

Finally. The Finals in Durango arrived. Sara came to Flagstaff a few days early to help with acclimatizing, and we headed up to Durango on Tuesday afternoon. Upon arriving in Durango we set off for a little spin downtown and to eat some dinner. For the first time in my life, I ate Thai food that I didn't like. How is it that Flagstaff can have 4 awesome Thai restaurants and I don't know of even one in Durango?

We drove up to the mountain resort on Wednesday morning to ride the course. We were on different agendas for the day so we decided to ride separately. After a tough start loop, the course climbs straight up from the base of the mountain. Then it climbs pretty much forever. I must have gotten spacey for a bit because I missed a sign and climbed to the top of a dirt road before it hit me that I was no longer on course. So I back tracked until I knew I wasn't lost anymore and continued on. And on. And on for so long, and onto trails I knew were not on the course last year, that I became totally convinced that I messed something up and got onto the marathon course instead. So I turned around and backtracked again. This time, while coming down a 2-way section, I saw Sara. What a relief! Turns out I wasn't on the marathon course...that really was our cross-country course. On Friday I would need to find a way back up there to ride the stuff I missed. I lucked out when I ran into Brad and Sheena on Friday and they were driving up to that area anyway, so I hitched a ride with them and rode the top section and the full descent. That descent is some of the highest speeds I have ever hit, and with those sneaky corners and water bars I'd better be really focused come race day!

Troy and Sazi-dog came up with our French friends Agnes and Serge to watch the racing and do some epic riding. They went for a 25 mile ride on Friday, which helped mellow out Sazi but it also made his paws sore so he walked like a ballerina for the next 2 days. Poor guy!

When I woke up Saturday morning I was a bundle of nerves. I felt awful in my warm-up; I just couldn't get it going. My start off the line was awful too: they have this gravel pit for a start line, and I just can't seem to get my momentum in it to get started. But after all that stuff things began to look up for me. I moved fairly quickly into the top 5, right where I wanted to be. I was making sure to pace myself and avoid sudden power surges, because it is so hard to recover from that kind of thing at 9000 feet. I inched my way through the group until only Shonny Vanlandingham and Allison Dunlap were in front of me. As Shonny began to pull away I began to reel in Allison. Soon I found myself behind her and ready to pass. She stayed on my wheel all the way to the top of the mountain, but I was able to put about 10 seconds on her down the descent. I think I maintained that gap through the start loop, but beginning the major climb for the second time I began to fade. She took her opportunity to jump past me and I couldn't respond. She opened up about 10 seconds on me this time. I felt

like if I could just keep her within this distance, I might catch her on the descent and put up a good fight for the finish line. Although she didn't really pull away anymore, I just couldn't bridge the distance so we finished the race with Shonny in first, Allison in second, and me 10 seconds behind in third. I was thrilled to have ridden such a great race, and when I realized that we finished a good 6 minutes ahead of the next riders in I was just shocked. Things got even better for me when I found out that my third place finish pushed me into 4th overall for the series.

The next day's short track didn't go quite as well for me. I was already having trouble getting mentally psyched up for the race after my big effort in the cross country. Then more trouble with those rocks on the start line, followed by a horrible funneling on the tough climb, and my mental game was shot. I battled pretty well though, and managed to get up into 8th place. It was really fun that our whole team was riding in about the same place, with Lisa and Sara finishing 10th and 11th respectively. It must have looked great seeing all three Ford jerseys passing by one after another.

As the weekend came to a close I felt so satisfied with my performances this season. Two big races still to come, but with the ending of the National series I felt a big sense of relief that I have been able to represent my Ford Cycling Team and all of our team sponsors so well. When I go out to these races I feel such a sense of support, and that goes immeasurably far. Now it is time for a little r and r with Troy and Sazi at the Lightner Creek campground near Durango, then off to France for the World Championships!