

Heavenly Mountain's zipline propels riders toward Lake Tahoe at speeds up to 55 mph



Heidi Wiemokly flies down the Blue Streak at Heavenly Mountain Resort. Photo/Trish McGraw

By Kathryn Reed

Zippering through the air at speeds up to 55 mph, legs dangling 160 feet above the ground and Lake Tahoe getting closer by the second.

Aptly named the Blue Streak, Heavenly's zipline is about whisking thrill-seekers down 3,300 feet in about one minute. Whether it's the blue sky – or more gray as the case was on Friday – or the varying shades of blue from the lake – the views are stunning.



This is the view from the top of the Blue Streak zipline. Photo/Kathryn Reed

From the launching pad it looks like the endpoint is Round Hill. On the ride down it appears the landing point is the lake itself.

Two people may go at once on separate cables. The heavier rider tends to finish first. It's not uncommon to get a little spin action going, but it's impossible to turn the seat all the way around.

It's hard not to smile, even with a cold wind blowing. But if the wind is sustained at 25 mph or more, the operations cease immediately. Safety will take precedence over fun.

Redundancy is built into the harness system, as well as at the end to stop riders. This ride has a much smoother, less jarring finish than the previous zipline.

Everyone wears a helmet and harness, sunglasses are a good idea.

The only drawback is that it feels so controlled that the adrenaline rush is not sustained for the entire ride – at least according to a couple *LTN* riders.



Two people ride at a time – heading toward the gondola building and Tamarack Lodge.
Photo/Trish McGraw

The ride opens today for the rest of the winter season – which ends April 20. (The zipline will be open Memorial Day weekend.)

This is one of Heavenly Mountain Resort's attractions to lure the non-skier to the mountain, give riders something more to do and make it a year-round destination. It's possible mountain biking and a gravity fed ride through the woods will be added in 2015 and available for use the following summer.

"Part of the reason why we are expanding is to give a full-day summer experience," explained Matt Eaton, senior manager of activities. "There's nothing like it on this end of the Sierra."

Blue Streak is the larger of two ziplines that will be open every day when the summer season begins June 13. (The smaller zipline needs a little more work before it opens.) For now Blue Streak will operate from 10am-3pm Friday-Monday. It costs \$40 per ride, plus \$45 to ride the gondola. Pricing for the summer has not been established.

It starts to the west of the top of Tamarack chairlift, the same spot the former zipline was located. It ends above the

terminus for the gondola.

“It’s been completely re-engineered, especially the retrieval process. And we’ve increased training for staff,” Sally Gunter, spokeswoman for Heavenly, told *Lake Tahoe News*.



Spring coils help stop people after a 3,300-foot ride. Photo/Trish McGraw

In September a lawsuit from the 2009 death involving the old zipline was settled. A newlywed who was on the Tamarack chair with his bride fell to his death when a rope from the zipline, which is 100 yards away, got entangled with the chairlift.

For the past five months the U.S. Forest Service, OSHA and the manufacturers have been inspecting the new zipline. Staff has been undergoing rigorous training.

Today anyone who is not pregnant, is at least 42-inches tall and weighs between 75 and 275 pounds may step into a harness, get hooked into the chair and be whisked down the mountain on the South Shore’s only zipline.