

- How might the formal and stylistic features of this text appeal to a particular audience?

## Taiwan KOM Challenge – A Personal Account

By Daniel Carruthers<sup>1</sup>



I had heard of the famous Toroko Gorge climb to the summit of Wuling a few years ago and had always dreamed of doing the ascent to the clouds and beyond; but never found time to go and do it. This time, I was back in Taiwan competing in the *Tour de Formosa*, an invitational seven-day international race for deaf riders. The only problem was that the KOM (King of the Mountain) Challenge was the day after my 800km race around the island of Taiwan concluded and I would already be very tired, however the allure of climbing the “blood-stained beast”, as termed by Taiwan expat pro rider Lee Rodgers, deeply gripped me and I was going to do the climb no matter how tired I was. As an 85kg cyclist, I am by no means of climber build, nor do I profess myself to be a good climber – in fact I dread hills in bike races as they are the places where I am dropped by the lighter weight riders. Despite confronting what seems to be “every cyclist’s nightmare”, I was attracted to participating in the epic climb. I also knew that the road that we would race over is featured in the world’s top 10 most dangerous roads (mostly due to the numerous landslides and the way the road snakes its way around the edges of the gorge with a gaping drop opening below).

15 It is also billed as one of the most stunningly beautiful roads to cycle over. In short, it is a climb that should be on every cyclist's bucket list<sup>2</sup>!

The first 15km was a neutral roll-out before the gun was sounded at the start of the climb. The pack just surged forward and I found myself racing up near the front and, perhaps foolishly, attempted an acceleration at the very front, and then launching one of my trade-mark "suicide" attacks going up a steep grade into the tunnel. Italian rider Orrico Davide from the Atlas-Enervit team responded to my attack by chasing me down. I turned and saw him coming; as I sat up I saw that he had a smirk on his face and continued his acceleration. From this point on, I was content with riding comfortably in the pack.

25 Once I had re-grouped myself after being dropped, I found myself picking off blown riders one by one, passing almost a dozen riders. It is a good motivating point when this is happening. I also had time to check out the scenery on the way up and just could not believe my eyes at how fantastically beautiful it looked. There was such contrast too as I rode higher and higher. From the lush green dense native bush to large twisted gaunt old trees that were straight out of the Goblin forest and the large pine forests in the drier alpine climate areas. Finally, at the top, 30 it was a pretty barren wind-swept landscape.

My Garmin<sup>3</sup> recorded a total ascent of 3500m and within the magnificent climb there was one 3–4km descent that was welcomed after 70km of solid climbing. Just when you think you got a good tempo going, boom the road goes straight up for the last 13km with impossible gradients of up to 27% showing up on my GPS. Even the 28t sprocket I installed on my bike especially 35 for this event was not enough as in some sections I found myself zig-zagging. The one good thing happening in those closing stanzas was that after every impossibly steep section, the road would briefly flatten out before dishing out the punishment again.

Finally, the 1km sign appeared, but the gradient just got even steeper and what made matters worse was traffic was allowed to pass by and since I was zig-zagging a bit, a car nearly clipped 40 me causing me to yell insanely. The onlookers also yelled at the car that went by as they understood my plight. I could see the finish banner looming up the top with a large crowd of people gathered to watch the finishers. Still I had 300m of steep hill to climb, but I had renewed energy and pressed on the pedals harder and even sprinted in the last 100m – free-wheeling past the head commissioner who gave me a high-five. He was also the head commissioner 45 for the *Tour de Formosa* that I had just completed and he knew what a week I had gone through.

I'd like to see another climb in the world that can rival this magnificent beast rising out of the island of Taiwan. At 100km long, even factoring in some short downhill within, it is possible that this is the longest and most varied beautiful climb in the world. Put it on your bucket list 50 of cycling events to do in your lifetime. Every keen cyclist I have spoken to about this KOM challenge has gotten excited as the allure of the mountain has gripped their imagination.

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<sup>2</sup> bucket list: list of things you want to achieve in your lifetime

<sup>3</sup> Garmin: GPS device