

The Race is On

Tour of California returns to Santa Cruz County Monday



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Diane Delucchi, Maura Noel and Abe Lincoln talk while handling the distribution of VIP packets for the Tour of California at Michael's on Main in Soquel Thursday.

Bicycle Races

By JASON HOPPIN

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✓ APTOS — If you want to know happens when 144 very large, very powerful men engage in a fast-moving mosh pit on wheels, Monday afternoon just might give you the opportunity.

Months of local planning will come to a head when the Amgen Tour of California returns to Santa Cruz after a one-year hiatus. The second stage of arguably America's greatest bike race is ending in our backyard, and many are expecting 117 miles of punishment to culminate in a breathtaking sprint to the Aptos finish line.

"If you want to see action, watching the sprint is fantastic," said Jim Langley, local cycling journalist.

Santa Cruz County's connection to cycling runs deep, and many of the seminal figures in the development of recreational cycling have connections here, from Tom Cuthbertson to Ross Shafer to Keith Bontrager. Books that helped popularize bicycling in the '60s and '70s, the

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IF YOU GO

AMGEN TOUR OF CALIFORNIA

WHEN: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday

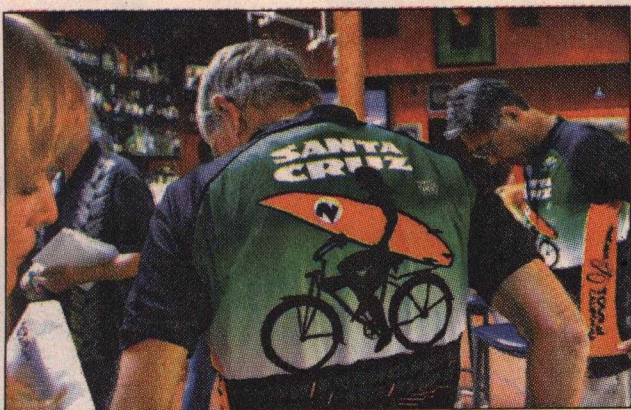
WHERE: Various locations; Festival at Cabrillo College, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos.

DONATIONS: Organizers are still seeking donations. To help, visit: www.tourofcalifornia-santacruz.com/get_involved/contribute

ON THE NET

Get race-day updates and up to the minute coverage online

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JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

Two men try on their jerseys while picking up their VIP packets for the Tour of California at Michael's on Main in Soquel Thursday.

AMGEN

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sport of cyclocross, carbon-fiber bike frames and mountain bike suspension all have local origins.

Yet it took members of the Santa Cruz County Cycling Club to bring the Tour back, after local governments abandoned their official support. The group includes lead local organizer Maura Noel, who offered her retirement savings as a guarantee that they could raise the money needed to make the event work.

"All the big stuff is in place, it's really just details now," Noel said Friday. "I'm super excited and happy the way the community has supported us these past seven months. Now if everyone just buys a T-shirt, I'll be ecstatic."

This year's race will include a health and wellness festival at the Cabrillo College finish line, and numerous local and national vendors will be on hand. Cabrillo plans to hold classes as usual, though Soquel High, also along the race route, is only holding a half-day of classes.

In past years, the fight for the right to wear the stage winner's jersey was decided in Bonny Doon, previously the day's only major climb. This year, race organizers added another long haul up Bear Creek Road, making observers wonder whether any members of the pack would be able to break free.

"They're trying to tear their legs off this year with so many hills," Langley said of this year's race.

That means there could be a crowd barreling toward the finish line at Cabrillo. If so, teams will do just about anything to break their sprinters free, including bumping the wheels of other riders and even an occa-

sional head-butt.

Many are happy to see the race return. Ryan Beauregard, owner of Bonny Doon's Beauregard Vineyards, has seen his winery turn into a party during past races. This year, Beauregard is selling \$60 tickets to a catered lunch and blues band fiesta that promises to again be a viewing hot spot.

"No one's going to have more fun than us," Beauregard said.

People interested in making sure they don't miss the finish can buy grandstand seats from the Aptos Chamber of Commerce, with chamber representative Meggie Schuller saying interest is strong.

"It's going good. We've sold about 160 tickets" of 220, Schuller said, saying she expects race-day sales as well.

Covering 733 miles, the race begins Sunday in Santa Rosa and ends eight days later in Beverly Hills. Organizers see it as a major precursor to the Tour de France, and it includes some of the best riders in the world.

Stage 2 begins at Marina Green in San Francisco in the shadow of the Golden Gate Bridge. Riders then come down Highway 1 before turning into the Santa Cruz Mountains just past Davenport.

From there, riders climb Empire Grade before a white-knuckle descent down Jamison Creek Road into Boulder Creek. From there, they climb again to Summit Road, where a timed sprint is held.

The last 17 miles of the race are either downhill or flat, which should make for excitement. Along Soquel-San Jose Road, riders should reach speeds approaching 60 mph.

Follow Sentinel reporter Jason Hoppin on Twitter @scnewsdude