RACE ACROSS A MIND

João Pombinho

AN EXCERPT

Chapter 16 · Third day · Monument Valley

Third day of twelve. The rock chimneys at dusk, and a sky that was starting to turn.

A long straight of more than a hundred kilometers took us to Kayenta, at km 245, where we stopped at the gas station before Monument Valley — thirty-two minutes, the longest stop of the day. I went to the bathroom to also stop, eat, and put drops in my eyes because of all that dust. It was past six in the evening, the end of the day was approaching, and a quick calculation in my head led me to push the free part of the team ahead: "go on, you deserve to see it in daylight, and I probably won't make it in time." It was genuine, but the guys ignored me, and all that was left for me was to put my foot down.

Over those twenty kilometers, an impressive transition takes place. The rock chimneys, with dusk approaching, were hypnotic. And then — there it was. The image I used in my talks, showing people, saying: "this is where I want to go." We stopped, had a team moment, and took some photographs. It was worth a ton, and we took as long as we wanted. Or ten minutes, whatever.

But the skies were changing. What looked like a storm was forming; the smell of the air was different. We passed through, it turned ugly, and the police closed the road right after, already in Utah, past a roundabout.

And then it started. I had never ridden in conditions like those: the wind came from everywhere and kept changing — and I, who am no featherweight, was pushed around unbelievably; it was an enormous task just to stay on the bike, my knees ached with the constant jolts — and at some point I thought: "okay, this is too much." Without visibility, the sandstorm threw orange-colored clouds, and one of them hit me straight in the eyes and nostrils like a shot; the glasses were of very limited use at that point. João Miguel shouted "João, get inside!" and I agreed — but at the same time, I kept turning the pedals slowly, without continuous flow, in sudden spikes. Irregular, mismatched bursts of power competed, in my head, with the task of figuring out where and how to stop, while I was thrown from side to side at the mercy of the rodeo conditions. Mafalda joined the conversation, and the decision to stop kept getting pushed ten, twenty, fifty meters further… I was at my limit, but I felt it was worth pushing through just to get out of there, because locking ourselves in the van was the absolute last resort. I could barely move, but from that point on I started to smile. Scared and in shock, I shouted against the conditions as we

made our way out of the desert landscape into higher ground. After a few minutes of the most incredible rodeo I've ever experienced on a bike, we had, it seemed, made it through.



The road to Monument Valley, shortly before the storm.

. . .

Race Across A Mind is out September 24, 2026.

The story of the first Portuguese person to solo-finish the Race Across America — and of the other crossing, the one made from within.

ironpigeon82.com