Cyclists gear up for mountain challenges

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By Karen Chavez
ASHEVILLE CITIZEN-TIMES

ASHEVILLE, N.C. — Dr. Debi Schusler has a difficult decision to make each spring as the bicycling season gears up across Western North Carolina.

Does she go for the gusto — and the possible broken bones — or does she take it slow and know she'll be able to keep her day job caring for the community's teeth?

This year, Schusler, 43, a former bicycle racer who owns a dental practice in Hendersonville, will start the season with a safe, scenic ride at the sixth annual Tour de Lure on April 10. The 67-mile ride starts at the Corpening YMCA in Marion, heads out over the picturesque back roads of McDowell and Rutherford County, and passes by Lake Lure.

But it wasn't an easy decision, Schusler said, since the bike ride is on the same day as the 11th annual Assault on the Carolinas, a bike ride in Brevard, in which she also has participated.

"I gave up racing because I'm a dentist," said Schusler, who used to race with Team ECD. "It's hard to think you could crash and not be able to work the next morning. The Tour de Lure is safer because you're not at the mercy of the pack's pace. It attracts a wider variety of skill levels, and if you want to ride with some friends socially, you can do that."

The Tour de Lure also has the option of a less-challenging, 25-mile loop that winds through rolling farmland, and cyclists can bring their nonbiking family members along: They can use the YMCA facilities while the cyclists ride.

But Schusler said while the Tour de Lure might have a slower pace, the legs will burn just as badly on the nearly 6,000 feet of cumulative climbing on the longer route.

In fact, many cyclists use the Tour de Lure as a training ride for the infamous Assault on Mount Mitchell, a 102-mile ride from Spartanburg, S.C., to the summit of the highest peak in the eastern United States, on May 24, said Jane Cowan, 55, of Marion. Cowan and her husband, Joe, started the Tour de Lure with their club, Marion Foothills Cyclists.

"It's a great ride, it's scenic and there are support vehicles, but it is challenging," Cowan said.

The Assault on the Carolinas, now in its 11th year, is also a ride — not a race — with 100K, 60K and 40K options, but tends to bring out the competitive spirit.

All routes are well-stocked with restrooms and food stations and post-ride lunch. The 40K and 60K rides (25 and 37 miles) traverse the scenic countryside of Transylvania County, while the 100K (65-miler) heads down into South Carolina, and has a notorious, 6.1-mile climb up Caesar's Head on its return, said Jay Coan, co-ride director.

"The 100K is really twisty and turny, with rapid descents and flats where pace lines form. It's really challenging," Coan said. "It has all the things that cyclists are looking for."



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Riders take off in the Assault on the Carolinas bike ride in 2008. The 11th annual ride in Brevard will be April 10.

UPCOMING RIDES IN WNC

- **Tour de Lure:** Sixth annual bike ride April 10 at the Corpening Memorial YMCA. Registration begins at 7:30 a.m.; ride at 9. Choose 67- or 25-mile course. Cost is $25 for YMCA members, $30 for nonmembers. Register at www.ymcawnc.org/tourdelure.php.
- **11th annual Assault on the Carolinas with 100K, 60K and 40K options:** All rides start and end at Brevard High School, 747 Country Club Road, Brevard, at 9 a.m. April 10. Entry fee is $40, including T-shirt, rest stops, SAG wagons and post-ride lunch: E-mail info@assaultonthecarolinas.com or visit www.assaultonthecarolinas.com.
- **35th annual Assault on Mount Mitchell and 17th Assault on Marion:** The 104-mile ride from Spartanburg, S.C., to the summit of Mount Mitchell on May 24 is sold out, but there is still room in the 74-mile, May 24 Assault on Marion. Starts in Spartanburg, ends in Marion, with 5,000 cumulative feet of climbing. Go to www.freewheelers.info/aomm.