

Racers Ready to Fly at Maryhill Course

By Carol York

The International Gravity Sports Association (IGSA) awarded the 2008 IGSA World Championships to the 2008 Maryhill Festival of Speed, adding to the quiver of internationally recognized sport venues in the Columbia Gorge.

The Maryhill Festival of Speed is the largest North American gravity sports festival. Maryhill Loops Road, the oldest paved road in the Northwest, is recognized as one of the best venues in the world due to its challenging hairpin corners, high speeds and perfect pavement.

Though often used in automobile commercials, the road is closed to daily traffic. Thousands of hay bales and miles of containment fence will line the 2.2-mile racecourse.

Shuttles will provide rides between designated spectator areas, where spectators will line the course to cheer both the leaders and the sensational wipe-outs.

Registration, technical inspections and open practice begin August 26, with racing scheduled daily 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., August 27-31.

The event will be nationally televised on NBC's Jeep World of Adventure sports, and will be re-broadcast on ESPN International and Universal HD.

The festival features the world's fastest gravity downhillers, plus sponsors, exhibits, food and musical entertainment.

In addition to downhill skateboarding and streetluge, athletes will compete in classic luge, downhill inline skating, inline board and gravity bike classes. Racers range from age 14 and up.



Skateboarders will race down Maryhill Loop Road this month, vying for a world title at the IGSA World Championships. Photo by John Longfellow.

The "Racers Village" at the Klickitat Fairgrounds features live bands August 30-31, starting at 8 p.m., a skate park, beer garden, food, vendors and camping.

With competitors from five continents, locals and visitors can mingle with the world's best.

Gravity sports involve speeding downhill on a paved, curvy road lined with hay bales on a streetluge, skateboard, gravity bike or inline skates, powered by gravity with NO brakes.

Outfitted with special gloves, padded suits and sturdy helmets, riders push off from the start and let gravity do the rest, careening at high speeds downhill trying to avoid each other to be the fastest through multiple curves and obstacles to the finish. Riders often descend at more than 50 mph.

Street luge riders use modified skateboards in a prone position—also known as land luge.

Sitting on a skateboard is known

as buttboarding or classic luge. Street luges can be customized to increase performance, whereas the buttboard has design limitations to keep the equipment standardized, less expensive, and minimize technological advantage.

A speedboard is also known as a stand-up or downhill skateboard. These are specially designed for speed. Riders stand, squat, tuck and angle to achieve high speeds.

Cranks, pedals and chains are removed from gravity bikes to prevent them from catching on the ground in high-speed turns.

Attached rear pegs provide footrests. The bikes are built with stretched and lowered suspension bike frames. Riders wear full-face motorcycle helmets, body armor and leathers, kneeling in an "aero-tuck" to increase speed. ■

For more information, visit maryhillfestivalofspeed.com. Reprinted with permission from the Gorge Guide.