

WINE PRESS

N O R T H W E S T

Pedaling through Oregon wine country

By Jade Helm - May 22, 2015



Cyclists enjoy the warm weather and rolling hills of Oregon wine country.

MARK E HELM — Contributing Photographer

When the weather is warm and the grapevines are growing, what could be better than cycling through the beautiful rolling hills of Willamette Valley? Maybe embracing the luxury of a fully supported ride, gourmet meals, incredible wine tasting and doing it all for a good cause. Pedaling the gentle hills, the views become even more breathtaking. There is no windshield, no car engine noise, nothing between the rider and the natural beauty of Oregon. One rider describes the experience: “I love seeing wine country this way - the feel of the land, the smells, the chance to stop and talk to other riders.”

While refreshing to the mind and body, the [Children's Heart Foundation](#) Wine Rides do your spirit good too. All of the proceeds from this series of rides are donated to the Children's Heart

Foundation. Kelly Aicher, co-owner and general manager of Bike Gallery headquartered in Portland, leads the two Children's Heart Foundation Wine Rides each summer. Aicher was born with a congenital heart defect. At the age of three, he benefited from a then "cutting edge" surgery at Oregon Health and Science University. Today he serves on the board of directors and is the vice president of the Oregon Chapter of the Children's Heart Foundation.

These rides allow Aicher to combine a love of wine and cycling. "I get to plan a fun event and give to a cause I believe in."

Aicher could not accomplish this without support. [Stoller Family Estates](#) and [Vista Hills Winery](#) open their tasting room and grounds to host the cyclists for the orientation and lunch - a significant gift in kind because facility rentals are waived.

"We are honored to be a long term partner of this event, which raises funds for the Oregon Chapter of the Children's Heart Foundation. Building a sustainable business that supports the surrounding community is one of our core values at Stoller Family Estate," said Bill Stoller.

Vista Hills Winemaker Dave Petterson shares, "This event is totally in concert with the charitable values of the winery. The owners are proud of the tasting room and property they have built and are glad to welcome the riders and donate the event space."

Riders start from the host winery at 9 a.m. and make a 32-mile loop through the gorgeous vineyards of Dundee Hills. Zipping down Laughlin Road, cyclists take in the views as they pass Willakenzie Estate, Saffron Fields and Lenne Estate. Domaine Serene, Domaine Drouhin, and Penner Ash Wine Cellars are also among the nearby wineries. Riders who wish to plan their own day of wine tasting following lunch have many convenient choices.

Riders take a break at designated spots to refuel. "The camaraderie at the rest stops is the most fun," shares Aicher. "My wife and volunteers make cookies. We get repeat riders and sometimes all they want to know is 'will there be cookies?'"

The rides last approximately 2 ½ hours. and cyclists meet back at the host winery where tasting and lunch are set up outside overlooking the vineyards. The party that started on the route continues as people relax and chatter over their wine glasses. This is not a race and there aren't any "winners" but there are bragging rights and a small amount of trash talking about who came back first. One lucky rider does win a bottle of wine playing "Poker Run." Three cards are dealt at the beginning and two more at the rest stops. Best hand wins.

Whether it is the scenery, wine, great cause, or the exercise endorphins, everyone is all smiles. One couple who has participated five times states this is one of the best rides. "We start at a beautiful winery. Sunday is a great day for riding. We enjoy the camaraderie on the road and wrap it up with a great lunch and wine. Coming here makes us happy." One very animated rider declared bike riding through vineyards as "the most romantic atmosphere for a date WITH exercise."

For those born to ride there are even more opportunities. Eola Hills Winery hosts Bike Oregon Wine Country every Sunday in August. In its 19th year, this event began with owner Tom Huggins and friends who gathered informally to enjoy cycling and barbecuing. They were having so much

fun they decided to sell tickets. Rich Washburn, Eola Hills Winery vice president/sales manager, explains, "It is a great way to market our winery and support smaller neighboring wineries."

This event begins and ends at the Eola Hills Winery tasting room in Rickreall. Routes lead cyclists past participating wineries for a day of tasting. Adding a bit of luxury to this ride is the concierge wine pick up. Cyclists who buy wine along the route never have to lift a finger, much less tote around a bottle. Eola Hills Winery sends a van to collect purchased wine which is then staged for pick up back at the Rickreall tasting room.

North and south routes through Willamette Valley are alternated each Sunday in August. Each route has "shortcuts" so the rider can choose their own intensity. The north route is a 40 or 51 mile loop with the potential for nine winery visits including Hauer of the Dauen, Witness Tree Vineyard, and Kathken Vineyards. Eola also holds a lake-front mini tasting at their Legacy Vineyard. Lunch is served at Stangeland Vineyards. Riders pulling the hill to Stangeland are greeted by Larry Miller and staff and are rewarded with free tastings and great discounts. Lunch is set up outside and Miller has even added a new shady picnic area. This summer Stangeland plans to pour the 2012 Pinot Gris, 2013 dry rosé of Tempranillo, 2013 dry Gewürztraminer, and several highly rated current release and aged Pinot Noir vintages.

The southern loop is the flatter of the two and can be ridden as a 40, 63, or 71 mile route. Five winery stops are available plus an opportunity to visit Rogue Farms. Wineries include Red Gate Vineyard and Ankeny Vineyard. Lunch is held at Airlie Winery or Emerson Vineyards. The team at Emerson sets up tables and chairs under their shady oaks and on the deck. Tastings this summer will include Pinot Gris, Viognier, a newly released rose, and their 2013 Pinot Noir that won best in show at the Newport Seafood Competition. Of course owner Tom Johns plans to "tantalize taste buds" with Emerson's best selling 5 estate blend Brother Red.

Regardless of the route, all riders meet back at the Eola Hills Winery tasting room for a big outdoor party that lasts from 2-6pm. Cyclists refuel with well earned calories from salmon, fresh veggies and pastas. Vegan and gluten-free options are available. Eola wine flows freely and the sound of live music mingles with chattering conversations.

It should be noted that both of the rides mentioned in this article are accessible for expert cyclists and "weekend warriors." A sag wagon (no, there is not a nicer sounding name) is available to take riders up a hill or even part of the route. The rides are fully supported with mechanical assistance if a bike needs repair.

Bike Oregon Wine Country has five Sunday rides August 2015. Tickets can be reserved by calling the tasting room 503-623-2405 or visiting www.eolahillswinery.com Tickets are \$75 and include route support, wine transport, lunch, BBQ party, and discounts on Eola wines.