

Guy from Tahoe does more than ski, put on bike events

By Mary Cook

Curtis Fong, best known for his television and radio personality *The Guy from Tahoe*, is not your typical guy from Tahoe. He seems to live two lives: that of a mountain goat and that of an on-the-go urbanite.

And he's much more than the guy putting on Sunday's 8th annual Tour de Tahoe – Bike Big Blue 72-mile ride around Lake Tahoe or the guy who writes the ski report for *Lake Tahoe News* and delivers it on KTHO FM-96.1.



Curtis Fong
likes fast
cars, bikes
and skis.

Photo/Provided

Fong fell in love with Tahoe as a teenager. He learned to ski at 12. At 18, while peers were pulled into the Vietnam War, Fong “got lucky” because he received a high lottery number in the draft and went to college. After four years studying photography at Sacramento State, Fong rented a cabin in Tahoe and ran a successful photo concession at Kirkwood the year it opened in 1971. Within two winters, Fong advanced to advertising and public relations director at Kirkwood.

In 1983, Fong left Kirkwood to work for KTHO AM-590 radio in sales. He presided as station manager for its FM counterpart, K-Zephyr, until 1985. During this time, Fong took up cycling, loving it so much he and his buddies formed a club, known as the Alta Alpina Cycling Club.

The Death Ride was organized by Wayne Martin in 1980, and became the official ride in 1981. Fong functioned as the Death Ride manager for 11 years.

The Death Ride got Fong's wheels spinning – it was his guinea pig event. He formed TGFT (The Guy from Tahoe) Productions, a sports marketing company, in 1989. Then, in 1990, he christened his company with the Comstock Silver Century, a 100-mile, 9,000-vertical-foot historical ride out of Carson City and Virginia City.

"It was meant to be a training ride for the Death Ride," Fong stated.

As it turns out, this route was a training ride for three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond.

From there, Fong created America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride in 1991. He also started OATBRAN, which stands for One Awesome Tour Bike Ride Across Nevada.

Now, in its 19th year, the tour follows 420 miles of Nevada's loneliest highway, Highway 50.

Fong harbors a soft spot for untouched places, stretches of desert speckled with sagebrush, sliced by long, rolling highways. In addition to his homes in Gardnerville and Stateline, Fong owns a house with 3 acres "in the middle of nowhere," also known as Gilman Springs, Nev. During a recent weekend at this property, he witnessed a meteor shower, spent time at the local hot springs, and trekked to nearby ghost towns with the help of his H1 Hummer.

Fong's desire for wide-open spaces and miles of lonely highway predisposed him to a love affair with high-performance vehicles. Inevitably, about 20 years ago, Fong sided with Porsches, believing them to be "works of art." In the winter, he does road trips to Aspen, Sun Valley, and British Columbia in pursuit of his other passion – skiing.



Porsche
drivers at
Sand Mountain.
Photo/Provided

(Fong also coordinates the Heavenly R.A.T.S. League Race Series and mogul freestyle events for Sierra-at-Tahoe.)

He doesn't mind flying, but if he has the time, he loves the drive. "I like to see the country, discover new roads," he says.

About 10 years ago, Fong became involved with the Porsche Club of America (PCA), and ever since he has been collecting Porsches. He owns everything from a 356 Speedster to a 911 Turbo, built for street and track. He attended driving school in Reno and obtained a test and tuner's license, which allows him to buy track time at the Reno Fernley Raceway. Two years ago, Fong was the vice president of the Sierra Nevada PCA and in the same year he put on his first show-and-shine car show called Porsches in the Park.

Fong's experience with the OATBRAN bike ride spawned the idea of a car tour across Nevada. Now, four summers in counting, Fong has led a group of Porsches across Nevada on Highway 50,

culminating in a three-day, two-night tour. Last year, in August, he also took a group of Porsches around Lake Tahoe, with a lunch-stop at Northstar-at-Tahoe and dinner at Lakeside Beach Grill.

In the 1990s, Fong split time between radio and television. He started calling in to radio stations in the Bay Area to do Tahoe ski reports. One Monterey station disc jockey forgot Fong's name during his introduction and arbitrarily dubbed him "The Guy from Tahoe." Fong rolled with the mistake, cueing in with, "Hi, this is Curtis Fong, The Guy from Tahoe." The nickname stuck and he still uses it to this day with his mountain resort reports on K-Tahoe, his "What's Up Tahoe?" segments on Outside TV and with *Lake Tahoe News*.

After 39 years of living in Tahoe, the 60-year-old possesses top-notch credibility in the area's media and recreation industries. While the lure of other places (Hawaii; Park City; Bend, and Sedona) beckoned, he stayed true to Tahoe.

"With all the friendly people, with all the recreation that is here, there is no reason for me to go anywhere else," Fong says.

Every once in a while, his ambitious nature gets the best of him; he has to remind himself to pause and gawk at the flawless sapphire that is Lake Tahoe. He encourages all Tahoe residents to do the same: "We all need to stop and say, 'Wow, this is why I'm here.'"

On Sunday, thousands of others will say something similar as they participate in his annual Bike Big Blue cycling event.