

Lake Tahoe to host women, men Tour of California professional cyclists in 2016



Tour of California organizers are confident snow will not be an issue in Tahoe like it was in 2011. Photo/Lisa J. Tolda/Copyright

By Kathryn Reed

Expect snow in May 2016 – Amgen’s Tour of California bike race is coming back to Lake Tahoe.

The men and women will be riding on the same day – May 19. The women’s stage 1 will start and finish at Heavenly Mountain Resort, and the men will complete stage 5 at the California Lodge after leaving from Lodi.

“The iconic landscape of the lake and everything else around it add a lot of beauty and glamour around the race. It shows off our state in the best light,” Michael Roth, with AEG, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “The biggest challenge is to continue to challenge the riders with a tougher course and I think they all appreciate that.”

AEG produces the multiday event that is now in its 11th year.



Tahoe-only views like cyclists coming through Cave Rock and the challenges of the route keep the area popular with riders and race

promoters. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

Sir Bradley Wiggins of Britain is the only confirmed cyclist. He won the race in 2014, which he did while being the reigning Olympic champion.

“He will be getting ready for his fourth Olympics in 2016. His road to the Olympics will come through California,” Roth said.

Other athletes who will be competing will be announced after the first of the year.

With the men’s race starting in Southern California a week later than previous years, organizers have their fingers crossed this will help when it comes to weather. This is the second year for a south to north route.

“A lot of times we get the question ‘Are the men ever coming back?’ A lot has to do with geography. When the start is in Sacramento or Santa Rosa it doesn’t make a lot of sense to come east,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Snow has been an issue each of the two times the race has come to Tahoe. **In 2011**, the men were to start near Stateline and finish at Northstar, with the second stage leaving from Squaw Valley. The two Tahoe area starts were aborted because snow was falling.

This past May it was touch-and-go as the women were getting loosened up for the start from the Cal Lodge at Heavenly. Mother Nature finally cooperated with skies becoming blue and the temperatures rising enough to give the green light. **This year the women** had two days of racing on the South Shore.

2015 proved Tahoe isn’t the only place where it snows in May. The men’s and women’s time trials had to be moved from Big Bear Lake because of the white stuff.

The threat of snow clearly isn't keeping organizers away from Tahoe.

The men will ride about 800 miles between 12 host cities from May 15-22. They start in San Diego and end in Sacramento.

The women compete May 19-22, covering about 200 miles. The race will be the first U.S. event on the inaugural UCI Women's WorldTour.

New this year is the men and women will be riding from the same start locations, but not on identical courses so they are not actually competing against each other.



As in 2015, the women in 2016 will start from Heavenly Mountain Resort's Cal Lodge. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The exact routes will not be released until later this year. However, with North Lake Tahoe Resort Association being a partner with the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority in promoting the Tahoe aspect of the race, it is obvious the cyclists will

be hitting the North Shore.

This year the women did the 72 miles around the lake and then finished with the steep climb up Keller Road in South Lake Tahoe. Another loop around the lake is being planned for 2016.

For the men, coming from the Central Valley the scenic route would be to come up Highway 88 over Carson and Luther passes. This keeps Highway 50 over Echo Summit, the main route for vehicles into the South Shore, open without delays.

Most likely the women will start and finish before the men arrive.

The next day – May 20 – is the time trials for the women and men. The riders and the 1,000-person entourage for the tour will drive to Folsom from South Lake Tahoe.

“It’s a great challenge for us to come up with the courses every year. We find new areas and locations to feature,” Roth said. “Part of the thing that makes this race so popular is that we continue to expose the race to new communities and we continue to bring it back to the communities that have supported it the most.”

One thing that makes an event like this different than other professional sports is the ability to meet the athletes before and after they ride, as well as participate on the same terrain they are on. Many of the riders hang out afterward at what becomes a party at the finish.

The lifestyle festival will be in the parking lot of the Cal Lodge. It is expected to be larger next year because South Lake Tahoe is hosting the two competitions, plus the men’s sponsors will be in town with booths. There will be VIP tents, which anyone can pay for that experience.

For those who aren’t in one of the host cities, the event is televised. ASO is AEG’s broadcast partner. This is the same

company that for years has produced the Tour de France. The Tour of California is televised internationally, with more than 200 network affiliates part of the coverage.

“We do it primarily because it helps send the message that we are a great place for both elite athletes and recreational riders to come and enjoy spectacular scenery and really good riding,” Chaplin said. “We are also hopeful that it drives incremental overnight stays and there is an economic impact through the event.”