

Rando? How about RanGO?

BY DIDI HENDRICKS SCHENCK, A BUDDING RANGONNEUR

If you rode Paris-Brest-Paris in 2015, you might not remember their names, but you likely remember those eight dudes on the ElliptiGOs: Idai Makaya, Billy Grace, Stuart Blofeld, Alan McDonogh, Bill Pinnell, Carl Nanton, Andrew Nuttall, and Jim Cremer. The first six actually finished in under 90 hours on those stand-up bikes, leaving no doubt that the ElliptiGO was a legitimate presence in the field of one of the most grueling endurance cycling rides in the world.

If you are in the majority here and *didn't* ride PBP in 2015, then it's possible that you have never even *seen* one of these machines. Created by Bryan Pate and Brent Teal as a running alternative, the first long stride (LS) ElliptiGO hit the market in 2011. Since then, several more models have been introduced, and more than 35,000 have been distributed all over the world. Fifty of the USA athletes who competed in June's Olympic Track and Field Trials use the "GO" to cross-train without risking injury from impact.

With 20" wheels, 8 or 11 gears in its internal Alfine hub, and weighing in at about forty pounds, the stand-up GO requires about 30% more power than a conventional bicycle at the same speed. In short, traveling at 12 mph correlates to about 16 mph on the seated steed.

So, let's briefly analyze what these PBP Boys (as they are affectionately known in the GO community) accomplished. They had far less time to rest during this event than regular cyclists, not to mention they were standing up the whole time. They had

about two hours of sleep on the way to Brest, just one hour on the way back, and occasional 6- to 7-minute micro naps—just enough to keep them from falling asleep on their GOs. Stories of hallucinations, riding in circles, running into hedges, biting a hand to stay awake, falling asleep (anyway) on their GOs.... CRAZY! And still, six were able to triumph over all that and become the first ElliptiGO riders to complete PBP.

It certainly was an incredible feat, but that doesn't mean the ElliptiGO shouldn't be a consideration for cyclists who have difficulties with conventional bikes as well as anyone who just wants a new challenge.

We ElliptiGOers love our bikes. Why? Some, like me, are former runners who can't run anymore, looking for that brief state of euphoria known as

The PBP Boys, 2015.
—PHOTO ETHAN PINNELL





runner's high. Some are people who enjoy the elliptical at the gym and want to take it outside. Still others are cyclists who for whatever reason can't cycle anymore – due to neck, back, knee, or, ahem, gluteus maximus issues. We do like to brag that our butts never get sore, so add the ElliptiGO to the list of alternatives to consider if you're in this group.

The ride is quite splendid. It's no impact yet weight bearing. You don't need a zero-gravity treadmill if you have a GO. You're standing tall; I feel like a prairie dog on top of my GO, able to look over small rollers and see beautiful sights without that awkward turn of the neck from the seat of a bicycle. The stride is effortless and uses more muscles. I'm not going to lie; on long rides my feet can get sore and tired, but I'm not chafing down in the nether region either.

And the ElliptiGO climbs – yes, it does! In fact, the ElliptiGO World Championships are held every October outside San Diego on an 11.67-mile course with 4200' of climbing up Mount Palomar. We've represented at Mount Washington, Pike's Peak, and the Death Ride. Someone once quipped that you can climb a telephone pole with an 11R.

The Path to the ElliptiGO

I've lived most of my life on a farm in Southern Maryland, that part that is

southeast of Washington, D.C., tucked between the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. I ventured out only to go to Penn State (Class of 1986), where I ran cross-country and track and graduated with a degree in mathematics and computer science. I've enjoyed three careers: programmer analyst, stay-at-home mom, and now 8th grade algebra teacher. Though I always had a goal of running a marathon, I never figured out how to incorporate into my busy life the serious training plan to run a good one! I delayed too long. The years of hitting the pavement pounded thin the cartilage in one knee, and I tore what was left of the meniscus stacking hay. My running career came to a screeching halt in 2016 and crushed the marathon dream.

By 2018 I was desperate to fill the void of not running. I had a decent entry-level Trek, but cycling just didn't thrill me – I mean no offense here. I knew of the ElliptiGO from running

NVR-Warrenton 100/200K, 6/26/21.

—PHOTO ANDREW ADERE

magazine advertisements and the great champion marathoner Meb Keflezighi's endorsement. Wanting more information, I casually Googled "ElliptiGO guru" and up popped the name: **"Idai Makaya, Milton Keynes, England."** Reading his biography, I had no idea what his references to PBP or LEL meant. I just thought he was that expert for whom I was searching. I'm not terribly ashamed to say I found him on Facebook and eventually friend-requested him. To my surprise, he accepted and we chatted for quite some time. Not only did Idai fire me up to order a top-of-the-line 11R the next day, he also encouraged me to join his "Longest Ride Challenge" and do a century on the GO to replace the lost marathon dream. *A hundred miles?* What the heck was I thinking?

Long distance cycling on the GO gripped me early on. I was thrilled by the gorgeous countryside and mountain views – sure, you see a bit of this running and hiking, but you only cover a fraction of the miles.



Nine weeks later, under Idai's mentorship, I completed that century on my 11R nicknamed "Hot Lips," at the Cap2Cap in Richmond, Virginia. (Fun fact: Hot Lips gets her name because she was shipped without the E in ElliptiGO, so I filled the blank with a hot lips decal.)

Six months later, I qualified for and competed in the 2018 ElliptiGO World Championships race up Mount Palomar. It took me 2 hours and 29 minutes and I felt every single one of those 4,200 feet. Every. Single. One.

Three years later, I've now completed 24 centuries (including one solo 200km) and probably 30-40 100kms – about 17,000 miles in all. Most of these have been organized rides because I truly enjoy riding everywhere, and I like being around people, even if I'm not actually riding with them. My biggest climb was the Savage Century 77 in 2020; Strava gave me 6,623' for that ride!



A Developing RanGOnneur

Long distance cycling on the GO gripped me early on. I was thrilled by the gorgeous countryside and mountain views – sure, you see a bit of this running and hiking, but you only cover a fraction of the miles. My friend Jim Cremer, a PBP Boy and then president of the *Global ElliptiGO Riders Club (GERC)*, turned me on to "audax" and "RUSA." I learned about the brevet series and the time limits. I've come to the conclusion that I am definitely NOT Paris-Brest-Paris material, but more challenging 200kms and maybe a 300km seem like reasonable targets for this gal. A 400km is a big maybe; remember, on the GO, I'm not going to get that rest and yes, my feet get very sore. I'll need every bit of the time limit for a hilly 200 and flat 300. I doubt I can make the 400 limit, but I might be able to finish one.

It took a couple years to get up the nerve to join the Northern Virginia Randonneurs (NVR). While I *can* climb, the thought of moving up to the 200km *and* adding 6000 to 7000

300 feet from the summit of Palomar, ElliptiGO World Championships, 2018.

— PHOTO MAC MCKECHNIE

MD Endurance Challenge, 5/22/21.

— PHOTO JESSICA SHORT

feet of climbing was daunting. And the thought of no SAG or rest stops was just plain scary. 2020 happened and further delayed my debut.

In late March of this year, I discovered my Rando Guru, when I finally reached out to Hamid Akbarian, the regional brevet administrator (RBA) of the Northern Virginia Randonneurs. To my surprise, Hamid was excited about an ElliptiGO riding with NVR! He remembered Idai from LEL a few years earlier. He and the lovely, incredible Misha Heller convinced me to join them at an upcoming 100/200 event down in my neck of the woods on April 3.

That debut 100km was so cold and windy, and I moved like a frozen turtle. It was the slowest metric century I have ever completed, and these were *my* roads! It should have been easy! Forget the lovely new French words I'd acquired: "populaire," "brevet," and "bonne route"; I was using those other words, the ones you have to beg pardon for using! One negative of standing on the GO is being a big wind block. This particular day's wind was one I refer to as the "infinity headwind." Like the scarf of similar name, it never ended. I turned around in Leonardtown, and that sucker turned right around with me.

I left with the 200km riders, but still, the dashing and talented Georgi Stoychev caught me on the way back, and he was kind enough to say that I "looked strong coming up the hill" out of Chaptico. Oh, Georgi, nice try! A flurry of congrats on the e-mail thread made me blush since I didn't feel I'd ridden well, but the outpouring of kindness made me realize these people were really good folk, much like my beloved GO community.

I couldn't wait to join them again, but it was going to have to wait. A week later I had to pause my riding due to a long overdue partial knee replacement. I incorporated the GO into my rehab and had such a fantastic recovery that I was able to complete my first 100km+ just six weeks later at the Maryland 12-Hour Endurance Challenge on May 22 with several NVR members.

In early June I joined NVR on a brutally hot weekend for two back-to-back 100kms in Sterling, VA, while Misha and crew were simultaneously hammering away at the 600. Hamid sent us off Saturday morning promptly at 7:00 am and then resumed his responsibilities monitoring riders and cooking. I did a tour of Loudon County and was just about to reenter the Washington and Old Dominion Trail for the last leg home when I heard, "DIDI! I FINALLY CAUGHT UP TO YOU!" Bless his heart, it was Hamid! He had left over an hour after I did

so he could catch up to me and ride the rest of the way. It was such a great experience, and even though I was exhausted, I came back the next day. Three weeks later, I discovered the beauty of Warrenton with NVR on another populaire.

****THIS, folks, is how to grow your rando membership! Hamid will schedule as many as five different routes on a single weekend to accommodate everyone's schedules and abilities! He is the master Jedi of RBAs! ****

What's next for me? I've completed a couple of centuries, and I'm hoping by the time you read this, I'll have some 200kms brevets under my belt. Perhaps next year I'll tackle a 300 if I can find a very gentle one. I think I'm crazy enough; the day after the Warrenton 100km, I did a century. I've got a little pluck!

I'm hoping this article encourages rando groups to welcome the GO and

inspires other GOers to join RUSA. We have a few already, but we have not tapped into the hundreds more who already partake in non-RUSA organized rides. ElliptiGO is always represented at organized metric centuries and centuries, Mount Washington, RAGBRAI, CCC, and various time-trials around the country.

In closing, I'd like to personally thank *American Randonneur* for inviting me to write this article; Bryan and Brent for creating this bike that I love; Hamid Akbarian, Misha Heller, and NVR for welcoming me with open arms; Idai Makaya and the other ElliptiGO PBP Boys for paving the way; and my beloved GO community for boldly riding our contraptions. I had no idea that randonneuring even existed, and here I am, making wonderful new friends, enthralled by the sights, achieving new goals, and having a blast! I ranGO! 🚲

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