

Track Cycling Offers Something New and Different



By Jen Rasmussen
Bicycle Paper Intern

You want me to get on a bicycle without brakes, and race around a slanted track with a pack of other riders, at fast speeds? This may be a common thought when otherwise experienced road or mountain bikers think about trying track racing.

What many don't know, however, is that it is a great way to stay in shape, as well as improve balance and pedaling technique. "It improves your pedal stroke and spin because you don't have gears to switch into," says Mike Murray, track director at the Alpenrose Velodrome. Also, anyone can get involved, from children as young as five to men and women of all ages.

Along with offering ample room for spectators to watch racing events almost every night of the week, the Northwest's four main velodromes have reasonably-priced classes available.

Washington

Thanks to the efforts of the Marymoor Velodrome Association, riders in the Seattle area are treated to a wide variety of classes and competitions at Redmond's Marymoor Park.

The park is famous for its unique amenities, including a freestanding rock climbing wall, a model airplane field and the Velodrome.

For \$40, novice riders can take a five-hour basic session on track riding, with an optional lesson on racing. Track bicycles are provided and participants only need to bring a helmet. After completion of the three-week session, these riders are eligible to compete in their age bracket at the Group Health Friday Night Races.

Marymoor is offering co-ed as well as women-only beginner classes this summer. After completing the class, participants are invited to race in the Monday night novice race sessions.

Marymoor offers courses for children as young as five years old. The PeeWee Pedalers level, for children 5-8, is offered free of charge, thanks to a donation from the Cascade Bicycle Club. Classes for kids ages 8 to 15, called Velo Kids, cost \$30 and are held on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Oregon

Oregonians interested in the sport have an impressive list of choices as well. The Alpenrose Velodrome is a great place to bring

the whole family. The track is part of a random assortment of attractions that can be found on the property of the Alpenrose Dairy, the only remaining family-owned dairy in the area. During the summer months, visitors can find the Little League Softball World Series, BMX competitions, 1/4 midget car racing, pony rides and Velodrome racing on one of the steepest tracks in the United States. "It just looks scary. It gets an underserved reputation," Murray says.

According to Murry, over the past 15 years, the majority of the new riders that have come to the track are not experienced road cyclists, but rather beginner riders who have chosen track cycling as their entry point to the sport.

Before novice participants attempt to ride the velodrome, organizers recommend their track development classes, which take place every Wednesday night from 6 p.m. to dusk. The \$10 fee covers instruction, bicycle rental and insurance. The sessions focus on technique for upcoming events, and encourage future participation.

"Fast-Twitch Fridays" at Alpenrose let riders of all ages and levels test their sprinting abilities, and there are also separate Omnium races for beginner men and women. Unlike many other tracks, the Alpenrose Velodrome is always open for practice, except for rain-outs, scheduled races and regular training sessions.

involved can watch the Junior Racing events every Friday at 6 p.m.

Victoria

On the Canadian side of the border, Victoria's Juan de Fuca velodrome also has activities for riders of all levels planned for the summer.



Photo by David Leahy

The track offers training and racing opportunities to all.

Although they don't offer organized novice classes, Friday nights are designated beginner nights, when riders of all ages can come try out the track. There are many experts on hand to answer questions, fit riders for rental bicycles and go over track etiquette.

"Once riders are comfortable with being on

a track bike, we encourage them to ride the sprints and time trials on Monday nights," says Breanna Loster, a director on the board of the Greater Victoria Velodrome Association. "It's fairly low-key."

From there, riders can start participating in Thursday night's mass-start races.

"We also have a junior program for kids 11 to 18 to be able to ride with people of their own age group and ability," Loster says. It is usually held one or two afternoons per week.

Novices can get inspiration and learn more about the sport by watching racing at any of the three tracks throughout the summer. All three have racing most nights of the week, and information can be found on their websites.

In addition, as the summer comes to a close, the tracks will play host to a variety of special events. Alpenrose will host the State Track Championships from August 19 to 21, as well as the Junior and Team Championships on August 27 and the Masters on September 3 and 4.

The Victoria will also be hosting two big track competitions. On the weekend of August 19-21, both the BC Provincial Track Championships and the American Velodrome Challenge will be held.

All of these events are open to spectators and are a great way to learn more about the sport.

Yet more options

Once the summer is over, and the rain returns to the Northwest, the excitement of track racing moves to BC's Burnaby Velodrome. Although it is closed this summer for maintenance, the

track, which is one of only two indoor velodromes in North America, will be open all winter. Unlike the other tracks in the Northwest whose seasons end in late August, Burnaby's season begins in September. Weekly Learn to Ride and subsequent Learn to Race classes will continue through the fall and winter.

As far as the danger factor goes, Murray assures riders that track riding is just as safe as road cycling. "It's true you don't have brakes, but nobody else does either," he says.

With so many opportunities and rental bicycles available, it is a great time to try out a side of cycling that you may not have experienced. No matter where you live, there is a track and a bicycle waiting for you.



Photo by WheelsinFocus.com

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Pedal for a cure.

Group Health's MS 150 Bike Tour is coming September 10 & 11. This event is a benefit to raise funds to find a cure for multiple sclerosis. More than 50,000 people in Washington are affected by MS everyday. Join this two-day ride through Skagit, Island, and Whatcom counties. Be part of this incredible journey to fight MS. Visit www.cyclingforhealth.org to sign up.

Classes for kids ages 12-18 are held throughout the summer, and every Friday, the "Kiddie Kilo" allows young novice riders to try out their newly-acquired skills on the track. Kids who are interested in getting

Northwest Tracks

Alpenrose Velodrome
6149 SW Shattuck Road
Portland, OR
(503) 246-0330
www.obra.org/track

Marymoor Velodrome
6046 W. Lake Sammamish Pkwy
Redmond, WA
(206) 957-4555
www.marymoor.velodrome.org

Burnaby Velodrome
Harry Jerome Sports Centre
7564 Barnet Highway
Burnaby, BC
(604) 290-0020
www.burnabyvelodrome.ca

Juan de Fuca Velodrome
1767 Island Highway
Victoria, BC
(250) 478-8384
www.gvva.bc.ca