Women descend upon Northstar's bike park



Instructor Kristen Martin Del Campo leads riders down Northstar's bike park. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Kathryn Reed

TRUCKEE – Take another look, that gnarly dude on the mountain bike might just be a dudette. It's hard to tell with all that gear that makes riders look like Ninja warriors.

It's not just the hardcore riders who are decked out in this garb. So are newbies and the less experienced cyclists. It's all about safety.

Northstar's mountain bike park is attracting more women these days, and all levels of riders. The added enthusiasm has a lot to do with a weekly program called Pumps on Pedals. It's all

about getting women to feel comfortable downhill mountain bike riding.

“You progress on the terrain you are comfortable on,” Kristen Martin Del Campo told *Lake Tahoe News.*



Lift access speeds up the learning curve by not having to pedal up the mountain. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

She is one of the instructors for the Friday night rides. Del Campo has been certified by the International Mountain Biking Association to teach.

Her style is laid back and encouraging, making it comfortable to get outside your comfort zone.

First-timers go through a skills clinic that includes taking the gondola to the Zephyr Express and riding down to the village. It sounds simple until Del Campo has us leaning one way and the bike the other as we turn. It’s all about keeping as much tread on the ground as possible. Skidding, we’re told, is more dangerous than going fast.

Then people are divvied up in groups based on skill level. The mountain’s routes are divided into green (easy), blue (intermediate) and black (advanced) just like ski runs.



Northstar has a variety of terrain –

easy to double black diamond. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

“Mountain biking is relative to where you live,” Del Campo said. “Here it’s dry and loose. People’s mountain biking definition is different.”

That’s why they like to see what a rider is comfortable with before assigning her to a group for the free ride experience.

Standing is the norm. Getting used to riding over natural features – aka rocks embedded in the ground – is part of the experience.

While the fire road intuitively seems easier and safer than the single track with banked turns, Del Campo is quick to dispel that belief.

“The flat, loose corner is more technical than the berm,” Del Campo said. “On the flat you have to be more active and balanced on the bike.”



Instructor Kristen Martin Del Campo is also a mountain bike racer. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

There are bikes designed just for downhill. Others are good for climbing. Some are all around. Tires are getting fatter. Components more light weight. Hydraulic brakes allow for one-finger breaking – also meaning more fingers are on the handlebars to control the bike. It's easy to spend $5,000 on a new mountain bike.

This is the first year for Northstar's Specialized Academy.

The bikes are in the village, whereas in the past they were mid-mountain. The thinking behind the academy approach is to brand the program much like they’ve done with the Burton Snowboard Academy. People will know what to expect and have a consistent experience.

A great thing about Specialized is that it is one of the few companies making mountain bikes specifically for women. The frames and other components are better designed for a women’s physique.

Riders, though, may use their own equipment for the Friday rides — or anytime at Northstar. It’s about the camaraderie and the riding.

——



Kristen Martin Del Campo demonstrates how to lean when turning. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

Notes:

· Aug. 6-7, women's only mountain bike weekend at Northstar. Details are **online**.

· Pumps on Pedals – Every Friday through Sept. 2. Check-in by 4:45pm in front of the Big Springs Gondola. Lift tickets are $28. Bikes and all necessary equipment are available to

rent for $28.