

Rain ends bike race early, but riders call 24 Hours of Rapelje a success

By Jennifer Ries
SCN Editor

Rain or shine, you can't keep a mountain biker down, and 180 of them showed up in Rapelje last weekend to prove just that. They hit the 14.7 mile course hard starting at 11 a.m., but by that evening rain had slowed even the most dedicated biker to a mucky, muddy crawl.

"The event went great but I feel bad that we had to cancel due to rain," said race organizer Cynde Erfle. "Mountain bikes don't do well in mud and safety was also an important issue."

Participants from Alberta, Canada, California, Washington, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Minnesota, Billings, Butte, Bozeman, Big Sky, Missoula, Great Falls, Helena, Red Lodge and Ennis hoped that the race would only be delayed, but at 4:30 a.m. Sunday race organizer Mike Erfle ran the course by 4-wheeler, determining it was a no-go.

Despite the early ending, bikers were in high spirits. "We love the spirit of Rapelje. We just come for the fun," said one Carnival team member.

Said Jamey Cunningham of the Lotus Pad Thai-ers, "I'll be back next year. This is my first race, but it is the hardest I could think of."

And when they return, they'll be doing it not just for the course, but for a good cause - benefiting the Stockman Cafe.

"We can't thank you enough for supporting the Cafe," said Mike Erfle. "You keep us going the other 365 days of the year."

Next year's race will be around the summer solstice.



Off to a great start, LeMond style, bikers ran into nasty weather several hours into the race. The race was eventually cancelled, but spirits remained high among the participants who pledged to be back next year.

SCN photo by Jennifer Ries