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Bike bedlam in Eagle

Cult Cross cyclocross race kicks off spring season

By Laura Lief

After a two-year hiatus, Colorado's only spring cyclocross race, Cult Cross, returns March 31 to the Eagle County Fairgrounds for its fourth edition. Blending road biking and mountain biking, cyclocross races consist of blazing laps around a course that features asphalt, grass, dirt, sand, mud, barriers and other obstacles. Due to the technical nature of the courses, there are always sections that require riders to dismount, carry their bikes while navigating the obstruction and then remount.

Described as a grassroots event, Cult Cross is the brainchild of promoter and former racer Larry Grossman, who brought the Town of Eagle on board as the presenting sponsor and with nearly \$2,000 in cash prize on the line. While Grossman only races occasionally these days, he used to drive to the Front Range every weekend for many years to race because "that was the only game in town."

He remembers seeing his first race with friend and Mountain Pedaler owner Charlie Brown years ago, and was immediately hooked. Since then, he's been a competitor, race organizer and race announcer.

"I started Cult Cross because I love the discipline of cyclocross racing and wanted to bring it to the local race scene," Grossman says. "It's a day full of fun and tough racing on a unique course at the Eagle County Fairgrounds."

Taking place along the scenic Eagle River, the event features seven race categories - 18 and under, beginners and first timers, sport and recreation level, fat bike and single speed, Women's Clydesdale Championship, women's elite and men's elite. Starting at 10 a.m. and ending around 4 p.m., the races will be between 30 and 60 minutes in length.

Nothing easy about cyclocross

According to local pro Jake Wells, cyclocross is a sport unlike any other, and there is no such thing as an easy cyclocross race.

"Cyclocross is often referred to as the 'steeplechase of cycling,'" Wells says. "I migrated to 'cross from mountain biking and have now been racing for about eight years, seven of those years at the elite level. Initially cyclocross was just something fun to do during the fall after the mountain bike season was over and before ski season started, but now it has become my primary focus on the bike."

Because cyclocross typically begins in the fall, Wells spends most of the summer road racing and mountain bike racing.

"For me it helps build endurance and fitness and keeps the training fun," says Wells, who is also a personal trainer at Dogma Athletica and a private coach. "Once I get closer

Catch the action:

What: Cult Cross 2013

Where: Eagle County Fairgrounds

When: Sunday, March 31

10 a.m. - Juniors under 18

11 a.m. - "C" (Beginners and first timers)

Noon - "B" (Sport and recreational level)

1 p.m. - Fat bike and single speed

2 p.m. - Unofficial Official Women's Clydesdale Cyclocross World Championship

3 p.m. - Women's Elite

4 p.m. - Men's Elite

How much: Juniors race for free and the rest of the categories will have a \$25 entry fee.

Registration is day of the event only. Laps will be six to seven minutes long, and most of the course is visible from a single viewpoint.

to the beginning of the season, I start doing more specific training that addresses the exact demands of a 'cross race."

Those exact demands include all-out sprints, leaping over barriers, pedaling through sand and dirt and hopping obstacles on tires just a bit wider than those on your average road bike. Cyclocross season usually starts in mid-September and runs through mid-January, during which Wells typically races between 20 and 30 events.

Something different

One aspect that sets cyclocross apart from other bike races is the availability of a "pit crew" for competitors. According to Wells, pitting is all part of the game and can determine the outcome of a race. Depending on the level of the race, Wells will have a spare bike and someone in the pit to get him a clean bike and take care of any mechanical issues.

"At the local races I usually just put a spare bike in there to grab if I need it or have a friend help me," he says. "But the best pit crew is my wife. She races 'cross too and has been helping me for years, so she knows the drill."

Wells says he is looking forward to Cult Cross because it's a unique race in the fact that takes place in the spring.

"Larry Grossman always puts a good fun event, and it's always a good core group of people that come out for it," he says. "It's kind of the unofficial kick-off to cycling season here in the valley, and I know that LG has put a lot of hard work and effort into getting more sponsors on board and pumping up the event. In return I hope that more folks come out to participate and spectate. It's a great way to spend the day."

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WHAT'S HAPPENING



Avon-based cyclocross racer Jake Wells competes at last year's Colorado Cross Classic. Eagle holds its own Cult Cross next Sunday, March 31 at the Eagle County Fairgrounds. Look for Wells and others on the course. Dejan Smaic photo.

A spectator sport

For those who have never seen a cyclocross race, it is undoubtedly one of the most spectator-friendly forms of bike racing. The action is constant, heckling is encouraged and the entire course can be seen from one or two vantage points.

Both Wells and Grossman describe Cult Cross as very social as often times people come out to the race, have a beer and hang out with friends as they watch. It is also a very family-friendly event.

"There is nowhere to hide in a 'cross race. The pain of the effort is usually visible on the racers' faces and the spectators and hecklers can add a real unique element to the atmosphere," says Wells.

According to Grossman, you can even give the sport a try

for the first time while you're there.

"Cult Cross is a very fun and grassroots event and everyone is welcome," he says. "If you are curious about the sport and do not own a 'cross' bike, come out and try it on your mountain bike. The crowd is super fun, and the vibe is the best you will find at a bike race."

For more information on Cult Cross, visit cultcross2008.blogspot.com. **A**

SneakPEAK writer Laura Lieff can be reached at info@sneakpeakvail.com

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