



Left: Dan Recht at the start of the 2019 Mt. Evans Hill Climb in Idaho Springs.

Denver's Dan Recht

Passionate Lawyer and Endurance Athlete

BY REID NEUREITER

Civil rights and criminal defense attorney Dan Recht is well-known in the Denver legal community as one of Colorado's top lawyers with his own firm, Recht Kornfeld PC. In fact, *Law Week Colorado* designated Recht the "Best Criminal Defense Attorney" in Colorado for four consecutive years (2014-17). He is also a former president of the Colorado Criminal Defense Bar, a former chair of the ACLU of Colorado, and a frequent television and NPR radio commentator.

But few people know that the 66-year old Recht, having reached the summit of Colorado's legal profession, spends much of his spare time reaching for other summits—on his bicycle. This past July, Recht completed two of Colorado's most grueling one-day organized bicycle rides: the Triple Bypass ride, from Evergreen to Avon, and the Mt. Evans Hill Climb, from Idaho Springs to the summit of Mount Evans. Both of these rides feature spectacular mountain scenery and high altitude, and both are among the most difficult organized rides in the world.

The Mt. Evans Hill Climb travels 28 miles up the highest paved road in North America, through forests of aspen and lodgepole pine, passing the Mount Goliath Natural Area, which contains a stand of Rocky Mountain bristlecone pines that are thousands of years old. Beyond tree line is Summit Lake, which at 12,800 feet is reported to be the highest lake in Colorado and one of the highest in the United States. Past Summit Lake riders face five more miles of seemingly endless switchbacks to the summit of Mount Evans (14,130 feet), where exhausted cyclists are usually met by the local herd of wild mountain goats, and sometimes bighorn sheep.

The Triple Bypass requires even more stamina. This 120-mile ride ascends 10,600 feet (more than two vertical miles) over three high mountain passes—Squaw/Juniper Pass (11,020 feet), Loveland Pass (11,990 feet), and Vail Pass (10,666 feet). Riders usually depart Evergreen before dawn and do not make it around Lake Dillon, past Frisco, over Vail Pass, past the Vail Ski Resort, and into Avon until 5 or 6 p.m., spending between eight and 12 hours in the saddle.

Closer to sea level, Recht—a father of three and grandfather of two—recently taught his 4-year-old grandson to ride his bike. "It was really sweet," Recht's daughter Molly recounted. "He now wants to be just like his grandfather, saying, 'When I get a little bit bigger, I want to ride up that pass with Papa.'" Molly is amazed at her father's athletic achievements and the passion he puts into both his cycling and his legal practice, and says her father shows no signs of slowing down. "It is incredible. He is in better shape than anyone I know. His passion is unmatched with everything he does. To see a man his age who absolutely crushes it, it is phenomenal."

A Conversation with Dan

Recht recently answered questions about his history in cycling and how he keeps so physically active at a time of life when many people have

Dan Recht passes oblivious mountain goats as he crosses the finish line of the 2016 Mt. Evans Hill Climb.



retired both from work and from doing anything too athletically demanding.

Q: How long have you been road cycling? How did you take it up?

A: I grew up in Wisconsin, and as kids we rode our bikes constantly. As a teenager, I began taking long bike-camping trips to Northern Wisconsin. In my twenties, I rode through Ireland and France with full saddle-bags for camping, and I also camped over a thousand miles through the Northwest, ending up in Montana. However, I didn't start racing road bicycles until I was in my fifties. Why? I had persistent running injuries that eventually caused me to switch sports. It took me a while

to get over the running addiction. Fortunately, I found a substitute passion that makes me even happier.

Q: How many times have you ridden the Mt. Evans Hill Climb?

A: I have lost track of how many times I've done the race up Mount Evans, but I have ridden to the top at least 20 times.

Q: How many times have you ridden the Triple Bypass?

A: I have ridden the Triple Bypass officially 22 times. However, I have done the ride informally many times—a total of over 30.

Q: How do the two rides compare? Which one is harder physically or psychologically?

A: Mt. Evans is crazy and hard, as it is over 14,000 feet. As anyone who has hiked up a 14er knows, for the last several thousand feet of elevation gain, the air is quite thin. So, the intensity of the effort for the last few hours is extreme and much more than anything on the Triple. On the other hand, the Triple is much longer, and much more grueling as a result—10,000 vertical feet gain and over 100 miles of riding is a [expletive deleted].

Q: How did you train for these rides? How much time was involved?

A: I did not specifically train for those rides, but I try to ride in the hills as much as I can. When I have limited time, I often drive to Lookout



Mountain [in Golden] and get my hill-climbing in by doing Lookout two or three times per ride. Squaw Pass is good training also.

Q: What kind of equipment is necessary to complete these rides? The weather this year was pretty good for both—how has weather affected you in years past?

A: Any time I ride at elevation, at a minimum I bring a rain coat, warm waterproof gloves, and other miscellaneous material to use if it rains or gets very cold. Regarding bike equipment, your bike needs to have a wide gear range with a pretty easy easiest gear. However, I don't go so far as to have a triple chain-ring in front.

Q: Have you ever had to quit one of these rides in the middle? Why?

A: I have never abandoned the Mt. Evans ride. And only once have I abandoned the Triple. That was because it was raining hard and very cold as we descended from Squaw Pass. I and hundreds of others were worried about hypothermia.

Q: These are considered some of the toughest road bike rides in the country, if not the world, because of the distance and altitude involved. Have you done any other rides elsewhere that compare?

A: I have been lucky enough to travel all over the world on somewhat extreme adventures but have never ridden anything harder than Evans and the Triple. Just last November, though, I did a remote arduous 20-day trek in Nepal with my

daughter Hannah that took us over 18,000 feet. I have also climbed to around 20,000 feet five or so times in my life, and those all-day climbs compare in effort, psychological fortitude, and intensity to the Evans and Triple rides.

Q: This year, you almost turned around three-quarters of the way up Mount Evans. Why did you think about stopping, and why did you ultimately decide to continue?

A: The weather was looking foreboding when I was over 13,000 feet, and the thought of screaming down from the top of Evans [with rain or lightening] scared me. In the end, I told myself, "You have never abandoned in 20 some efforts—don't start now." And so I didn't. And I am happy I didn't.

Q: Any advice for beginner cyclists who might be interested in doing one of these very difficult rides?


A: These rides are something you need to slowly build up for, or you are assured of getting injured, not unlike deciding to run a marathon but failing to build up slowly—a sure recipe for injury and unhappiness. On the other hand, if you train for at least six months, gradually build up your base, and plan to simply finish, you might just harbor the type of insanity to get it done.

Q: Are these rides dangerous? Have you ever been injured riding your road bike? Do you have any tips for avoiding crashes or injuries?

A: The major danger on these rides are the steep, fast downhill where speeds hit 50-plus miles per hour. I suppose there is also the danger that your friends and family will label you with an insanity diagnosis.

I have not been injured in one of these serious mountain rides. But I have been injured [broken collar bone] while riding at high speed in a big pack while race training. My tip for avoiding crashes or injury? Stay on the couch and open a beer.

Q: How long do you see yourself participating in such grueling events?

A: I am 66 years old. How long will I keep doing these crazy events? Who knows? Health and longevity are part of the great mystery of life. But I can tell you I hope to continue doing such things as long as I am able. I will invite you to my 70th birthday celebration on top of Mount Evans. 

A version of this interview previously ran in the *Greater Park Hill News*. Photos by Reid Neureiter.

Reid Neureiter is a magistrate judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Colorado. In his spare time, he enjoys taking sports photographs and is a frequent sports photo contributor to his neighborhood newspaper, the *Greater Park Hill News*. His cycling images have been used to publicize some of Colorado's most renowned organized bike rides, including the Mt. Evans Hill Climb and the Triple Bypass.



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