



Looking for a Challenge?

by Mark Michel

One set of rides on the club schedule that people frequently ask me about are the Challenge Series Events. What is the purpose of these rides? Are they races? Would they be good events for me to participate in?

The RMCC strives to create a broad range of rides and programs to accommodate all of our members interests, and to attract more riders who are enthusiastic about cycling—we are after all, the club “for people who love to ride!”

We created the Challenge Series because of a relative lack of competitive events that are not formal races. People I know who are into running participate in many timed events during the season, whether it be a local 5K, the Bolder Boulder, marathons, or more ultra type events. For cyclists, there are sanctioned ACA races where you have to have a license and then pay an entry fee, or there are centuries which are untimed, non-competitive (and also have an entry fee). But there is nothing in between.

In Europe, there are events called Gran Fondos and Cyclosporitifs which are timed events that fall between a traditional road race and a non-competitive event. These types of events are starting to appear in the United States. Like most centuries, however, they are characterized by high entry fees. For it's entire existence, the RMCC has been offering these types of timed events—minus the high entry fees.

One thing that the RMCC promotes through our ride schedule is self-sufficiency and following the rules of the road. As such, we don't really need an aid station every 10 miles, nor do we need closed roads in order to feel safe. As such, the main benefits of those special-event entry fees can be lost on us.

Enter the Challenge Series. This is a series of open-road timed events that any RMCC member can participate in. Events cover a range of distances, from 50 to slightly over 200 miles. Along the course, each rider goes through a number of checkpoints which are setup to maintain course integrity. The rides are not SAG-supported per se, but you can get water and drop off/pick up items from the safety vehicles that are at the checkpoints. Each ride has a relatively generous minimum time.

These are open-road timed events. Unlike many formal races, the courses are not closed. Additionally, Challenge Series rides are longer than most sanctioned racing events. While we do recognize the top finishers of each event, the competition is meant to be of a friendly, club-like nature as opposed to being cutthroat. Ultimately, the “challenge” of each event is up to you—it may be to ride further than you have before, to increase your level of performance, to be among the top finishers, or just to enjoy the ride! As such, the series is not just for “those” riders of super-human abilities—it is for you!

We have three groups of Challenge Series events. First are the climbing events of under 100 miles. These include the Foothills Climbfest which takes in the roads of southern Jefferson county, with a shorter version Memorial Day weekend and a longer version on Labor Day weekend. New this year is the Mt. Evans Challenge, a ride from Golden to the summit of Mt. Evans—perhaps the ultimate hillclimb event in Colorado!

The second group is the RMCC 1-2-3. This is a multi-stage series although you can just ride individual events if you like. It has a 100K (60 miles), which is the length of a typical road race. Next is a 200K (125 miles), the length of an average Tour de France stage. Finally is a 300K (180 miles), which is the distance of a long European single day race like Milan-San Remo.

Finally we have the RMCC Triple Crown. Again, this is a multi-stage series where you can also ride individual events. These are the most-challenging events—rides of around 200 miles in length in the mountains—from Denver to Aspen, the “Death Ride” loop in southwestern Colorado (Ridgway, Durango, Tellulride), and the Grand Loop from Golden through Rocky Mountain National Park and over Berthoud Pass. Those who complete all three receive a special award.

These rides are obviously all challenging, hence the moniker, “The Challenge Series.” They provide ways for us to test our abilities and maybe try something we otherwise wouldn't. However, riding our club schedule on a regular basis will prepare you to attempt these types of events, which helps take away the stress of how to prepare.

If you haven't done an event like this before, please join us! Invite your friends as well. For more details, including rules, dates, times etc., check out the Challenge Series section of the website. Also use the online registration form to register (some events do require advance registration). See you at the ride!