preparing for an endurance event I like to simulate race conditions as best as possible on one of my last long rides leading up to the race. The Lumberjack course has a large percentage of singletrack with some doubletrack thrown in to make a nice loop. These days the course is around 30 some miles per lap and consists of 3 laps. There's a fair bit of climbing per lap at around 2,500 feet of ascent. I like to get out for a nice long ride on local trails using singletrack and some gravel with plenty of hills to help dial in my setup. It's good to setup your bike and nutrition just as you'd use it on race day to see how everything plays out. I like to shoot for a solid 4-6 hour ride. It's better to discover issues with your hydration or bike setup well before the race as opposed to race day. If you're in need of new tires, a brake bleed, fresh drivetrain or any other major maintenance or adjustments be sure to get those out of the way well in advance (i.e. not the week prior to the event). If you've been logging some heavy miles be sure to rest your body up as best as possible the week of the race. Speaking of the race, let's jump into some specifics.



## **The course**

Lumberjack 100 consists of a paved road roll out of a few miles followed by a 30+ mile loop of singletrack and double-track. You'll have the good fortune of riding the loop 3 times before finishing the event at the completion of the third lap. Since it's a lap format race that means every 30 or so miles you'll have access to the pits where you can see your crew and grab whatever you need. There is also a neutral aid station located approximately halfway through the loop with some snacks and water. Check the website/facebook page for specifics on the neutral aid station. There are a lot of hills in the course but none over a couple hundred feet. The singletrack is mostly fast and flowy with some sandy spots and tree roots to contend with. The doubletrack and gravel roads are mildly sandy but nothing crazy and are good spots to recover a bit and eat. For reference, the lead group can cook through a lap in a little over 2 hours so it's possible to crush through a lot of the trail at 15+ mph. When looking at a map of the course you can see there's a large outer loop and some tighter twisting stuff in the middle of that large loop. This large outer loop is quite varied from tight and twisty dark dirt trail to open bench cut hardwoods. It's a nice varied stretch to keep interest high. The inner loops are where a lot of the bigger steep climbs are hiding and depending on the direction of the course come either near the start or end of each loop. It's beneficial to familiarize yourself with the course so you know what to expect and how to plan for each lap. Naturally, the best way to be fully prepared is to make a day or weekend trip up to Big M to pre-ride a lap or two! The Manistee National Forest is a beautiful place to camp and ride for a few days!



## **Bike setup**

Everyone has their own preferences of what bike to use for endurance mountain biking. My weapon of choice is a short travel full suspension rig with a 1x11 drivetrain with plenty of range for climbing and carrying speed on the two-tracks. Naturally, some folks prefer singlespeed, fatbike, hardtail or full rigid. Whatever your choice, be sure you've got it all dialed in. The course has a lot of singletrack but it's quite fast and flowy. There isn't a huge need for aggressive tires at

Big M and I usually run something like a Schwalbe Rocket Ron (snakeskin) 29 x 2.25" or Continental X-King 29x2.2". A good fast rolling tire with some cornering knobs is what you'll want. Being able to grip and rip all those turns can save a lot of time over the course of 100 miles. I've become smitten with having a top-tube mounted feedbag for quick access to snacks. It's much easier to dig into something you can see as opposed to fishing around in jersey pockets while dodging trees. You'll definitely want to have your spare tube, multi-tool, CO2, and other repair items stowed securely under your seat or in a hydration pack. One thing a lot of people overlook is a derailleur hanger. There are a lot of sticks and debris floating around those trails due to the sheer size of the system and forest, I've seen many folks shred derailleur hangers out there and it's always nice to be able to pedal your bike back to the pits. Speaking of pits, it never hurts to have a toolbox and extra items handy (derailleur, tire, wheel, etc...) that you can't carry with you on your bike. You might have to go 30 miles without it but at least when you pass through again you can fix what ails you.



## **Nutrition**

Depending on your pace and fitness you can expect a lap to take a bare minimum of just over 2 hours. For me, that means 3 bottles or the equivalent in bottle/camelback ratio. Since I ride full suspension I can only put one bottle on my bike, so I run a camelbak. I've tried to get away with two bottles per lap but paid the price on what is typically a warm day. I prefer to get some of my calories in liquid form, so I use a calorie dense drink mix (Carborocket Half-evil) which delivers 300 calories per bottle. The rest of my calories come in the form of gels, chews and solid food. It's not unusual for people to get sick of sweet drink mixes and gels during long events like this one, so it's nice to have some savory food options in case your stomach begins to get tired of sugar. I like to have some potato chips, cheez-its, beef jerky or other salty items in sandwich bags ready to go in the pits. I also like to have more snack and food options than I'll need calorie wise, so I can pick and choose what sounds good each time I come through. Bananas are not only easy to eat but a good source of potassium (as are potato-based foods), and they are easy to digest which is nice if your stomach becomes uneasy. One trick I have is to carry to-go pouches of applesauce as they go down easy and help settle your stomach. Many nutrition brands have electrolyte/sodium pills that can help fend off cramps and keep your electrolytes balanced. My preference is the Rocketlytes by Carborocket as they have ginger and other natural additives to soothe your stomach. Whatever food items you choose to fuel with, be sure to test them well in advance and on long rides to see how your body handles them. Another tip is to try out your drink mix of choice when it's warm. It's not unusual for it to get 90 degrees or hotter in June here in Michigan. Some drink mixes might taste great when they're iced down or in cool weather, but once they're warm they can become unpalatable (this is especially true for calorie dense drinks). Some bonus items to stock in the pits might include; ice-cold soda, simple sandwiches, cold pizza, savory wraps, popsicles, cookies, and orange slices.



## Hydration

As I mentioned above, the last few times I raced lumberjack I was on a full suspension rig which only fit one bottle, so I also run a Camelbak. I've found that I need at least 3 bottles worth of fluid per-lap to stay hydrated but that I don't always drink every ounce depending on the weather. I find that a hydration pack is easier to take small sips more frequently from as opposed to reaching for bottles on trails and that keeps me steadily hydrating all day. You'll want to avoid not drinking for an hour then chugging a whole bottle of fluid as it can cause bloating and stomach discomfort. It's much easier to stay on top of hydration when you can steadily sip and ounce or two every 10 minutes or so. I like to mix a calorie dense drink in my bottle and put water in my camelbak so that I have the option of fresh water or flavored drink mix. If your stomach starts to get tired of your drink mix it's nice to have something to drink that has no flavor. The downside to using a camelbak is that they aren't super-fast to refill at the pits so if you plan on hanging with the leaders be sure to have at least two so you can do a straight exchange and have your crew refill the empty one while you're riding. Bottles are much easier to grab and go, and also easy to track how much fluid you're ingesting. The nice thing is that you only need to cover 15+ miles at any given time before you'll come across some water since there's an aid station at the halfway of the lap. The tough thing about hydration is if you fall behind it's a tough game to play catch-up. Choose whichever system will keep you drinking steadily throughout the day.



## Pit stops

The pits at Lumberjack are both a blessing and a curse. There's nothing better than rolling in off a tough lap and seeing your crew and grabbing a cold drink. There can also be nothing harder than getting up off a chair in 90-degree heat after relaxing and getting back on your bike for that third lap. It's best to plan your pit stops in advance and if you're having people crew for you, be clear to them on what your plan is for the race. If you're expecting to fly in for 15 seconds and grab all new bottles and food, then make sure they know. On the flip side, if you tend to loiter in pit stops, and easily waste time during events, then have someone there to motivate you and keep you moving in and out of the pit. It's helpful to have a small table to spread out the items you need along with a cooler to keep bottles and food cold during the race. Have your pit area setup and dialed in to keep confusion and stress to a minimum. Try to be efficient with how long you're off the bike and in the pits, as it can be difficult to get going again after standing around or sitting down for a long time. You definitely want to be sure to address all your needs, but don't get caught in the habit of sitting there chatting with your friends as there is a cut-off time to hit.



## Mental game

Endurance racing can be as much mental as it is physical. For many racers the actual pedaling is the least of their concern. Come prepared for a long day in the saddle and don't get thrown off if you encounter some adversity such as a crash or a mechanical. No matter how much you plan and rehearse something can always go wrong. Keep your expectations for your race realistic, and don't get down-trodden if you fall off that pace you had planned on keeping or get passed during a tough lap. The best thing you can do is keep pedaling forward, being friendly with other rides/crew/volunteers and enjoy your surroundings. Keeping a positive mental outlook can make or break your race, and don't forget that mountain biking is supposed to be fun! It helps to ride with upbeat and positive people as well as having a good crew to keep you motivated. Have your crew ready to talk you off that quitting ledge if need be, and have people you trust to keep you going. In turn, be positive with other racers who are struggling and help motivate folks who are dragging behind by saying hi and telling them to ride with you. The camaraderie that comes with endurance racing can be an uplifting and amazing experience so embrace it and push yourself to succeed.



### Pacing

One of the final pieces of the racing puzzle is pacing. Every race I've ever done whether it's 25 miles or 340 miles, everyone always starts out going fast. Lumberjack is no different, especially with the paved road roll-out before hitting the trails. Seed yourself realistically in the starting area around people of a similar pace or goal. It's good to push yourself a bit harder than usual to get a decent spot on the singletrack, but don't go so hard you blow up and the next 50 people need to try and pass you. Most people will ride the first lap much harder than they should, and by the third lap they are struggling to hold pace. Trust me, even if you're behind your goal a bit during the first 10 miles there is plenty of time to make that up over the last 90. Be patient in the singletrack and make the most of the doubletracks when it comes to passing. It's a much easier mentally when you're the one passing people on lap three as opposed to being the one that everyone seems to be passing.

Well, those are my tips for riding and racing the Lumberjack 100. Hopefully there's something in there you'll find useful. Most of all, be sure to enjoy the event for what it is; an awesome group of mountain bikers out riding 100 miles of singletrack in one of our beautiful national forests! Take the time to make some friends while you're there, say thank you to crew members, promoters and volunteers. After you're all done riding, eat some good grub and head over to the Pine or Manistee river for a refreshing swim. I highly recommend making a weekend out of it and sitting by the campfire afterwards reliving the days events with good company.

