

## 2017 Blackberry bRamble Post- Ride Report

**By: Dave Walla, Event Coordinator**

I want to start off by saying what a pleasure it was to work with GEARS on this years Blackberry bRamble! It was a great opportunity to get plugged into the local scene and a good excuse to get out and bike more :) I was/am a total newcomer to GEARS but nonetheless people treated me with respect and kindness and I am so happy to meet so many awesome folks who all happened to love cycling.

Overall the bRamble seemed to be fairly successful this year based on the amount of participation, money raised, and fun had. The responses to the rider surveys were overwhelmingly positive and I think that this years bRamble will be a good platform to spring off of to have an awesome 20<sup>th</sup> bRamble next year. I would be very interested to help out again next year one way or another depending on my work situation.

I'd like to share a few selected survey responses to help folks get an idea of some of the things people said about this year's bRamble (I'd also like to suggest that we maybe share some of these things with the club via the newsletter...): "Great Food. Best road markings of any organized ride"... "It was fun and relaxed. The rest stop was particularly nice. Great watermelon!"..."Fun and Chill!"..."Loved it! Great Pie. Helpful volunteers spaced throughout route"..."You guys are awesome!! Thanks so much for your flexibility and help"..."Awesome ride. Great Rest stops. Loved the staff at corners directing us"..."Well organized. Friendly people. Plenty of water. Gluten free snacks!"..."volunteers at crosswalks were so nice"... "Keep up the great bike ride!"..."Great Volunteers"..."Everything turned out great, cant wait for next year!"..."Loved the string band!"..."Wow! Awesome ride! Best in the Valley!"

**Planning:** This took a lot more time than the estimated 220 hours (More like 275!). Perhaps part of the reason for this is that I had never been to a bRamble before and didn't know many GEARS members. Another part of this is that we were lacking volunteers for key coordinator positions including sponsorships and marketing/advertising. As someone who is struggling to support a family this ended up being a much bigger commitment than what it sounded like when I was hired. To be clear I am very thankful for the opportunity to work with GEARS and would totally volunteer my time if I could afford to do so as it is a most worthy cause. To be fair, I could have spent less time on the planning and it still would have gone OK, but I wanted it to be great! It was really helpful to have Mike, Lyn, Dana, (and others) guiding me through the process! It would have been nice to get all the coordinators together for a meeting early on in the process, but we couldn't this year as it took some time to get all the positions filled. I felt some responsibility to not waste people's time with endless meetings as most volunteers knew what they were doing. I also think that doing anything to help reduce volunteer burnout is a good idea (ie not asking too much of people, time, talent, or treasure wise). At times I found myself wondering when do I need to approach the board with something and when do I just do something without asking the board...It would be great to have the time to include the board in decision making more if time permits; or at least have more clear directive as to what the scope of authority of the bRamble coordinator is.

**Sponsors/Donations:** Even with the late start and lack of a committed coordinator we managed to get a lot of donations and sponsors. This was thanks to a number of people stepping up and helping out. We reused a lot of marketing material for years past, which was a big help but it'd be nice to have new material (flyers, save the date, etc. for the 20<sup>th</sup> annual bRamble.) It would be nice in the future to put

together a promo package that we can give to each sponsor. It could include free entry tickets, printed 8.5x11" posters, 3x5/4x6 save the date cards, a pdf of an eflyer, links to our facebook and website, etc. It was quite a large job for someone to constantly upload sponsor logos to the website. Perhaps if we started getting sponsors sooner we could be more efficient by uploading lots of logos in one sitting. It was also a lot of work to contact and maintain contact with all the sponsors...I think in the future it would be helpful to have one or more people dedicated to sponsor relations. For example, just making a thank you post on facebook to each sponsor can take up a fair amount of time with 20+ sponsors. Also writing the thank yous is no small task, nor is coordinating the pick up of donations, dropping off flyers, etc. I created a shared google sheet where people could keep track of who was contacting which businesses, etc. While it proved to be confusing for some folks, with an earlier start for the sponsorship team next year people will have time to become familiar with the system and that it can help save lots of time and headache. Please see the attached a list of this years sponsors as well as a list of potential sponsors that we could contact in the future. Finally, I think that we could ask for more money from some of our bigger sponsors, and that we should focus our efforts on bigger sponsors.

**Marketing/Advertising:** This suffered a little due to the lack of a committed coordinator but Lyn, Mike, and I (and others) were still able to do a decent job getting the word out. We mostly reused pictures and designs from last year which saved a lot of time but it would be nice to have something fresh for the 20<sup>th</sup> bRamble if time and motivation permit. I think we could also do a better job mentioning SRTS and our other nonprofit partners on our posters, save the date cards, etc. Based on the rider surveys, the most effective avenues were the bike shop save the date cards, the Sunday Streets parade and booth, the Eugene Weekly, and the Register Guard. The free facebook page also seemed to help some especially in combination with John R. making thank you post to our sponsors. Mike Cantrell took care of all the website building which was a lot of work! The pedicab advertising was free but didn't seem especially effective, although I did meet a member of the Amazon Neighborhood Association who supposedly printed an ad for the bramble in their newsletter. Devin also sent advertisements around to the mailing lists of local bike shops, which likely didn't hurt. It would be great if we could have everyone in the club contributing to advertising in some way whether its taking and handing out a few bike tags or save the date cards or making an ad for the Eugene Weekly or Register Guard. This is a huge job and the more hands on deck the more we will get the word out while also reducing volunteer burnout.

**Route Marking:** What a task this was! Mel has got it down to a science fortunately. Next time I would recommend taking a more comfortable vehicle than Mel's truck for marking the century as its a lot of car time :) A few more confirmation arrows on long straight sections would be appreciated. We need to be careful about people painting over or washing off marks before the ride. Blue paint is hard to see next time lets use a more visible color. Many people commented on how well the route was marked, a few people complained about it too but there's always a few folks who aren't paying attention and miss an arrow but swear that there wasn't one, etc. It would also help if we could have an official route explanation before the ride starts.

**Registration:** One person wrote in their comments that it seemed disorganized but I don't know what they were talking about. If anything they were just really busy handling all the last minute/day of registrations! We handed out donated Cliff bars to people as they registered. A few folks asked for a place to secure their backpacks, etc. during the ride. I think it would be nice and not too much trouble to have an official bag drop at registration next year; and a volunteer to be in charge of that as well as lost and found. We used a canopy to hold the start banner and people rode through/under it. Many people seemed to enjoy this-especially the kids. Garry had the big map on the easel to explain the route and answer questions and did a great job as always (even the person who complained about everything

else had to admit that Garry's positive attitude was awesome as always) In the future it would be great to have the map person make a short speech to explain the route, road markings, etc. before the ride. The mechanics seemed well utilized and appreciated. Someone suggested in their comments that we have an optional group starts. A few other people have commented that the ride can feel "lonely" at times...I'm a big fan of the group start and think it add an element of togetherness and excitement; just saying... :)

**Rest Stops:** In the future it would be great to have a meeting of the rest stop coordinators at the storage unit to coordinate what is needed and who is using what. Also there were a few comments about people wanting more protein, and wanting a meal vs snacks at different stops. While its hard to coordinate everyone's stomachs, perhaps a group start could also make this less of an issue if folks are starting closer to the same time. Next year it would be great to have a group of folks sit down to review the routes and determine the best spacing between rest stops.

*Crow:* Rob made considerable efforts to keep the budget down. He did a great job as always. He had just enough food but would have run out if a group of riders had not passed his stop without stopping. Rob put together a very throughout documentation of the Crow Rest stop into a beautiful binder.

*Orchard Point:* Mike did a great job! There was enough food and drink for everyone. A few folks commented that they would have liked the stop to be sooner and to have more lunch stuff instead of snacks...

*Lorane Grange: Lynda* of course did a great job and has her rest stop down to a science. She spent very little money (which she donated to GEARS anyway) and all were fed and happy.

**Road Marshalls:** One upset person complained about a lack of positivity and emotional support from road marshalls but I think she was just having a bad day. Many other people went out of their way to say how much they enjoyed the road marshall and their support and encouragement. Many people also noted that they were well placed to help direct riders on key turns, etc. Next year it would be great to have a group of folks sit down to review the routes and determine where road marshalls would be most appreciated. Perhaps having a person call and check in on all of the road marshall to make sure that they are there and feel like a part of it all would maybe be helpful. It'd also be great if the SAG drivers could bring road marshall cold drinks or snacks while on duty if possible.

**SAG Drivers:** We offered SAG drivers reimbursement for the cost of gas. No one complained. We had a few people take SAG rides this year (one due to a broken cable and 2 due to accidents). The coverage seemed good. One person commented that seeing the SAG driver made them feel safer. Michal Young coordinated the drivers to ensure good coverage but not excessive driving. It seemed to work out very well. One of the SAG drivers was a doctor, which was really handy for the guy who had the accident.

**Breakfast:** John R. did a great job with breakfast. He suggested making sure to coordinate kitchen time among various groups to avoid a crowded kitchen and having to wait. There was a nice spread of food and most of it was eaten/drunk although there was lots of extra MRH tea. It seemed well appreciated and worth doing. Lots of kids definitely took a few nibbles of this or that :) We tried to move the tea to the celebration but it was a last minute effort that did not work very well. In the future it would be great to have the breakfast coordinate with celebration folks about leftovers.

**Parking:** Went really well. Surprisingly we did not need any overflow parking. Lots of folks rode their bikes which was great! Perhaps advertising that we have a secure bag drop would encourage more folks to ride next year. In retrospect maybe its not the best idea to have the same person in charge of parking and pie and ice cream. Ideally we could have two parking teams, one for the morning and one for afternoon.

**Celebration:** Though the cost went beyond what I had anticipated, I think that some strategic planning regarding the celebration helped us to keep our expenses down this year. Especially considering what a daunting task coordinating the celebration is, Dana did an amazing job and it really came together. people really liked the band! (And the band really liked playing and was very happy with their pay, I believe they got \$400 or \$450 after agreeing to play for \$100 +perks). They brought their own sound equipment which was great. I personally thought it could have been a little louder but maybe I'm a little deaf and like really loud music :) They played on an old carpet under a canopy, which seemed to work well and be comfortable. While people would be able to see them better with a stage, and maybe the sound would carry better, it would take a lot more energy and effort to secure a stage and set it up and take it down. We really needed to have an MC and I feel like I dropped the ball on that. The MC could promote our sponsors, comment about the rides, mention the auction, lost and found, etc. We had a lot of great booths (especially REI was awesome) and the solar powered truck really came in handy for powering both the taco truck and the stage. The taco truck seemed to keep busy and people seemed to appreciate the extra food. I think it'd be great to have the volunteer appreciation party a different day if possible as it was a long day! (it could also be a sort of debrief). It would have been great if we could have started setting up for the celebration sooner! Some folks finished their rides and the band hadn't started and things were still getting set up. Also some folks who arrived late said that the band and celebration were already packing up, perhaps a second band would be a way to keep people around longer. It would be really cool if we could use silverware instead of paper and plastic...we could have buckets to return them in like at the Saturday market. We would need volunteers to wash them later though...perhaps this is something that GEARS could consider purchasing? (maybe a thrift store would donate silverware to GEARS?) Next time lets tell people having booths to start setting up earlier...at around 10:30am.

**Pie and Ice Cream:** Went really well. Mel did a great job finding pies from Fred Meyers last minute (and at a good price too)! Prince Pucklers again gave us a great deal on ice cream. We kept the ice cream at Albertson's overnight. The pies were stored in the Hilyard Center. The ice cream didn't melt too bad (I believe thanks to dry ice) although one of the late arrivals complained that it was melted. In the future maybe we could leave a tub in the freezer somewhere until later in the day. We didn't run out of pies.

**Silent Auction:** Went amazingly well considering how much of a last minute idea it was! See a list of the items attached. Karen did a great job and brought in just shy of \$1000! Dana also helped get a number of last minute donations (Arriving by Bike was very generous). This seems like something that would be worth doing next year with a few modifications. It was really nice to have a big ticket item like the trailer Burley donated. Lots of people checked it out but next year I bet even more would if we had a big sign for it that was hung on top of the canopy. Also next year it would be nice to have the auction end sooner so that people can pick up items the same day instead of having to chase them down. Also, if we have a MC next year they can direct people to the auction and announce when it is about to be finished.

**Equipment:** The equipment team did a great job this year and everything seemed to go very smoothly. In the future there needs to be more clear communication with the rest stop folks as far as what does

and does not get delivered by the equipment truck. It would be great for the equipment coordinator to join the rest stop coordinators for a meeting at the storage unit sometime before the bramble.

**Community Ride:** The group start for the community ride was really neat. Sarah did a great job with her introduction and safety talk and I heard that people liked the rest stop. I heard a few comments that the route markings were confusing and I think we need to coordinate better about this next year. It was so great for SRTS to allow us to join them for the Eugene Parade/Sunday Streets as this event really helped draw people to the bramble. It would also be great to have more things that GEARS and SRTS collaborate on in terms of marketing, advertising, etc. for the bRamble.

**Volunteer Coordinating:** Lyn did a great job finding so many amazing volunteers! This is a big job! Maybe it could be made easier by asking for volunteers through the website, newsletter or club email list sooner. We were able to reuse lots of volunteer t-shirts which was great in that it saved us a lot of money. The shirts reeked of chemical off-gassing after being in storage all year. Furthermore they are really ugly ;) Maybe next year we could have volunteers supply their own orange t shirt, or not have volunteer t shirts at all and just have festive looking volunteers. Another thought is coordinating with a business to have them sponsor us getting all new volunteer t shirts. It would be great if we could find some big companies early on that are willing to supply us with volunteers for road marshalls, etc.

**Maps:** Putting the maps and cue sheets together is a big job that Michal Young has kindly done for GEARS for a number of years. In the future it would be ideal to get whoever is doing this the sponsors logos and route specifics as soon as possible as this year it was rather last minute. Maybe AAA or someone would sponsor our big map?

**Photography:** I have not seen very many pictures of the bRamble. From what I gather Greg Lee was going to be a SAG driver and Photographer but then wasn't a SAG driver...did he still take pictures? Did we make an appeal to riders/volunteers to share their photos? I want to see :)

**Jerseys:** It would be really fun if we could make some 20<sup>th</sup> annual bRamble jerseys to sell to riders. Maybe Sport Hill or some business would sponsor them in exchange for logo placement? This could be a job for at least one volunteer all by itself.

I'm sure I could go on and on but I have to stop sometime; and I want to get my final check :) Please feel free to contact me with any questions, etc. I'm not going anywhere and hope to be involved with GEARS one way or another in the near future. I would also like to coordinate the formation of a how to manual for the bRamble planning but don't want to waste time on things like route specifics, rest stops, etc. if things are going to change significantly. Regardless I will start working on this asap with a self imposed deadline of November 1<sup>st</sup>.

Thanks again,

Dave Walla