

The Infineon Raceway at Sonoma, CA, was the site of the second stop in the NORBA series. It was a beautiful weekend, if just a bit windy, and I felt more than relaxed and comfortable staying in a cottage among vineyards.

I arrived in Sonoma on Wednesday evening, and got out on the course for the first time on Thursday. My first reactions to the course were less than stellar: it seemed like someone had pretty much just rolled through the grassy fields with a tractor and plowed a wide swath to ride on. To make singletrack, they ran a piece of tape down the middle and it became a two-way zone. But after getting a second lap on the course on Friday, I started to feel the groove of the course and began to enjoy it. The corners were probably the most challenging thing out there, but the climbing was no joke either. Between the course being wide open and the wind kicking up every afternoon, this race became as much of a tactical test as a fitness test.

The race began with my teammate Melanie McQuaid going straight to the front to pace set. I could tell I had good legs early on, and made sure I was within the top 5 so that if any attacks went I would be there to go with them. It happened early, and before I knew Alison Dunlap, Jimena Florit, and I were off the front alone. Before the first lap was over we had regrouped with some of the women behind us and were now a group of about 8. I'm trying to race more aggressively these days, and I found myself pulling this group of 8 for longer than I would have liked.

On lap 2, Alison, Jimena and I again separated ourselves off the front, and I began to realize that the first half of the course was really where I was riding stronger than most of the others. Alison attacked on the biggest climb of the course, leaving Jimena and I to try and work together to stay close to her. Then Jimena dropped me and I was in the wind alone. The next thing that (naturally) happened was I was re-caught by 3 women: Kerry Barnholt, Shonny Vanlandingham, and Kelly Emmitt. I decided that it was now my turn to sit in, so I latched onto their wheels and saved a lot of energy. We then re-caught Jimena. This was about the time I started counting racers: one up the trail, five in my group....hmmm....one of us is NOT going to be on the podium. So I started asking myself, how can I make sure I'm not that one? So I attacked. I knew I had to string it out. I knew there was no sense sitting back and letting someone else decide how the race would unfold. I went and it worked. I attacked hard so no one could sit on my wheel. Finally, Jimena and I were back at the front working together to keep Kelly Emmitt behind us. We worked hard and we did it. Coming into the final pavement section, I was poorly positioned for the sprint: Jimena was on my wheel, and I was about to lead her out. I didn't want a 5 pedal stroke sprint, so I went early hoping to gap her and keep her from having that lead out advantage. Miraculously, it worked and I crossed

the finish line in second place 30 seconds behind Alison Dunlap. What a day for me and for our whole team: all three of us finished in the top 12!

Throughout the race I was so thankful for my Bontrager Tubeless Revolt tires. This was my first time racing on these tires and not only did they have the lowest rolling resistance of any tire I've ridden, but they felt like Velcro in those loose, kitty-litter corners.

The next day was the short track, and I think everyone gave some consideration to riding their road bikes for this course: there were only two short dirt sections, so it was pretty much a road crit. And with the headwind along a paved straight-away, creating breaks was nearly impossible. My whole Ford Cycling team tried; we attacked at least four times but nothing was going anywhere. The finish came down to about a 10 person sprint, and this time I decided I wasn't backing down. I still didn't sprint that great, but managed to keep some girls behind me by finishing 6th. Melanie's sprint was a little better than mine: she pulled up to 5th.

From my viewpoint, the weekend was dominated by the Ford Cycling team. We were on the front, off the front, making attacks, riding smart, and even putting on clinics for the amateur racers (see our report about the PreRide on our website www.quickrelease.com). Now that is the way it's done!

Huge thanks go out to Shimano for looking after me and my bike, Ford for making this team happen in the first place, Athlete Octane for the great supplement, and Scott Blanchard from Pyramid coaching for figuring out where to take my training so that I could come out this weekend and get my best finish yet.