

Women fight to win Lake Tahoe cycling race



The peloton makes its way through Cave Rock on May 8. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

Mother Nature teased Amgen Tour of California race officials Friday morning as temps hovered just above freezing and snow

danced in the air. As the 11am start time got closer, the clouds parted to show blue sky and the requisite 45-degree mark had been reached.

Eighty-two elite women racers left Heavenly Mountain Resort's California Lodge on May 8 on a 74.5-mile trek around Lake Tahoe, with an elevation gain of 5,300 feet. They rode through South Lake Tahoe, turned right onto Highway 89 to ride around the lake (72 miles) and then up Keller Road with its 15 percent grade, to finish at the California Lodge. (Cycling events go clockwise because it's safer to make right turns.)



Elite racing bikes easily cost five figures. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

This is the first time a women's cycling event of this caliber has been staged in the United States.

As the teams each signed in and were introduced before the start, Ali Tetrick of the Optum team said, "I think at the finish you will see a small group. You will see who wants to sprint after climbing that hill."

She was correct in her prediction.



Riders enjoy views of Lake Tahoe for much of the competition. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

“That last hill will turn riders inside out,” the announcer boomed as the pack thinned out in the last few miles. “They are all hoping they have enough gas in the tank to make it to the finish. You thought the Donner Party was bad; this is ridiculous.”

Katie Hall of team United Health Care crossed the line first with a time of 3:10.49. Rounding out the podium were Alena Amialiusik of Velocio-SRAM and Lauren Komanski with Twenty 16, both with a time of 3:10.51.



Top riders from each team on the start line. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Sarah Storey (Pearl Izumi) started a breakaway and was followed by Allison Beveridge (Canadian national team). They pulled 1:25 minutes ahead of the peloton until they were caught at the top of Spooner Summit.

With 7 kilometers to go, all the major teams had a rider in the breakaway. One by one they started to fall back.

Earning the best young rider jersey was Hannah Barnes (UHC); Queen of the Mountain went to Storey; and the sprint leader was Beveridge.



The gear, the bike and the rider are lightweight. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Dealing with the elements

The elevation and temperature are not issues most of these cyclists have to deal with on a regular basis.

Lauren Stephens with team Tibco said, "I'm used to riding in 100-degree heat, and 100 percent humidity." The topped ranked rider in the United States in 2014 calls Texas home.

Storey said, "We had a lot of preparation with the altitude."

The British athlete is already well decorated with Olympic cycling and swimming medals from the 1996 Paralympic Games in Atlanta. (When she was born her left arm was entangled with the umbilical cord in the womb, which left her left hand unable to function.)



Rhae Shaw and her
BMW team scouted
the course in
March. Photo
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Carolyn E. Wright

The BMW team came to Tahoe in March to check out the courses. It was beautiful weather for their weeklong training – nothing like this week's weather.

While May is always iffy weather in Lake Tahoe, it felt more like winter than spring on Friday. More snow covered Gunbarrel than has been on that ski slope in the last month. All morning clouds shrouded Mount Tallac.



Cycling is a team and individual sport. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The cold had most of the riders covered head to toe, with only a few braving shorts.

“We know mountain weather. Anything can happen,” Rhae Shaw of the BMW team told *Lake Tahoe News* before the start.

“It’s very difficult to ride at this elevation,” Shaw added. She said Colorado is the other area that gives cyclists a bit of a challenge when it comes to altitude.

Saturday’s forecast is a high of 61 degrees in South Lake Tahoe.



Cyclists pause for the national anthem.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

Local impact

The South Shore in 2011 tried to host the men's first stage. Mother Nature wasn't as forgiving then and the race was canceled because of snow.

Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, was hesitant to put a dollar figure on the economic impact a race of this magnitude has on the region.

"More for us it's about the awareness of the destination," Chaplin told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We have great cycling. Elite athletes like to train here."



A team Optum rider prepares for the start of the first phase. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

While the North Shore does not have a start or finish like when the men's race was here and Northstar and Squaw Valley were part of the itinerary, it is still involved.

Sandy Evans Hall, executive director of the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, was on hand for the start of Friday's race.

"They will get to see the entire lake. It showcases what we have," Hall told *Lake Tahoe News*. "We are really focused on human powered sports."



Katie Hall, center, celebrates her win May 8 with Alena Amialiusik, left, and Lauren Komanski. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Even though there isn't live television coverage of the women's races in Lake Tahoe, it is possible to stream the events. And footage from these events will be used during the men's race this coming week.

Plus, it gives locals a chance to see a professional sporting event for free. More than 100 people gathered near the Y on Friday as the cyclists made the turn onto Highway 89. Cheering crowds were in groups throughout the race as well as many more who gathered at the finish line.

Notes:

- Stage 2 for the women begins May 9 at 10:30am at Heavenly Mountain Resort's California Lodge.
- The 49.7-mile course goes into Meyers, will be two circles, with an elevation gain of 3,300 feet.
- Pioneer Trail will be closed from Ski Run Boulevard to Highway 50 in Meyers from 9:30am-1pm.
- The finish at the Cal Lodge is expected to be at 12:30pm.
- For more info, go online.
- There are two sites where people may stream the event live. Here is the first and the second.