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Jose Gallardo, Amy Lopez and Joe Acosta rest after completing the 34th Annual Amtrak Century Ride. The trio cycled over "Heartbreak Hill" and through headwinds at the 90-mile mark to finish. *Photo courtesy of Amy Lopez*

100 a Nice Round Number for These Devoted Cyclists

- Acosta and Gallardo complete their first 100-mile ride in September

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Oct. 15, 2008) Bicycle riders refer to it as a "century": 100 miles cycled in a single event. Joe Acosta and Jose Gallardo, bus operators from North Los Angeles Division 3, completed their first century ride together on Saturday, Sept. 6 and lived to tell the tale.

Acosta and Gallardo have been seriously cycling for about a year, collecting distance milestones as they rolled along.

Gallardo has completed the Rosarito-to-Ensenada ride (50 miles) and the 8th Annual Los Angeles River Ride (42 miles), while Acosta completed the 22nd Annual Tour de Sewer (40 miles) along the Los Angeles River in March.

Together they pedaled the Solvang Half Century Ride (50 miles), but the century mark still beckoned. So, in September, they rode in the 34th Annual Amtrak Century Ride.

How far is 100 miles? Acosta and Gallardo began riding at the Irvine Metrolink station and stopped riding at the San Diego Amtrak station in

downtown San Diego.

During the Amtrak Century Ride, the Metro duo had the opportunity to ride the I-5 (Golden State) Freeway for eight miles, while passing through Oceanside. Overall, it took them eight hours to complete the route (including the scheduled rest stops). In their 6.5 hours of actual riding time, Acosta and Gallardo averaged 15.5 miles per hour.

Amy Lopez, health and wellness program manager for the San Gabriel Valley Sector, rode with Acosta and Gallardo. She remembers tackling the ride's toughest hill at the 80-mile mark—the appropriately named "Heartbreak Hill." Its steep two-mile climb delivered the heartbreak. The last challenge, according to Lopez, came near the 90-mile mark, when head winds provided an invisible barrier.

"I felt a little tired but happy that I could accomplish it," said Gallardo, looking back at his first century ride. "That goal means a lot to me. I never imagined that I could do the distance. Doing it is very different than talking about it."

Gallardo believes it helped him to ride with friends, if only to have someone to talk with at the rest stops.

Gallardo, a 10-year Metro employee, had previously ridden the 47-mile City of Angels Fun Ride, which wound through Century City and Chinatown. "Now that looks like nothing compared to the century ride," he said, adding that he is taking the rest of the year off from bicycling events.

Acosta, who has worked for Metro for 19 years, is now training to ride the Pasadena Half Century Ride in December, said "I really liked the sport, but I never took part in it." Only when he purchased a road bike (the type of bicycle ridden in the Tour de France), did Acosta catch the bug.

His reward has been increased energy and ample time for meditation.

For someone considering riding, Acosta recommends he or she simply jump on a bicycle seat and try it out. "All these are family events," he said of the distance riding events. "They're not races. They're not timed."

And although Acosta most enjoys riding on a bike path along the Los Angeles River, where he absorbs his surroundings and meditates, he has learned to navigate street-riding in Los Angeles.

"You've got to watch out for traffic," he advised new riders. "It's kind of hairy. [Drivers] don't acknowledge you; they cut you off. You just have to be careful."

"It's like being a bus operator: You have to be a defensive driver," Acosta said.