

L&M Group – Ricoh New Zealand - USA trip update 3

Apologies for the late update but it has been a very very busy last few weeks with about 12 Pro/cat 1 races in 3 weeks. Anyway enjoy the read below.

Whats a good way to spend a wednesday in the middle of the American summer you might ask? How about loading up a '97 Subaru Outback with five race bikes on the roof and a bunch of New Zealand's finest young cyclists, getting up before dawn and driving across three, mind numbingly similar states to the mighty city of Chicago in time to compete in a 10 day professional cycling race series? For someone from New Zealand the saying "everything's bigger in Texas" really actually applies to America as a whole. I mean if you were to drive 1200km in New Zealand you would either be starting or finishing in the sea, where over here you don't even come close to touching the sides. Anyway it certainly gives us plenty of time to get to know each other, plan for the upcoming events and digress on what has already been accomplished.



So to kill some time on the journey which there is plenty, Jimmy Williamson wrote about the previous weekends racing. So in Jimmy's words an update from a couple of weeks ago:

We warmed up nicely for our 12 hr drive with a couple of hours car trip to a race in Pennsylvania on Saturday and then a solid 8hr return trip to Connecticut on Sunday.

Saturday saw us take on the Historic Marietta Criterium in a tranquil town out the back of the Amish headquarters in Lancaster. The race was certainly not the biggest on our calendar but that didn't mean that it wouldn't be fiercely hard and a good test of how our bodies were responding after two weeks of training in the heat. A solid field lined up due to a lack of other racing in the area and we knew that it would be a good fight. The course was through the quiet but old streets of the small town and although the course looked tame when taken on at an average of 45kph it was anything but. Myself and James had raced on the track late the night before and were still getting the legs accustomed to the quick change in codes so initially I was not feeling amazing.

As the race progressed it was clear that the fast pace and long finishing straight was not friendly to breakaway riders however Scotty continued to force his belief that solo is the only way to ride and enjoyed several laps off the front, much to the confusion of the American spectators who are not used to someone attempting to race alone, Scotty was forced to use some of his spare energy on with both hands to try and coax up some vocal support, lucky he only needs his legs to pedal. Meanwhile the rest of us were suffering the bunches intolerance of Scotty's riding style as they put some massive surges in to close the gap down. U

Unfortunately disaster struck in the last third of the race as the pace was heating up, Scotty was finally caught, and both James and Tim were stuck behind riders who were struggling to stay upright let alone be a part of the race. In unusual circumstances for a criterium anywhere in the world neither of them were allowed to rejoin the race after both suffering mechanical issues due to crashes. Thus it was left to three of us. Grayson had been riding well and looking after himself in a good position in the bunch with myself. When they announced a crowd prime with about 10 laps remaining I took advantage of my good position to have a crack only to get edged out and come up empty handed in second. It took me a couple of laps to recover from the effort and I soon rejoined Scotty and Grayson near the front of the pack in the final laps. A bike malfunction in with two laps remaining ended my race prematurely however and I was forced to watch from behind the barriers as Grayson showed his strength and speed with a long.....

sorry where was I...my typing was just rudely interrupted as Ol' Suby had drunk too much and was all out of gas just a mile short of the next service station, seems Mr Canny is not always Mr Reliable. Lucky for generous kind citizens of Ohio rather quickly coming to the rescue and giving us enough gas to get the much needed top up down the road.....

....anyway so Grayson had a great long and strong sprint to win the teams first podium of the trip in third placed. A great effort considering the lack of support in the finale. Another positive was seeing fellow kiwi Brad Evans take the win.



With a boost in morale and an eagerness to improve we didn't blink an eye at racing again the next day some four hours away in Connecticut. This time the race was a 60km crit on a purpose built cycling/exercise track in a city park. A nice flowing course with some elevation and exposure to the wind thrown into the mix. As is standard with these amateur races the field is unpredictable, uncontrollable and almost impossible to judge, there are always super strong riders from places you wouldn't expect. I had a good crack at splitting things up early on in the wind and was off the front for a few laps with a couple of other guys but a lack of commitment on their behalf meant we didn't survive our little jaunt for very long, not that it was an issue for me as straight away Scotty countered and decided to drag some poor soul along to join in the torture this time. Grayson was attentive and followed the next strong guys to jump and soon the two groups joined up at the front to make a leading charge of five. It was the perfect situation for us so myself, Tim and James set about trying to control the wildness of the field. I use the word "wild" as a euphemism for how they actually ride in that situation. Instead of the sensible, efficient and effective method of sharing the work at a steady and hard pace to bring the break back, these guys preferred to take the suicide attempt of doing 150% half lap solo burners on the front then swinging off and coming to a near halt, the other way to describe this is taking 5 steps forward and then 7 back, the end result being that you don't catch the break or anyone or help yourself to finish the race anywhere near the front. The hard thing about being in our position in that situation is that you can't let these guys go when they take a flyer as there is still a chance one of them will actually be strong enough to drag the bunch across to the break, therefore we were set to the torturous task of jumping with all of them, essentially doing at least one above max effort per lap for 40 odd laps. Much to mine and James' delight Timmy actually came into his own in this muscle destroying type of riding and we soon lost count of how many times he covered moves even after having to change to a rear training wheel due to a puncture. Anyway as we entered the final 10laps of the race Scotty and Grayson's smooth and steady riding break was closer to catching us than we were to them and so I looked to try and move up the placings and finish the race strongly off the front, I got away with four other guys who had been some of the main surgers or 'pretend chasers' and we continued to battle to get around a lap consistently. These guys have obviously never lined up in anything like the

Millers Flat to Mosgiel Kelvin Hattie Memorial Handicap race as they had no concept of lapping out or working in a group, meaning we were putting in massive amounts of effort and getting virtually no where, it was frustrating riding but I just chalked it up to good training for the next races.

Meanwhile up front Scotty and Grayson had lapped the remainder of the field and were gearing up for the finale. Scotty gave it a good crack at taking the win himself with a lap or so to go but was closed down leaving Grayson to line up the sprint. Again showing his impressive turn of speed to go one better than the day before and take a fine 2nd place. He had also stamped his authority all over the mid race primes not letting guys twice his size get one up on him in any of them.

The drive home after a successful and hard day on the bike is always enjoyable especially in a group of supportive, enthusiastic and genuine good buggers where everyone can have a good laugh and mull over the days outing so our four hour drive home was done and dusted with no trouble.

Now I (James Canny) will take over for the rest of the update.

Intelligentsia Cup - Chicago

We arrived in Chicago after 12 hours driving across 5 states. Our accommodation for the next two weeks was nothing short of amazing. We were staying with Doug Zell owner of Intelligentsia Coffee a friend of mine who is also a very handy bike racer. Dougs company as you no doubt picked up was the major sponsor for the Intelligentsia Cup.

Dougs home/apartment was simply stunning, it was on the 47th floor of the Heritage on Millennium Park in downtown Chicago. Beautiful views and even better coffee. We took a quick spin on the shore of Lake Michigan and got ready for the first of 8 gruelling races over the next 10 days.

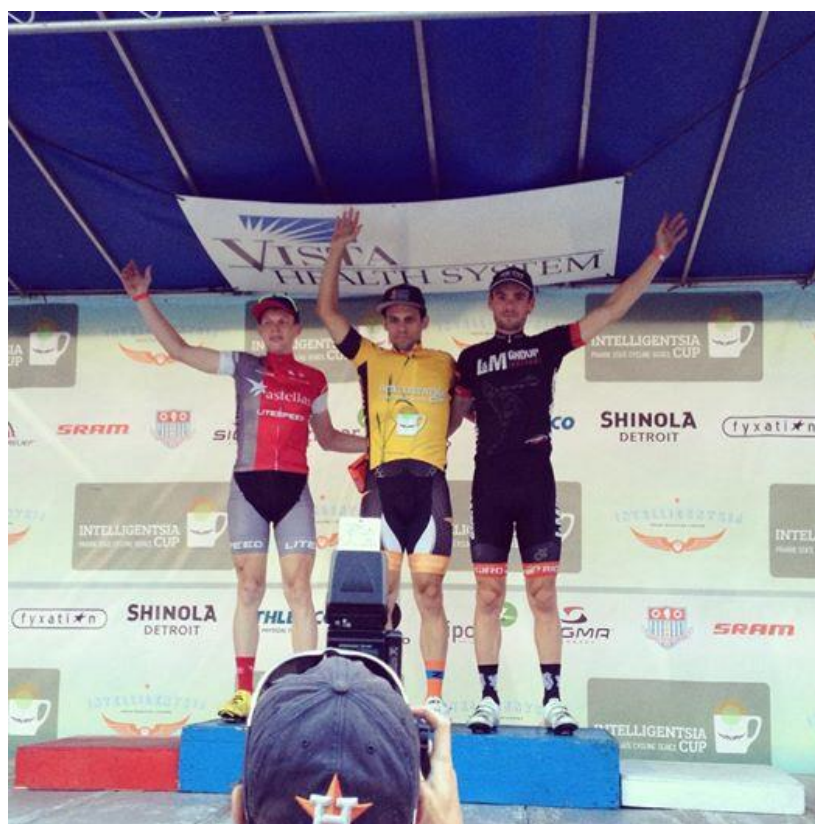
Stage 1 – Waukegan Criterium

With top team Astellas, Athlete Octane, United Healthcare and Champion Systems lining up for this series we knew it was going to be a tough couple weeks. We arrived early warmed up hard and had a quick team talk which consisted of “If there is a breakaway we need to be in it”! The race started hard and fast with each of us taking turns to cover the different break aways. The major difference between racing over here and back home is the sheer speed and risks some of the riders take, its crazy dangerous sometimes but heaps of fun. Eventually Scotty managed to ride clear solo and was joined but a cohort of American pros. We waited in the field and again covered any riders trying to bridge the gap. Its an important part of team work in cycling the covering of breaks because it essentially frustrates anyone trying to ride across to a break away. For example with Scotty up the road a rider from a team may try and “jump” across to the break quickly, this usually

requires at least two guys working hard together to bridge the gap, what our role is the joker i.e. to sit on the guys trying to bridge across and refuse to work which we are entirely entitled to do because we have a rider already in the break thus frustrating the riders trying to get across, the beauty of this tactic of course is worst case scenario one of our riders gets a free ride across to the breakaway.

Anyway back to the race Scotty went beast mode and drove the break which survived to the end. Scotty who is not reknown for sprinting rode well to take 3rd Place and our first podium in a full pro criterium!!! Such a great feeling, Jimmy and Grayson sprinted well to take 11th and 12th.

Full of pride in the jersey we drove back to base camp in down town Chicago and planned the next stage.



Stage 2 – Lake Bluff Criterium

This was a tough race, a dangerous course with a massive vocal crowd again we covered all the breaks but unfortunately one slipped away. Scotty tried to bridge across but the Americans were not going to let him get away again and brought him back. The boys worked hard with some other teams to bring the break back but with all the big American teams well represented it was a fruitless chase and the break stayed to the finish. Jimmy was our highest finisher in 12th. Not a great day at the office but still a solid outing by the lads and Grayson picked up a number of big money cash primes to keep food on the table for a few weeks haha.

Stage 3 – Crystal Lake Criterium

This was a tough course in down town Crystal Lake with a number of turns and an uphill finish. After the disappointment the night before we were highly motivated to get back up there. All the boys rode well and held the bunch together and Jimmy found his sprinting legs to finish 3rd behind USA Criterium Champion Dan Holloway and series leader Chad Hartley, a phenomenal effort. Grayson impressively finished 5th! A great race and spirits were high going into the two rest days. We spent the rest days looking around Chicago and checking out the sights and sounds.



Stage 4 – Willow Springs Road Race

Unlike the previous three stages this was a road race and probably more suited to us. With a small climb it looked like not a bad stage to get a good break going. All the boys were aggressive from the start Tim in particular rode like a man possessed covering all the breaks. I stayed close to Jimmy my role being to look after him for as long as possible and keep him out of the wind should it really start blowing. On the second of six ascents of the climb Grayson launched a blistering attack that was brought back by an Optum pro with help from Astella's pro cycling. As soon as it was brought back Scotty countered and established a break that lasted for the next 4 laps. The pro teams put there workers on the front and pulled him back. Jimmy and Grayson managed good sprints and placed 7th and 8th. To be honest we were pretty gutted with how the race panned out and some negative tactics

from some of the other teams really restricted what we could do. We had a wee team meeting afterwards and all agreed we rode well but next race we need to just ride so bloody hard no one wants to try and sit on.

Stage 5 – Beverly Hills Cycling Classic

Held in Beverly Hills Chicago (not to be confused with its east coast cousin) the course was pretty tough with a longish climb and fast chicanes through a relatively affluent neighbourhood. Our plan was dead simple, attack attack and attack some more. So right from the gun I attacked (hoping that some big strong American pros would come with me to share the work) unfortunately no one wanted to join me so I put my head down and rode hard for a time. Once the other teams got their act together they chased me down and Timmy in fine form countered immediately. They then had to chase him down too! Just to rub a little more salt into the wound Grayson and Scotty attacked with a few others staying away for nearly 40km with Grayson winning prime after prime of cold hard cash. The break looked like it would stay till the finish until one of the American teams who had a rider in the break decided to ride hard on the front and bring it back, pretty much the stupidest most pointless thing I have ever seen in a bike race as the worst their rider could have finished was 5th (their best rider ended up 7th.....idiots). Anyway they brought the break back and Jimmy countered with a strong pro but the break didn't quite stick. So a bunch sprint it was and Jimmy placed 6th and Grayson in 10th.

Stage 6 – Elmhurst Criterium

Today we were aiming for those top steps again. Having not learnt my lesson I attacked from the gun with a very strong rider from an elite mid west team. We were bombing the corners and taking a few risks to get away. The field was strung out and hot on our tails when the rider driving the peloton crashed at the head of the field and as easy as that we had a little break of two. We worked together for a few laps but the other guy with me was doing suicide turns so I backed off, sure enough the peloton caught us and Tim and Jimmy countered a few times until eventually Scotty got into a strong break. The break worked well and opened a big gap, Grayson shrewdly followed a few riders who were trying to cross to the break away and almost made it only to run out of road. Scotty sprinted in the break and took a well deserved 5th with Grayson in 11th.

Stage 7 – Downtown Chicago Criterium

This was in some ways the queen stage of the Intelligentsia Cup as it was outside the sponsor and our host Intelligentsia Coffee owner Doug Zell's roast plant. Without a win to our name and a little frustrated at the near misses we decide to throw all caution to the wind and ride the most aggressive race we could, an all or nothing not more top tens, we wanted a win against the pros. We arrived at the start 2.5 hours before the twilight kick off, everyone was pretty subdued as we warmed up knowing we had a painful couple of hours ahead on what looked to be a super fast drag strip of a course with a couple of dodgy chicanes thrown in the mix to hurt the legs. Scotty attacked as soon as the gun went, when

I looked down at my Garmin and we were doing 60kph 1 minute into the race I knew it was on, this set the tone for the entire race it was absolutely brutal out there but every single one of the boys was at the front either attacking or covering attacks, Grayson and Jimmy were winning the cash primes along the way as well. About half way through the race coming into the chicane Grayson took off and dragged away four other riders. I was a little nervous as two of the riders were from top Crit team Athlete Octane and the other two were from Bissell. But they hugely underestimated Grayson and in he showed them what this 18 year old from Nelson can do taking our first win of the season!!!! I think his face below shows the joy/relief off finally knocking the win on the head! Jimmy took a flyer with a few laps remaining and picked up 7th Scotty, Tim and I all finished a few seconds down at the head of the much depleted peloton. It was a wonderful feeling doing a victory lap with Grayson and seeing all the lads so happy. It is moments like this that make all the hard work, the training, the travel and the time away from loved ones worth it. Being apart of a winning team is something very special.



Stage 8 – Downers Grove

The final stage of the Intelligentsia Cup was held on the famous Downers Grove circuit. This was the USA National Crit Champs circuit for 23 years and a quite a few New Zealanders have had success here over the years Graeme Miller and Hayden Godfrey to name a few. Downers Grove is a technical course with many corners and a tough little pinching rise. The race was surgy with the 8 days of racing showing in some of the riders legs. Jimmy established a long break and looked set to stay away only it to come back with a few laps to go. Jimmy tried to lead Grayson out for the sprint but big hook in the final corner nearly

took them both down. Jimmy managed to battle through the carnage for 5th. Overall this took Jimmy to 5th in the Intelligentsia Cup with our 18 year old prodigy Grayson in 6th.

The next day saw us all have a rest day and a good look around Chicago before jumping back in the trusty Subaru for 12 hours on the interstate back to Kutztown, PA (which we did a little kiwi DIY on by fixing the sagging exhaust pipe with some coathangers).



Iron Hill Twilight Criterium

After a few days back at based camp and some much needed recovery miles we headed off to one of our other major targets for the season the famous Iron Hill Twilight Criterium. This is a race that is very dear to my heart and like no other, it is a 75km Criterium on a ultra dangerous 1km circuit in down town West Chester in front of literally tens of thousands of spectators and just to spice things up a little more there is over big prize money and the race is held pretty much in the dark. My last two experiences at Iron Hill were challenging as I was involved in big crashes both times I was determined not to have this happen again.

Anyway, we arrived early and I managed to convince the race promoters to give both Jimmy and Grayson call ups. This is very crucial in big races like Iron Hill as there are 90 plus starters and if you are not in the top 30 you may as well kiss your chances of doing well goodbye as the trickle down effect of every little braking or acceleration is hugely magnified at the back of the race. As it turned out I managed to jump the barriers and get on the front line as well so with the national anthem playing loudly we had three L&M Group Ricoh NZ riders at the front of the race.

The race predictably started hard and fast, just as we clipped in the race organisers called a prime of \$250 cash to the winner of the first lap, well that was all Grayson needed to hear as he took off and promptly smashed all the other contenders to win the first prime. Jimmy then picked up the next prime a few laps later before Grayson again picked up another

couple. Scotty and Timmy mean time were sitting in the pack, I wouldn't say comfortably as this is a race were every 30 seconds you have to accelerate as hard as you can just to stay in the bunch. I was feeling ok and trying to follow safe wheels when bam I went from going 50kph to lying in a tangle of bikes, blood and lycra clad men..... My Iron Hill curse happened again. I got up and if you were watching the live feed you will see I was more then a little dazed, sporting a nice new bloody hole in my forearm and a bit of concussion I quickly got on my bike and rejoined the race. Eventually along with a few of the other riders who came down in the crash I was dropped from the main peloton and it was off to the ambulance for some TLC.

With the four others still in the race we were still looking good. It was here that Scotty laid down some serious horse power and took off the front of the race. He was quickly joined by a number of pros and they promptly took a lap. Meaning the worst Scotty could finish was 7th. Grayson in the mean time was looking incredibly strong when disaster struck, one of the big hitters chopped is front wheel out on the down hill straight with Grayson hitting the deck at 60kph, ouch! So the wee man quickly joined me in the ambulance to get patched up. At this stage Tim had also fallen victim to the high speeds and it was up to Jimmy to guide Scotty to the highest possible finish. Unfortunately another trio took a lap so now Scotty really had to have his wits about him. In the dying laps Scotty tried a break away with US Olympian Bobby Lea but they were brought back, he just lost Jimmy's wheel in the sprint but still finished a fantastic 6th with Jimmy in 14th. One thing for sure is we got more then our fair share of air time and if you have a spare moment check out the full coverage below:

<http://new.livestream.com/steadypace/events/3193858>

Anyway sorry about the huge update but finding time to finish it off has been tough whilst sorting the logistics for racing all over the show!



This weekend we have our first tour of the USA season with the Tour of Millersburg, stay tuned and once again thanks for the awesome support.

James Canny