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Sisters Stampede draws 368 racers

By Jeff Spry

The first **Sisters Stampede** Mountain Bike Race galloped out of the chute at Lazy Z meadow east of the FivePine Campus on Sunday. More than 368 racers in 25 categories from all over the state turned out to experience **Sisters** Country hospitality and ride the newly expanded trails of Peterson Ridge in a highly successful inaugural race.

In full cowboy attire with Colt six-shooter, Bill McKinney and his quarter horse Skip led the first group of pro riders out onto the race course, winding around the open meadow. A shot from McKinney's revolver started the race.

"Joel Palanuk, the race organizer, called one of my buddies and asked me to do it," McKinney said. "Took me a while to hunt down the blanks for my Colt pistol."

Barb Gerber was part of the registration team and was amazed at the incredible turnout for a first-time race.

"What makes this so special is the location, it's not in some isolated area," she said. "Everything went so smooth, everybody did their job and really pulled it off. Our community is great with stepping up to the plate with volunteers."

Doing double duty as a paramedic and race announcer, Alex McLaren, of Bend, offered colorful commentary and race updates from the start/finish line.

"I've been to races all over the nation and even for a 10-year event this would be an amazing crowd, let alone a first-year race," he said. "Registration was a well-oiled machine. Everybody started on time to the second. That's incredible."

Due to the Forestry Service only granting one permit for a race this Memorial Day Weekend, it left the **Sisters Stampede** the only OBRA mountain bike race in Oregon, drawing entrants from far and near.

Racers arrived from Portland, Roseburg, Madras, Salem and Burns. Some of the top pro riders from Bend came to participate in the festivities, including Chris Sheppard and Ben Thompson.

Donna Birky, from Bend, came to watch her husband and son race.

"It's my son's second mountain bike race; he's 10 years old," she said. "This is awesome. I loved Cowboy Bill and it's a beautiful setting and we're thrilled to be here."

Depending on the category and class entered, racers pedaled along either a 13-, 27- or 31-mile loop into the juniper and pine. After an hour, the first Category 3 racers on the shorter 13-mile loop crossed the finish line, covered in dirt but with smiles on their faces.

Some finished with a flurry, a flat tire, scrapes and bruises, but no one was disappointed. Post-race snacks of bagels with peanut butter, bananas and sports drinks were provided by a small army of volunteers.

Anna Huber, from Eugene, finished the race and was invigorated by the experience.

"It was an excellent course, lots of rocks, nice windy trail," she said. "I'm a beginner and it was my first race in a year, so it boosted my confidence."

Her friend, Cheryl Miller of Camp Sherman, thought it was a blast.

Sisters Stampede cross-country mountain bike race thundered onto Sisters trails May 30.



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Eventual winner Chris Sheppard powers along the track during Sunday's Sisters Stampede. *photo by Jim Williams*



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Dirt in the teeth? A good race for Jacquie Zanck of Sisters... *photo by Jim Williams*

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"The singletrack was awesome, all the riders were really friendly. I'm definitely racing again next year," she said.

World Cup racer and Bend resident Chris Sheppard won the overall Pro Men's title, claiming one of the custom **Sisters Stampede** belt buckles. Sheppard rides for Rocky Mountain Bicycles and has been racing for 21 years all over the world.

"Just look at the support here, you have some unique terrain and a diverse trail system. I'd call it a big success," Sheppard said.

His neighbor and other local favorite, Ben Thompson, came in second, about a minute behind Sheppard.

In other results, Cat 1 Men 45 and over was won by Gregg Strome of Bend. In the "Clydesdale" Division, which featured men 210 pounds and over, Josh Cobb of Haines came across the line first with **Sisters'** Paul Patton a close second.

In Pro Women, Tina Brubaker of Keizer came in first place and claimed a **Sisters Stampede** belt buckle and prize package. **Sisters'** own Shawna Palanuk, riding for GreenRidge/In Focus, took the top spot in Cat 1 Women with a strong finish.

"Shawna, my wife, came up with the idea of a cowboy on a horse starting the race, but it wasn't that easy to find a cowboy in **Sisters**, which seems strange," said Palanuk. "But it really added a nice brand to the event we think people will remember."

After the race, fans and friends congregated beneath the events tent at FivePine for commemorative T-shirts, Rad's famous Puerto Rican barbecue pork, burgers and special "Stampede Ale" brewed by Three Creeks Brewing Company for the occasion. The Moon Mountain Ramblers hit the stage at 3 p.m. and entertained a packed house until late in the evening.

Judy Dillewaard, of **Sisters**, showed up to root for her grandson. "I'm so proud of **Sisters**. They're very good at organizing and executing these kinds of events."

"Two people I want to specially thank are Winter Lewis of In Focus and Karly Hedrick, an intern at **Sisters** Chamber," race organizer Palanuk said. "Both were amazing, and the race might not have been a hit without them. They were indispensable and in the background quietly making things happen in a very organized, professional way. We're looking forward to making this an annual event if the Forest Service agrees."

For complete race results visit <http://www.sistersstampede.com> or <http://www.obra.org>.

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