

SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN BIKE FESTIVAL

# TRAIL BLAZERS



BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL PHOTOS

ABOVE: Harrison Smith of Aptos scores some style points off the ramp and into the big air bag at the mountain bike festival in Aptos on Saturday. BELOW: Riders tackle the shortcourse race in Aptos Village.

Festival, Superenduro  
race bring in big crowds

By JULIE JAG

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APTOS — History was made early Saturday morning in the Soquel Demonstration State Forest, and it was messy.

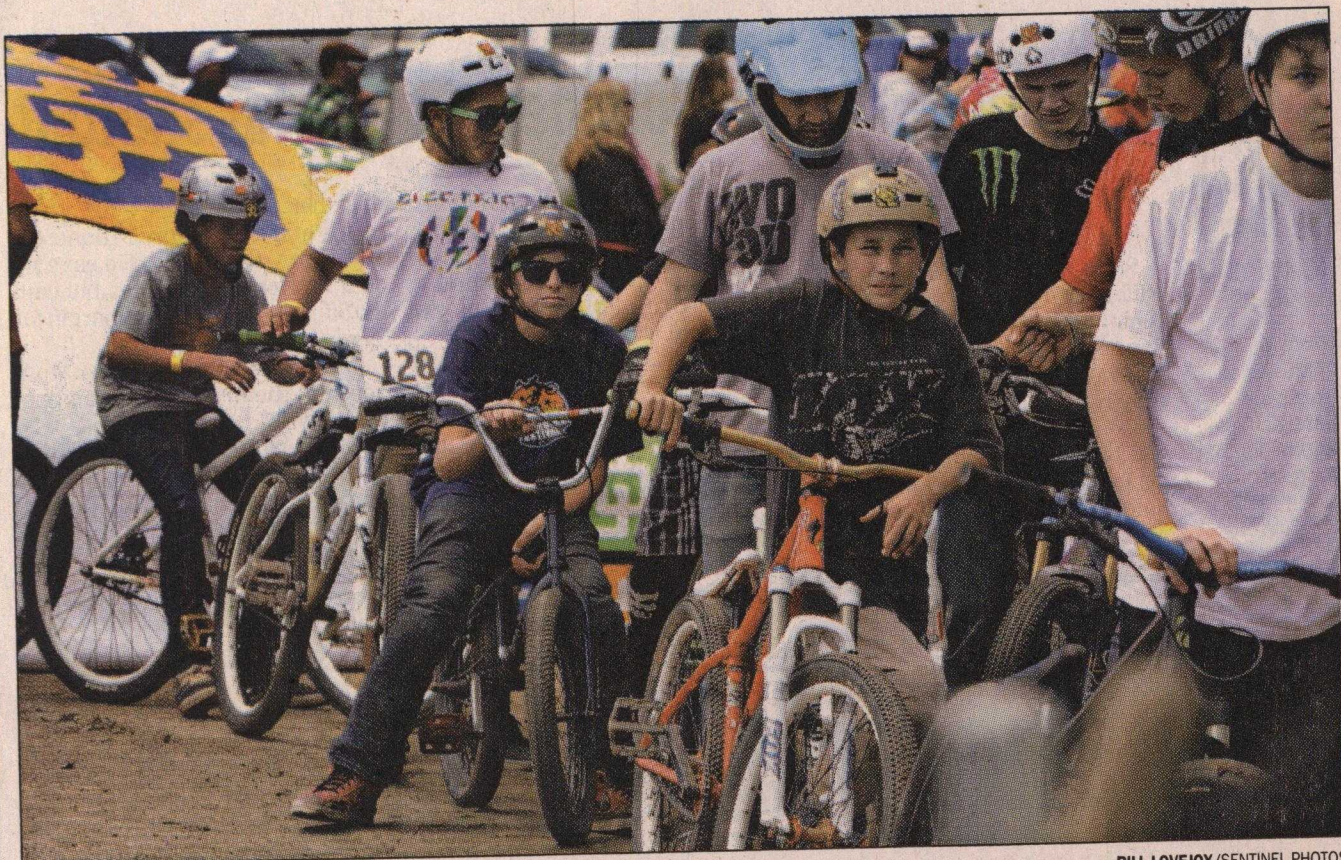
A posse of 50 professional mountain bikers started the day by grinding out a two-hour, 13-mile climb from the Forest of Nisene Marks State Park into the Demo, then spent another five hours racing each other

back down. By the time they arrived at the Santa Cruz Mountain Bike Festival grounds in Aptos Village late that afternoon, they had worn out their bodies and gotten splattered from head to toe clip in mud. They also had become participants in the first legally sanctioned event in the Demo and, moreover, what organizers believed to be the first Superenduro mountain bike race in the United States.

"I flatted in the first stage on the only rock out there, but I had a blast. The trails were awesome and I loved the for-



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BILL LOVEJOY/SENTINEL PHOTOS

ABOVE: Mountain bikers wait their turn at the popular ramp jump Saturday at the mountain bike festival in Aptos. BELOW: Nate Furbee helps Niko Marinovic catch a bit of air on the kids' track.

## FESTIVAL

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mat," said Matthew Slaven, 35, a professional Superenduro racer brought to the event from Portland, Ore., by sponsor Bell. "It's a big ride with little races in the middle. It's really, really fun event and really social."

Superenduro races test competitors on the mountain biking skills most recreational riders use every time they hit the trails — namely, climbing, descending and endurance. The format has been popular in Europe and Canada for years, but it has been slow to come to the United States until this year, when several have sprung up on the racing calendar. The Santa Cruz Mountain Bike Festival event may have gotten the honor of being first simply because it was held earliest in the year.

Superenduro co-director Mark Davidson, the president of festival organizer Mountain Bikers of Santa Cruz, said the format wasn't the festival committee's original plans. It started as a simple race with-in the Demo featuring a single climb and descent. Then local

pro Evan Turpen, who raced the format in Europe, suggested the festival add a couple more climbs and descents and make it a Superenduro.

"This more than fits in with the Santa Cruz values of mountain biking," said Davidson, noting that unlike in the downhill discipline, riders must get to the top of the course of their own accord. "A lot of us who moved here for mountain biking, this is what we love. It's definitely that kind of event."

And Santa Cruzans happen to be pretty good at it, too. Local pro mountain biker Aaron Bradford won the men's event, followed by Ryan Condraschoff of Larkspur and Duncan Riffle of Santa Barbara. Mary Moncorge of Marin won the women's event, followed by Joanna Petterson of Folsom and Abigail Hippley of Aptos.

"There are pretty fast locals here, and they have good knowledge because it was pretty slick out there," said Slaven, his face painted with hundreds of dirt freckles from the trails of the race and the mud puddles his friends tried to splash each other with on the ride back.

Slaven looked as though he was experiencing culture shock as he leaned against his dirt-brown bike post-race, taking in the bustling scene at Aptos Village after having spent the day in the quiet of the forest. It included kids bobbing up and down on the pump track, kids flinging themselves and their bikes off a ramp and onto a big air bag and adults taking in a crowded expo and beer garden. An estimated 4,000 people attended the festival last year and organizers hope to beat those numbers this time around. The festival continues today with those events as well as a jump jam competition, which will feature pro riders like Aptos brothers Cam and Tyler McCaul flying over giant bumps and sharp burms at the neighboring Post Office jumps.

Accuweather.com predicts the weather will be 62 degrees and sunny. That's a welcome change from the storms earlier in the week for jumps manager Saris Mercanti, whose crew was using propane fires Saturday to dry out the track in time for today's races.

Mercanti said the BMX and mountain bike jump contest



## IF YOU GO

SANTA CRUZ MOUNTAIN BIKE FESTIVAL

**WHEN:** Today, 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**WHERE:** Aptos Village

**COST:** Free for spectators

**EVENTS:** Pro mens and women's short track, pro men's and women's pump track, kids rodeo, jump contest

**ON THE NET:** For schedule and information, visit [www.santacruzmountainbikefestival.com](http://www.santacruzmountainbikefestival.com)

will be a "holla for your dolla" event. "It's worth cash if you try it," she said. "It's not about how good you are, it's about coming out and trying something."

Apparently, trying new things is a common theme at the festival.

Julie Kanagy, 39, of Felton, for example, picked the women's amateur short track race for the first mountain biking competition of her career in March after hearing no one had signed up. Given that, she felt fine about finishing fourth after a few more women showed up, including winner Renee Shelton of Mill Valley, who has experience racing cyclocross.

A few yards away, next to the pump track, Lauren Gregg of Santa Cruz also experienced the tingly sensation of venturing into the unknown. Gregg, 21, was the lone woman to attempt a jump into the big air bag. It required careening down from a 20-foot-plus plat-

form and launching her bike off a ramp into the air, only to land softly on a giant, bounce-house-style air mattress. A pro cross country mountain biker, Gregg admitted she's not used to getting airborne.

"I've never jumped in my life, just little jumps," she said. "It was intimidating, but easier than I thought it would be."

Micah Lesser, 14, of Fredricksburg, Va., made it look effortless. Lesser, whose family is in Santa Cruz on spring break, said he hadn't mountain biked in a couple of years. Still, he managed a couple of backflips off the ramp that elicited ahhs from the crowd.

"This is the best so far," Lesser said when asked how the bike fest, which he found out about Saturday morning from a flier at a farmer's market, ranked among his Spring Break activities.

"Last time here we went surfing, but this is better."