



Staff photo by Joseph Thomas

# Wheels fly, spokes spin in bike race

By KEITH HOLLAR  
Staff Writer

They came from as far away as Washington, D.C., and they brought with them some of the most sophisticated equipment that modern technology can produce. Most left with no more than what they brought except maybe a feeling of satisfaction from having done their best.

The event which attracted approximately 70 bicyclists from three states to downtown Carrboro Sunday afternoon was the first Carrboro Criterium Bicycle Race, sponsored by the Carrboro Business Association.

The criterium, which is a race of several laps around a relatively short course (in this case, .7 miles), was broken down into seven races of different lengths for riders of various abilities and experience. The shortest race, for novice women, was 3 miles long, while the race for Olympic-caliber riders was 45 miles long. Traffic was prohibited from the race area to protect the riders.

"It looks like there's good competition here today," said Curtis Mills of Lexington,



Staff photo by Joseph Thomas

Bike racing isn't a sport for the safe or shy of this world.

the current North Carolina road-race champion. He had just returned from a two-month road trip that carried him to races across the country, including the national road race in Seattle, Wash., where he finished 23rd, out of over a 100 racers.

"I'm going to try to make my move the second half of the race. I do better on a hilly course of 110 to 120 miles, but I enjoy criteriums. I'll be working with some teammates to our best advantage so we can get as many placers as we can."

The race at Carrboro was just one of a growing number of cycling events that have been gaining in popularity in the United States in the last 10 years. The bicycle perhaps enjoyed its greatest popularity for use in competition at the turn of the century, when competitive cycling was a major event that ranked with baseball for both participation and spectator interest.

At that time, the United States boasted some of the finest riders in the world. But as the automobile became more popular, the bicycle was used less for transportation, and consequently competitive cycling diminished in the United States.

But about 10 years ago, the bicycle began to regain a place in athletic competition in the United States, perhaps because of an increased awareness of physical fitness or as a means to satisfy a competitive urge.

Still, the Americans lagged far behind

their counterparts in Europe, where bicycle racing continued to flourish even after the automobile became popular. Today, competitive cycling is second only to soccer as a spectator sport in Europe.

France annually holds a grueling, 23-day race featuring the world's greatest cyclists. This event, the Tour de France, has been called the most demanding athletic event in the world. And participants in European racing, and especially in the Tour de France, are some of the highest-paid athletes in the world.

Yet even with the resurgence of competitive cycling, bicycle racing remains almost entirely an amateur sport in the United States. Only a handful of American cyclists, such as George Mount who finished sixth in the 1976 Olympic road race, are beginning to make an impact in international competition.

The race at Carrboro, however, provided evidence that bicycle racing has come a long way since 1900. Clothing, designed specifically for cycling, included colorful wool jerseys for high visibility and ready transpiration of perspiration, black wool shorts with chamois leather in the crotch for comfort, and fingerless gloves and leather-strap or plastic-shelled helmets for safety. The racers wore small, hard-soled shoes which were cleated and strapped to the pedals to facilitate pedaling by both pushing

and pulling. Many of the racers Sunday sported bikes costing from \$800 to \$1,200. These super-light racing machines weigh as little as 20 pounds, and the frames and components are made of any number of special alloys or even titanium. The frames are designed to be extremely rigid to facilitate transferring the maximum amount of the rider's energy into the forward motion of the bicycle.

Preparing for a race means many hours — and miles — of training. A racer usually rides between 250 and 400 miles each week in training.

"Say you're racing 170 miles, averaging 28 miles per hour, and the road temperature is 100 degrees," said Vince Davis from Winston-Salem. "It's just hard — you have to be ready."

Davis said he races for the competition. "It's the most competition that you can find in any sport. And it's the most physically exerting sport there is."

To prepare himself for the race, Davis had a breakfast of spaghetti for starch, followed by several noncarbonated soft drinks and a roast-beef sandwich. Most racers will not eat anything within three or four hours of race time, except maybe some fruit just before the race for quick energy.

A constant worry of every competitive cyclist is injuries, particularly from crashes. As the riders usually race in groups, often within inches of one another's tires, it is not unusual for several riders to go down at once. Several riders were injured in a crash Sunday in the novice men's race.

"There's an average of one wreck in every race," Davis said. "It's very bloody."

Because of the frequency of injuries, many racers shave their legs to provide for cleaner wounds and less-troublesome bandaging. "I always get kidded about that," one racer said Sunday.

But regardless of the risks and expenses of competitive cycling, most racers seem to feel it's worth it.

"I'm going to race as long as my knee holds out," Davis said.

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MARCH  
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SHOWS  
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6:00  
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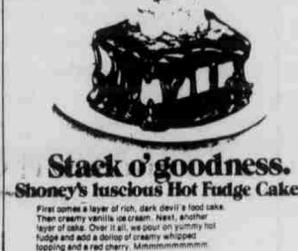
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