



Race you to the top

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It's a holiday weekend. Time to relax, right?

Not if you were competing in the fifth annual Summit Velo Summit Center Classic.

For the 261 cyclists who competed Saturday, it was a physically demanding day.

Competition began at 8 a.m. One rider at a time, roughly 30 seconds apart, rode 0.6 miles up Mars Hill Road toward Lowell Observatory for the first part of the four-stage race.

It's all uphill, and a steep climb all the way to the finish line.

Maggie Williams, a 45-year-old rider in the women's Category 1-2 division, revealed what this all-out race was like about two minutes after she ascended to the top of the hill.

"Agony. It was a really hard race," she said. "(It's) a great road course, very, very challenging. You had to be really careful at the bottom not to go too hard. When you got to the switchback (early on), it became the hardest part. You had to get out of the saddle.

"If you could get out of the saddle ... it felt relatively easy to the finish line compared to the bottom of the course."

Williams, a Landis/Trek/VW team rider, arrived at the course, which starts at Thorpe Park, at 7 a.m. to get a feel for it. She went up the hill twice before competition began.

That helped her "calculate what her strategy would be for going up the hill," said the Phoenix-based rider, who's in her sixth year in the race. "This is not my forte, unfortunately, this kind of race. (This is) for people, like, with one-minute power; my best power is at five minutes. It's not really long enough to suit my style, but I gave it all I had."

Austin King, one of the Summit Center Classic newcomers, had a different perspective after the race.

"I thought it was going to be longer," said King, a 25-year-old men's P1-2 rider who competes for Jittery Joe's, a Georgia-based team with national-level riders. "I

could've hit it a lot harder on the corner. But it's a great climb, awfully hard. But, yeah, it's a good way to start the weekend."

Ten-year-old Zach Edwards, a Flagstaff resident who rides for Red Rock Racing, completed the climb in 3 minutes, 25 seconds (10.54 mph).

It was pretty difficult, said Edwards, who's ridden the course several times to get familiar with it.

Edwards' teammate Tyler Coplea, 12, finished 16 seconds faster or in 11.43 mph.

While catching his breath, Coplea had this to say after the race:

"It's definitely mentally tough. You're really tired and you just want that finish to be right around the corner."

Tucsonan Nick Schreiber, 25, was the runner-up in the men's Pro 1-2 division. The Summit Velo rider zoomed up the hill in 1:44 (20.77 mph). David Glick of Eclipse Racing did it in 1:43 (20.97 mph) to finish first in their category.

Schreiber will compete for Team USA at the 2006 World Deaf Cycling Championships in mid-June in San Francisco. He earned a promotion to the pro category a week ago.

With the assistance of a sign-language interpreter, Schreiber was asked about performance Saturday morning.

"I feel fine, but I know there's other good guys, too," he said.

Schreiber's specialty is long rides.

"During long rides everybody gets tired," he said. "You know, at the beginning everybody's fresh. Like three hours later, everybody starts to fall back, and I start to be at the top five, top three. Maybe it might happen today (in Stage 2)."

It was entertaining to listen to the pre-race banter, what occurred during the climb up the two-lane road or what was said near the finish line.

Here's a sampling of what was overheard Saturday morning:

"It's all downhill," one cyclist joked. "A piece of cake."

"Get loose, man," one spectator said to a cyclist who was warming up.

"You're pretty fit. It's scary," one fellow said to an adult male rider.

As the riders made their way up Mars Hill Road, this reporter made walked up the hill, too.

Several people clanged cowbells. Others clapped or voiced support for the competitors.

"Looking good, looking good. Nice job," one man said.

Another man's point could not be misunderstood.

"Go, go, go, go, go, go, go, go," he blurted out in a quick, measured way, or as rapidly as the riders churned their legs.

On Saturday afternoon, the cyclists competed in Stage 2, the Williams-Perkinsville-Williams race, a 45-mile jaunt.

Today's competition shifts back to Flagstaff for the Northern Arizona University Criterium, involving packs of 40-50 riders at a time racing on a 0.48-mile campus course. It begins at 9 a.m.

Summit Velo team member Perry Davidson said this stage is an exciting event for spectators due to the speed of the race.

"(Cyclists) go across the finish line at 40 mph," he added.

Junior riders compete in the Criterium stage for about 15 minutes on this circular course, while pro category 1-2 riders zoom around the loop for approximately 70 minutes.

The Summit Center Classic concludes Monday.