



THIN AIR
Bring your best lungs and legs to this event

THE BITCH IS BACK

THE BRECK EPIC GETS EVEN HARDER

THE FIRST WORDS YOU'LL SEE ON BRECKEPIC.COM serve as both an invitation and a warning: "Got a diesel? Time to warm up those glow plugs, bud. Because the bitch is back. Two hundred and forty miles of primo, high-alpine riding served up Summit County-style. You a roadie? Look elsewhere. This is an MTB race, bud—the best *mountain biker* will win."

Breck Epic founder Mike McCormack—part marketing wizard, part shop rat in a cowboy hat—designed this six-stage Colorado race, which runs from August 21–27, with quality trail riding in mind. Last year's inaugural edition featured few of the wide, boring forest roads that are often a necessary evil of endurance races.

Instead, McCormack treated riders to some of the best singletrack in the state.

On any given day, racers might ride over the Continental Divide, portage their bikes through summer snowfields and speed along wildflower-lined singletrack. In short, the Breck Epic boasts a course with few rivals, which explains why the race debuted to widespread acclaim—particularly from racers. Winner Jeremiah Bishop, who beat Travis Brown by nine minutes, stumbled away wide-eyed.

"You're carrying your bike over barren, rocky tundra, coming into drops on blind corners," Bishop said after the 47-mile queen's stage. "It's wild. It takes fighter-jet reflexes."

McCormack wants his race to give the United States an event on par with international stage races such as the BC Bike Race and TransAlp. After a few racers expressed a desire for more distance, he added about 50 miles this year, replacing the prologue with a longer stage and lengthening two others. The total amount of climbing will be just less than 37,000 vertical feet—a huge number, given that racers will spend four to eight hours a day riding at elevations of at least 10,000 feet. Lots of sweat. Very thin air.

Still, McCormack is constantly checking himself, vowing to "preserve the rideability" and give anyone tough enough to try the Epic a chance to finish it. "I want it to be attainable for the everyman, the lunch-bucket rider, who just puts his head down and grinds it out," he says.

This year's race moved from early July to late August to accommodate the high country's late snowmelt, but otherwise will be similar to its debut. About 130 racers took part last summer, including Alison Dunlap and Keith Bontrager. The field will be nearly twice as large this year—the 2010 event had nearly reached its 250-person field limit back in April. Racers will compete in several classifications, including singlespeed, solo, pairs and teams of three to six riders. For added motivation a \$10,000 cash purse will be split between the Open Men and Women (Solo and Team) categories, and there will be a treasure trove of swag and awards. For more info, visit breckepic.com. —DEVON O'NEIL

WOT WHAT'S ON TAP?

JUNE 6

For those 24-hour racers who are afraid of the dark, or just those looking for something different, there is the 24 Hours of Light, a celebration of bikes and the summer solstice in Whitehorse, Yukon. Whitehorse is so far north it stays light all night. No lights needed or allowed. 24hoursoflight.ca

JUNE 27-JULY 3

In the last three years, the BC Bike Race has earned a reputation as one of the most epic and singletrack-packed events out there. This year's seven-day journey from Vancouver to Whistler promises to test the limits of bodies, bikes and sanity. Bcbikerace.com

JULY 4

Celebrate America's birthday with beer, brats, and bikes at Breckenridge, Colorado's Firecracker 50. The event boasts a festive parade start, but Marathon National Championship titles are on the line so expect some intense competition on the challenging high-altitude course. mavsports.com

JULY 9-11

Featuring a trifecta of sought-after world championships in the All Mountain, River Jump, and Pixie-Cross disciplines, this year's Downieville Classic, in Downieville, California, promises to draw only the most serious of athletes. Stay hydrated and entertained between events with cold beer, live music, and more. downievilleclassic.com

JULY 15-18

Sol Vista is hosting Nationals for its second year. Last year's courses featured stunning views, challenging terrain and very little oxygen. The little ski area in Granby, Colorado, will see the USA's best XC, DH, Super-D and Mountain Cross racers across classes put in their annual bid for stars and bars. solvistanationals.com

JULY 16

If climbing 13,719 feet over 100 miles sounds like your ideal weekend activity, check out the Breckenridge 100 in Breckenridge, Colorado. This year's course crosses the continental divide three times, and promises to remind you what true mountain biking feels like. warriorcycling.com

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bikemag.com