



Living

Is ATOC cyclical?

by David Abbott
Sonoma West Staff Writer



KEEP ON Bikin' - The sun broke through the clouds just as the riders came across the finish line in last year's event. Hopefully, the sun will break through for next year as the return of the event remains dubious. - Veronika Lenzi

Last year, just as the peleton rolled into downtown Santa Rosa, the sun broke through the clouds and the racers finished the first stage of the AMGEN Tour of California (ATOC) in the brilliance of a Northern California February day.

"I'm in charge of the weather this year," said Mo McElroy, who is involved in the monumental task of organizing Santa Rosa's leg of the Fourth Annual ATOC and garnering financial backers.

Although she's not a fan of drought, McElroy hopes that this year the clouds will part once more so that the throngs of people expected to show up and witness the American return of cycling legend Lance Armstrong can stay dry and enjoy the multiple festivities planned for Sunday, February 15 in downtown Santa Rosa.

"We're expecting about three times the number of people this year, which means (thousands of people) in town and along the route" McElroy said.

TOP ADS
FINANCIAL MATTERS

Enter symt [Get Quote](#)
[Symbol lookup](#)

NYSE [NASDAQ](#) [S&P](#)



© TickerTech.com Jan 29, 2009

Nyse	5347.20
↓ 154.26	↓ 2.80%
Nasdaq	1523.45
↓ 34.89	↓ 2.24%
S&P 500	854.81
↓ 19.28	↓ 2.21%
Russell 2K	460.82
↓ 12.20	↓ 2.58%
10Yr Bond	2.715
↑ 0.059	↑ 2.22%

Active Markets

Last Updated: 11:30AM CST 01/29/2009

[Petaluma Apartments](#)

established community, two pools quiet and other amenities. Look!
www.baywoodarms.com

In addition to seven-time Tour De France winner Armstrong, local cycling icon and winner of last year's ATOC Levi Leipheimer will once again compete in his hometown with the Astana Cycling Team. Although with the addition of Armstrong to Astana, Leipheimer has his work cut out for him.

With the added draw of Armstrong's comeback on top of the excitement of 18 world-class cycling teams, logistics for this year's event will be daunting. Bringing the race to the area depends largely on donations from the community and volunteers to make it happen.

The city had to guarantee more than \$100,000 in services for the teams and attendant necessities for the large crowds — such as security, traffic control, and garbage removal — and the race depends on hundreds of volunteers to make it happen.

According to McElroy, the city doesn't actually "write a check" to anyone to get the race. Race promoters keep coming back to the area because of the level of positive interactions with the people of Sonoma County.

"It's about the way we treat the cyclists and their support teams that brings ATOC back," she said. "That and the enthusiasm of the crowds."

The monumental task of recruiting hundreds of necessary volunteers is shared between the City and the Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition (SCBC), which will provide free bicycle valet parking for venues and all day events in Railroad and Courthouse Squares in downtown Santa Rosa.

Sandra Lupien, the SCBC events coordinator, called preparations for the event and the search for volunteers "mind boggling." She needs to find four to five people per shift for at least 10 shifts of bike parking, and McElroy said the city needs at least 200 more volunteers to help with the route as course marshals and in other capacities.

But Lupien says that overall the headaches are well worth it.

"We know our membership is enthusiastic about the ATOC," she said. "It brings business and tourism to Santa Rosa, and it's a great opportunity for us to advocate for people to get on bikes, not just for recreation, but for transportation as well."

The SCBC has several events planned for the weekend of the tour. On Saturday, February 14 the Bike Monkey Cross Race will take place at Doyle Park in Santa Rosa. There will also be a screening of the Prologue of the race with a scavenger hunt and even stationary bike races.

The day of the race will see multiple festivals downtown including the Kids Zone, located in Courthouse Square, which consists of several bicycle safety education and fun stations and plenty of activities for the kids.

The racing kicks off with the Pro Women's Criterium at 1 p.m. and the men's race is due to arrive in the late afternoon with record crowds expected to watch Armstrong in his first comeback race in the U.S.

Free public parking will be available at the Sonoma County Fairgrounds with complimentary shuttles to the festival area in Courthouse Square. Festivities will start at noon.

City bus service will be available to drop race-goers to within one block of the Festival in Courthouse Square, and of course there will be free bike valet parking for those who want to really get into the spirit of the race.

There will also be several road closures staggered throughout the day. Highway 12 from Brush Creek into downtown will be closed in the afternoon and streets around the main downtown area in both Courthouse and Railroad Squares will be impacted between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. Information will be supplied in city water bills and maps are available at the California Welcome Center.

But the race may not be back next year. The city will likely not have seed money for the event, so it will depend more than ever on public support. McElroy expects AMGEN to make another offer, but the city's ability to respond may be in doubt.

"It's pretty plain that between the city and its citizens, there is plenty of support for the race," she said. "Hopefully, we'll figure out a way to pull it together."

But planning, money and festivities aside, the main draw for the weekend's spectacle is the race itself, and the historic return of Lance Armstrong to professional racing.

Petaluma photographer Veronika Lenzi, who has provided photos for this publication's coverage of the races, is excited by the prospect of photographing her cycling hero.

Lenzi found her passion for cycling in 2001 when she saw the end of the Tour "Day" France she said, adopting the verbal parlance of one of her favorite commentators, former racer "Bobke" Roll. By the next year, she was hooked on bicycle racing and Lance "became her hero."

"My house is filled with Lance Armstrong photos and my one dream is to some day meet him, or get close enough to take a picture of him," she said. "I feel like a Beatles fan. If I ever meet him, I'll probably stand there, shake, and start to cry."

But Lenzi isn't just a mindless cycling fan. She and her husband have opened their home to many young cyclists — and non cyclists — in the hope that they can make a difference in the life of a cyclist, and she is currently one of the managers of the Santa Rosa-based Team NorCal Bike Sport. On top of all that, she was born and raised in the circus and traveled with her parents until she was 21.

For more of her pictures, go to veronikalenzi.com.

For more information about the 2009 ATOC, go to srcity.org/toc, bikesonoma.org, or amgentourofcalifornia.com. For information about the Women's Criterium, contact Laura Charameda at, 707-843-9056 or via e-mail at, womensatoc@aol.com.

February 15 events schedule

Courthouse Square, Santa Rosa

Noon: Lifestyle Festival open. Bike Valet by Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition. Rosie the Trolley shuttle from Fairgrounds parking lot. Kids Zone open - helmet give-away & fitting, crafts, and more! Kids Fun Race registration.

1 - 2 p.m.: AMGEN Tour of California Women's Criterium.

2:30 p.m.: Kids Fun Race.

3:45 p.m.: Men's Race enters circuit (any time between 3:30 & 4:30)

Railroad Square, Santa Rosa

Noon: Velove Festival open. Gold Sprints Racing. Community Booths. Food Booths & Beer Garden. Rickshaw Rudy's Pedicab Service will provide transportation downtown.

[Print this story](#) | [Email this story](#)