

Len's 1981 Record Attempt on the Avatar 2000

“Twelve Days, 3 Hours and 31 Minutes” (John Marino's record -1980)

Len Vreeland had committed to memory the Trans-American cross-country record set by John Marino on a bicycle in the summer of 1980. Ever since his failed attempt to set a new record in June of 1980, Len Vreeland had been planning another assault on the record, this time traveling from west to east to take advantage of the prevailing winds and using a recumbent bicycle instead of a conventional road bike.

The recumbent bicycle that Len would use on the Trans-America record-breaking attempt was an Avatar 2000, a bike manufactured by Fomac, Inc. of Wilmington, Massachusetts. Len had visited the two-man company where the recumbent was hand built. The owners of Fomac agreed to provide two recumbent bikes for the cross-country trip.

Len began training on the Avatar 2000 recumbent bike in December 1980. In February, he spent a month in Florida training for the cross-country attempt at a new record.

A Support Team of seven individuals was assembled. Once all of the team members arrive in California, the plan calls for Len and the Support Team to depart from City Hall in Santa Monica, California at midnight on Monday, June 22, 1981 and head east to City Hall, New York City, New York, a distance of 2,851 miles, with hopes of arriving on the east coast in under 12 days. For this effort, the team will utilize a motor home, the Broken Spoke Bicycle shop van and a motorcycle. This time, the team will also make use of Citizen Band (CB) radios for communication while rolling through the country side.

Vreeland estimated that it would take close to \$20,000 to properly finance a record attempt. However, corporate sponsors were non-existent for the second attempt as they were for his first try. Early on, Len vowed to make the attempt with what ever funds he could scrape together. The Support Team consisted of the following individuals:

Carol Vreeland	Allentown, PA	Chef
Tom Vreeland	Allentown, PA	Motorcycle Escort
Marie Vreeland	Lantana, FL	Log & Asst. Chef
Carmen Hagelgans	Bethlem, PA	Driver
Ed Kay	Bethlehem, PA	Navigator
Neal Novak	Allentown, PA	Driver
Greg Yatko	Allentown, PA	Motorcycle Escort

CB Handles:

Len Vreeland	Record Breaker
Motorcycle	Two Wheeler
Van	Broken Spoke
Motor home	Fuji 1

"Avatar 2000 Trans - America"

Sunday/Monday, June 22, 1981 - Day 1

Len Vreeland departs from City Hall in Santa Monica, California at 12 midnight and makes his first stop 2 hours and 44 minutes late, 40.9 miles into a 2,851 mile adventure. At 9:00 a.m. the California Highway Patrol informed the crew that Len would have to exit Interstate 10 as there was an alternate route available. Apparently, Federal Laws restrict the use of the interstate highway system by bicycles if there is an alternative route. The detour added 30 miles to the distance that Len will have to travel. Day one ends at 10:27 p.m., twenty-one miles east of the California / Arizona border. Total mileage covered - 300 miles.

Bethlehem Globe banner headlines:

CHiPs Add 30 Miles for Cyclist

Tuesday, June 23rd - Day 2

Off at 4 a.m. The morning went without incident but at 1:45 p.m. Len gets drowsy and ran off the side of the road. Although the team has a motorcycle for use as an escort it is normally only used when they are in heavy traffic. On this day, when Len left the road, the motorcycle was in the trailer and not in use. Len is unhurt and the adventure continues. Len and the crew stop for the night at Cottonwood, Arizona - 168 miles this day.

Bethlehem Globe banner headlines:

7,000-ft Climbs Slow Vreeland in Arizona

Wednesday, June 24th - Day 3

2:32 a.m. Len is off and riding. At 6:45 a.m. they reach the top of Mt. Flagstaff. Temperatures are cooler at higher elevation. Spirits are high. At 4:03 p.m., the group stops at Painted Desert and Len sleeps for an hour. The exact location was not recorded. Distance covered this day - 200 miles.

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Cyclist Crosses N. M., 210 Mile Day Cuts Deficit

Thursday, June 25th - Day 4

On the road at 2:15 a.m. Unexpected head winds slow progress. Len is depressed by the fact that they are going only 9 mph against the wind. Len took a break from 6:10 p.m. until 7 p.m. Riding again into 10-15 mph head winds. The party stops for the evening at 12:30 a.m. on the crest of a hill. The city of Albuquerque can be seen in the distance. It is a beautiful sight but depressing because they should have been well east of the city if they were on schedule. Only 163 miles this day.

Friday, June 26th - Day 5

A 4:20 a.m. departure. Rolling down hill at speeds of 28-30 mph. Traveling on I-40. New Mexico State Troopers agree to allow Len to travel on the Interstate Highway as long as they don't receive any complaints. At some point the group crosses the Rio Grande river.

Marie Vreeland, who keeps the log, notes that Len, Carol and Tom sleep in the motorhome while Greg, Neal, Ed and Carmen bunk in the van. But because of the close quarters in the van, sometimes Neal and Greg with a tarpauline, their mattresses and sleeping bags move to the roof of the motorhome and sleep under the stars.

At 5:55 p.m. Len takes a 1 hour nap. Back on the road at 7:32 p.m. At 11:30 p.m. the day ends at Tucumcari, New Mexico with 169 miles covered. It is ironic that the stop for the night is at Tucumcari as this was the place where Len's previous attempt at breaking the record ended.

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Cyclist 'Down' After Headwinds Blow in N.M.

"Len Vreeland lost time for the fourth consecutive day and his own hopes for a cross-country record appears to be waning."

Saturday, June 27th - Day 6

Len on the bike at 3:50 a.m. with a tail wind. A little after 6 a.m. the group goes through Logan, New Mexico. A short time later the caravan crosses into Texas. Trailing winds propel Len along at 30-35 mph. Spirits are high. Marie describes Len's mood as 'happy'. During today's ride an eagle swooped down a number of times as if to attack Len, pulling back at the last moment. Another noteworthy event: in the small town of Hopewell, Kansas the group met Lon Haldeman who is attempting a double transcontinental excursion - New York to Los Angeles and back to New York. Len and Lon exchanged stories, travel tips and maps and then they departed heading off in their respective directions. Lon said that his crew encountered Jim Black, another transcontinental rider who is on a record-breaking pace, in Illinois. At 6 p.m. Len takes a break at Hooker, Oklahoma. By 7:30 p.m. they have crossed the Oklahoma and Texas panhandle and roll into Liberal, Kansas. Day 6 comes to an end at 11 p.m. in Meade, Kansas. Miles covered - 248.

Len has fond memories of Meade, Kansas. A local policeman provided him with an escort into town, sirens blasting. Young adults in pickup trucks and motorcycles form a parade accompanying Len through town. One of the young boys commented that it was the biggest thing to ever happen in Meade. Turns out that the policeman is also the Mayor of the town. Several weeks after the cross-country attempt is finished, Len indicated that he would like to return to Meade, Kansas someday.

Sunday, June 28th - Day 7

Len on the road and pedaling east at 4:15 a.m. At 8:15 a.m. the team is at the junction of highways 54 and 154. At 11:30 a.m. the caravan passes through Pratt, Kansas. By 12:15 p.m. the tail wind that had Len traveling at 15 mph has changed to a cross wind. At 3:58 p.m. Len takes a nap. Back on the bike at 6:35 p.m. Somewhere east of Wichita, Kansas, at 11:30 p.m. Len calls it a day. Miles traveled - 176

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Vreeland's Mood Shifts with Wind

"Weekend riding in the midwest brought both exuberance and depression to cross-country bicyclist Len Vreeland of Allentown. It all depends on how the wind blows." Ed Kay, Len's navigator states: "Len still thinks it (the record) is possible, but it will take a lot of luck."

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Bicycling Record Appears Beyond Reach of Allentown's Len Vreeland

"After 1,650 miles, it appears Len Vreeland will not break the cross-country bicycling record."

"It is not yet clear to Len that the record is impossible but I can sort of sense it." said Ed Kay. "Theres a consensus among the crew members that he won't be able to do it."

Monday, June 29th - Day 8

A 4:30 a.m. departure. Around 7:45 a.m. a crew member takes note that Len is cruising, and singing along to the music playing in his ear. At 9:30 a.m., in Eureka, Kansas, the team reaches the halfway point. At 9:50 a.m. they pass through Neal, Kansas to the delight of Neal Novak. By 1:30 p.m. Len had traveled 122 miles since starting out. Not sure when the group crossed into Missouri, but at 7:30 p.m. the log shows they went through Nevada, Missouri. The occupants of the van, 'Broken Spoke', have dubbed the van the "pig pen". The day ends near Collins, Missouri at 10:03 p.m. Shortly after stopping heavy thunder storms pound the group but everyone is high and dry. 195 miles this day.

Tuesday, June 30th - Day 9

On the road at 4:30 a.m. in light rains. Progress is slow due to weather. The previous evening it had been clear to Len that the record was out of reach. At 8:40 a.m. the caravan passes through Mack's Creek, Missouri, population 106. By 9:30 a.m. the group is in the Ozark Mountains. At 8 p.m. the team decides to try to make it through St. Louis before stopping for the night. Otherwise, they would hit the city during morning rush hour which must be avoided at all cost. At 1:30 a.m. the team stops for 2 hours rest still west of St. Louis. Day 9 comes to a close as well. Day 9 has been a good one, 255 miles.

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Len Vreeland Crosses Ozarks

Wednesday, July 1st - Day 10

After a 2 hour rest, the group is off again at 3:30 a.m. as planned. The rest period was taken in the parking lot of a shopping center. A Police cruiser pulled up just as the crew was preparing to leave. They assumed the officer was there to run them off, but he had heard of the group and was disappointed that they were ready to leave. At 5:20 a.m. the caravan crossed the Mississippi river. At 6:18 a.m. in Fairview Heights, Illinois, 10 miles east of St. Louis, the team pulls into a Masonic Temple parking lot for some needed rest. Mission of getting through St. Louis before

morning rush accomplished. Back on the road at 9:30 a.m. headwinds of 10-15 mph encountered this morning. It begins to rain at 1:15 p.m. so team looks for a place to stop for lunch. a State Trooper directs them to the Sandoval High School. By the time the crew had finished lunch the rain had stopped. On the road again at 2 p.m. and 15 minutes later it is raining heavily and Len takes refuge in the motorhome. Len back out at 3 p.m. with rain gear on. It rained all afternoon and at 5:25 p.m. Len suggested they find a safe place to stop. By the time the crew found a good spot, the rain had quit and the sun was out, so Len continued on. At 10:30 p.m. the caravan crosses from Illinois into Indiana. The day comes to an end at 11:45 p.m. in Vincennes, Indiana. 142 miles today.

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Vreeland Battles Constant Winds

Thursday, July 2nd - Day 11

Team departs at 6 a.m. Uneventful until 11:45 a.m. when caravan moves through construction area, road crews stop what they are doing and watch open mouthed as the team motors past. A short time later the caravan goes through Bedford, Indiana. Len stops at 3:30 p.m. for a nap. Off again at 5:15 p.m. This day finally ends at 2:45 a.m. just outside Cincinnati (east side). Miles today - 192

Friday, July 3rd - Day 12

6:15 a.m. start. It is raining and cool. At 3:33 a.m. Len takes a 1 hour nap at Ratcliffburg, Ohio. Day ended at 10:45 a.m. A short time earlier Len has asked the crew if it was possible to get to New York by 5 a.m. Monday and if not, that they would have to abort the ride in the Lehigh Valley. Note: Cyclist are not allowed through the Holland Tunnel between the hours of 5 a.m. and 11 p.m.

The team got word today that Jim Black, who was attempting a Trans-America crossing had quit in Illinois.

After the team had stopped for the night Len talked of ending the ride for his and the crews safety. Carol reminded him of all the people at home who are counting on him to finish the ride safely. There were no more discussions of not finishing the ride. 150 miles today somewhere in Ohio.

Saturday, July 4, 1981 - Day 13

Len off at 4:50 a.m. 1 hour nap at 9:50 a.m. At 9:30 a.m. with Greg escorting Len on the motorcycle off somewhere ahead of the motorhome and van, three motorcyclist (two couples and a single rider) pass the motorcade at a high rate of speed. A short time later as the motorhome rounded a curve, one of the cyclist was lying in the road, his bike off the road surgance. The motorhome being the first on the scene,

stopped to assist the injured cyclist. The van, after a time, was able to maneuver around the accident and proceeded on to catch up to Len and Greg. Neal Novak covered the cyclist with a blanket until help arrived. Team members remarked that it was a good thing that the motorcyclists had not caught up to Len only to learn later that the motorcyclist were attempting to catch Len, having heard of his exploits on a local radio station. This day ends in Aurora, West Virginia just inside the Maryland West Virginia border. 150 miles today. Neal and Greg were chased off the roof of the motorhome by a thunder storm during the night.

Sunday, July 5, 1981 - Day 14

The team has 375 miles to go. At 5:30 a.m. Len takes off, Tom follows on motorcycle. At 9 a.m. the caravan stops. Carmen is to drive Marie Vreeland and Ed Kay to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania. Marie originally had airline reservations to return to her home in Florida on Saturday evening, but changed them to Sunday. Ed, a professor at Lehigh U. has a class to teach on Monday morning but plans to rejoin the group at Pete's Place in Allentown. Larry Vreeland is to drive to Chambersburg to deliver a car that will be used by Ed and Marie to drive to Allentown. Carmen with Larry will rejoin the team at Winchester.

The plan is to go as far as Carlisle today and arrive at Pete's Place at 4 or 5 p.m. The team will then proceed to New York with hopes of going through the Holland Tunnel 6 or 7 hours after leaving Pete's Place.

At 12:15 p.m. Carmen arrives at Winchester with Larry, Sue and Pat Judd, all of whom will join the group for the final leg of the trip. At 10:45 p.m. the caravan stops for the night at Shippensburg, Pennsylvania and there check into the Kandlelite Motel. This is the first stop at a motel during the entire trip and is necessitated by the additional people that have join the group. Total miles - 161.

Monday, July 6, 1981 - Day 15

The last day of this adventure begins at 4:54 a.m. and the caravan arrives at Pete's Place in Allentown at 4:27 p.m. A large crowd is on hand to welcome the group back. Carmen leaves the crew at this point. Thirty minutes later, the team is off heading for New York City. Chuck McCullagh, editor of Bicycle Magazine, rode with Len from Allentown to New York to keep him company and to offer encouragement. The group encounters heavy traffic in New Jersey.

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Weary Cyclist Takes Final Leg Across LV

"After approximately 2,750 miles of wrestling with mountains, surprisingly potent head winds, desert heat, fatigue, torrential rains and other deterrents, the Allentown bicyclists will pass through the Lehigh Valley today, three days behind schedule, but still in good spirits."

At 11:48 p.m. the caravan arrives at the Holland Tunnel only to learn that one of the tubes is closed for repairs. This unexpected circumstance threatens to postpone Len's entrance into the city. A New York Transit Policeman comes to the rescue and like a guardian angel, leads Len and his crew through the closed section of the tunnel. Workmen in the tunnel that was under repair were cheering all along the way.

**12:13:24 a.m. Monday July 7, 1981
City Hall - New York City**

Coming out of the Holland Tunnel the crew and Len's friends in the van sang "Happy Birthday" to Len and the transit police sounded their siren - Len had celebrated his 52nd birthday at the stroke of midnight while traveling through the Holland Tunnel under the Hudson river.

Len was met at City Hall by relatives, friends, Harald and other representatives of e Fomac, Inc. the Wilmington, Massachusetts manufacturer of the Avatar 200 recumbent bike.

There was champagne and a cake decorated with an image of the United States and a birthday greeting.

Total miles - 2,883

Bethlehem Globe Banner headlines:

Vreeland Ends Cross Country Trip on Birthday

"The Allentown resident arrived on the steps of City Hall in New York City at 12:13:24 a.m. this morning finishing a 15-day, 2,872 mile odyssey on his 52nd birthday. A trip which had begun on Monday, June 22 at midnight at City Hall in Santa Monica, California had ended in triumph.

Even though Len Vreeland did not establish a new Trans-America record after two attempts, none the less a new record was set in 1981; Lon Haldeman of Ohio arrived in New York at 5:35 a.m. on Monday July 13th setting a new record for the west to east crossing of 10 days, 23 hours, 29 minutes and 40 seconds. It was the second leg

of a two-way ride across the United States and back for Haldeman, and his time for the double crossing also set a new record at 24 days, 2 hours, 34 minutes and 40 seconds.

Leonard T. Vreeland was born in Danielsville, Lehigh Township, Northampton county, Pennsylvania on July 7, 1929 to Alonzo M. and Agnes M. Vreeland. As an adult he was employed by Bethlehem Steel Corp. as an accountant. About the year 1960 he purchased a used bicycle and began to ride to work. His love of cycling had begun. Len began repairing bicycles for friends in his basement and in 1972, using the 13-weeks of vacation he had accumulated, he devoted his time and energies to the bike shop on a full time basis. He never returned to his job at Bethlehem Steel, quitting after a career of 17½ years. The Broken Spoke, which he operated with his partner, Jack Check, became the premier bike shop in the Lehigh Valley.