

Tour Willamette

by Garde Wells

This is a big weekend for bicycle racers and fans alike. Eugene and its environs will host the seventh annual Tour Willamette. You know—just like the Tour de France. However, neither Greg LeMond nor Bernard Hinault will be here this year. And there's one other small difference. Whereas the Tour de France covers 2500 miles in 21 days, the Tour Willamette racers will crank out 350 racing miles between Thursday and Sunday afternoon.

Early Thursday afternoon the first stage of the race begins at Dexter Lake. It's a 66-mile road race. The way that "stage" races work is that riders accumulate their finishing times over the four days (and six stages) of the event. There are also, in the case of the 1987 Tour Willamette, "time bonuses" for riders who finish in the top four places each day. In addition, on certain big hills along the race courses, there will be "king of the mountain" time bonuses for the first three velo athletes to crest the upgrades.

Day two, Friday, starts at 9 am in Brownsville. It's an 11-mile time trial. A time trial is not like a road race. It involves riding all-out (between 30 to 35 miles per hour average for the 11-mile distance) for the best possible time against the clock. Again, in a stage race like the Tour Willamette, the fastest overall time for the six events wins.

Then at 1 pm on Friday, the riders go at it again with an 84-mile road race that starts and finishes in Brownsville. The course goes east through Crawfordsville, south through Marcola, then west across McKenzie View Drive through Armitage Park, then north on Coburg Rd.

As if racing twice on Friday is not enough, Saturday brings the 109-mile Coast Range Road Race. It starts at 11 am on Willow Creek Rd., at the end of W. 18th Avenue. From there it's out Crow Rd. to Wolf Creek Rd., around on Siuslaw Rd. to Lorane. Then it's north on Territorial Rd. and

back to Wolf Creek Rd. for another lap through Lorane. Eventually the riders will make it back to the start at Willow Creek Rd. & W. 18th Ave. This particular stage involves six formidable hills, including Greenhill Rd. just after the start and again just before the finish line at the 103-mile mark.

Sunday at 8 am at Willard School (29th & Lincoln St.), the 55-mile Kill Hill Road Race starts. Riders climb up the winding Lorane Highway about 18 miles to Gillespie Corners. From there it's up Territorial Rd. to Briggs Hill Rd., east on Spencer Creek Rd., and back towards town on Lorane Highway. "Kill Hill" is what the racers get after 53 miles that is not exactly flat—they turn east off Lorane Highway up Blanton Rd. At the top of the Blanton Rd. hill (a hefty 3/4 mile climb) the course levels out very briefly before turning right, straight up the KVAL-TV driveway to the top of the hill where the finish line is.

At noon on Sunday is the showcase event of the Tour Willamette. Normally held in years past as a separate event, the 30-mile University of Oregon Criterium is a thrilling one for spectators. A criterium involves racing on a loop road course—in this case, a 6/10-mile lap between 15th Ave., University Street, 13th Ave., and Agate St.—essentially 50 laps around the Erb Memorial Union.

All stages of the Tour Willamette will include men's and women's events. Members of the U.S. Women's Team will be racing.

Local talents Brad Gebhard and Mike Sheppard, who ride under Gitane of Eugene sponsorship, will compete with riders from the Canadian National Team, and top riders from elsewhere in the Western U.S. Gebhard outsprinted Olympic Silver Medalist Nelson Vails earlier this month (in a 1000-meter race) in Seattle, and Sheppard recently took 2nd place in the Volunteer Park Criterium, a national-class pro event.

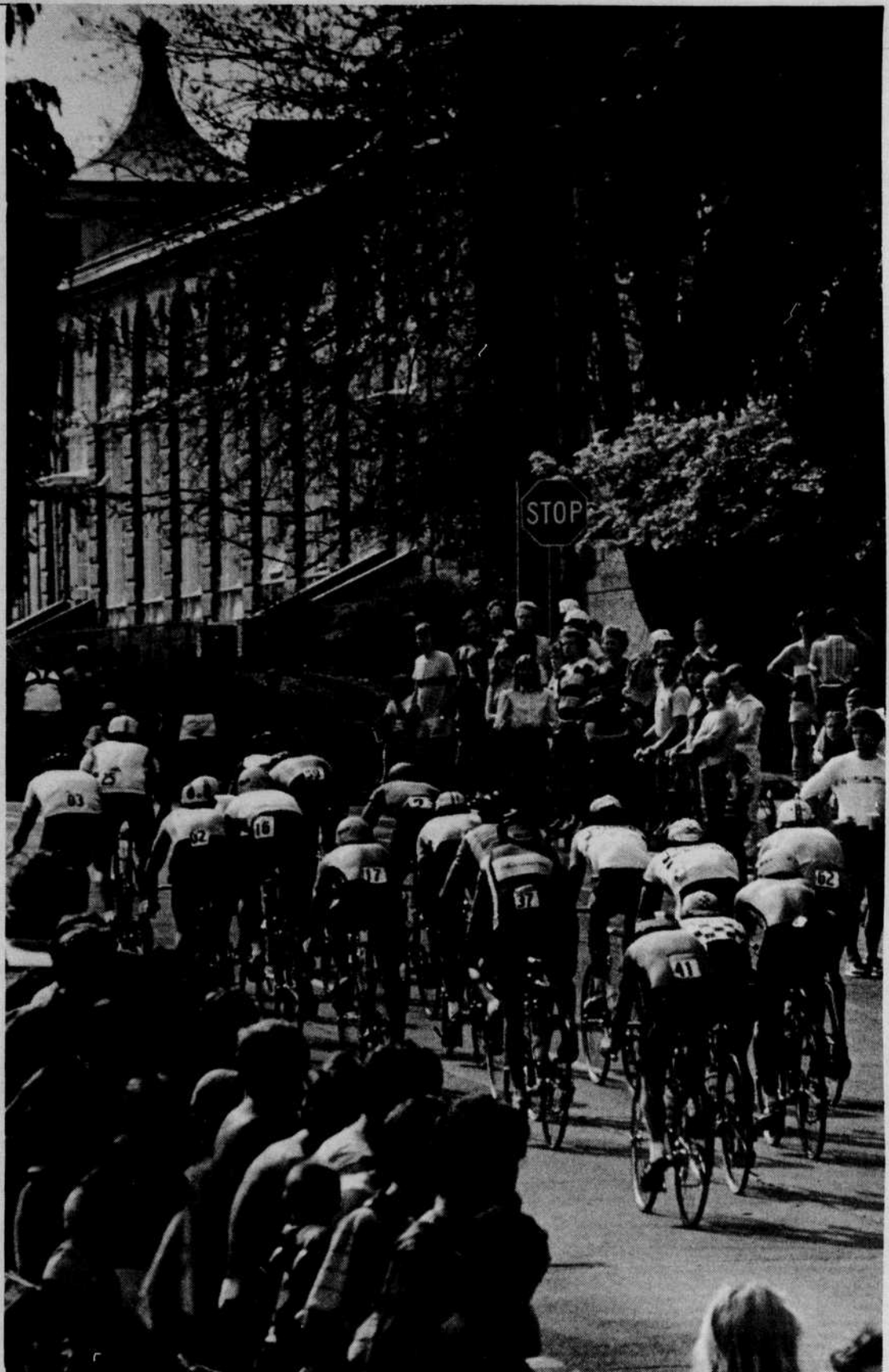


Photo by Rob Fisher

On Sunday crowds will gather for the exciting University of Oregon Criterium, a 30-mile race that laps 50 times through the UO campus.

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