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YOU CAN DO THIS BIKING IN NEW MEXICO

# ride of the century

» Sonya Ewan enters a 100-mile race in a place so spectacular, it's a crime not to stop

Photographs by Michael Clark

## ROAD BIKING HAS NEVER BEEN MY THING.

Dodging traffic seems anything but fun, and those skinny tires look like they'd pop on a twig. But a few months after casually tossing my name into a box labeled SWEEPSTAKES at a local bike shop in Albuquerque, I get a letter announcing that I've won a sleek black and red Trek 5200 road bike worth about \$2,500. Not using it would be like kicking good karma in the shins. So I decide to put my preconceptions aside and hit the street.

Consumed with envy over my new toy, my boyfriend, Haass, decides to buy himself a (much cheaper) road bike and suggests we sign up for a nearby race: the Enchanted Circle Century Tour, a 100-mile loop through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, beginning and ending in Red River, 3 hours north of Albuquerque.

With 3 months to train, Haass and I join some friends on their weekly 5-mile ride. Every 7 days, we add 5 miles to our scenic route just outside of town. Low hills dotted with cacti and sagebrush fly by in a blur. My legs slowly transform into lean pedaling machines, but I never top 65 miles during training, and neither does Haass, who hangs back with me for company. We're both hoping adrenaline will kick in and help close the gap.

On race day, we join 680 cyclists converging on Red River's tiny Main Street. We slowly shove across the starting line, and I feel a rush as I pedal up and coast down rolling hills that give way to a backdrop of piñon pines »

# IN FOCUS YOU CAN DO THIS

» and endless sage. Haass and I start off together, but he's long gone by the time I reach my first rest stop just over a ridge. I pull in to refuel on bananas and gawk at the huge blue sky and distant mountains. With 26 miles already behind me, I've barely broken a sweat.

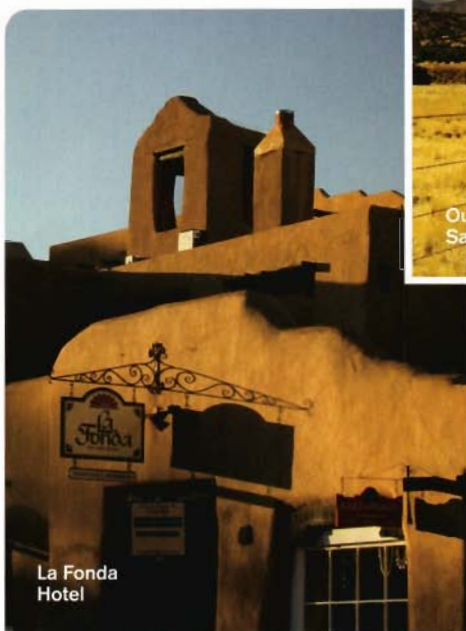
When I spot the first big hill, I down an energy gel like a shot of tequila. Reaching the top of Palo Flechado Pass, I'm now at 9,101 feet (about 350 feet higher than where we started) and have completed 57 miles in 6 hours—awesome by my standards, but not exactly light speed. To avoid running into the “sag wagon,” the van that picks up racers who fail to cross the finish line before the 6 P.M. cutoff, I decide to skip a 14-mile out-and-back and head straight for Bobcat Pass, a monster hill at an elevation of 9,820 feet. It sucks that I won't hit 100 miles, but the satisfaction of conquering Bobcat might make up for it.

As I approach the massive rise, I shift into my easiest gear. Other riders start swearing around me as their thighs feel the burn. Some actually get off their bikes and walk. Despite the raging inferno in my quads, I concentrate on pushing and pulling the pedals. No way I'm giving up. Three miles later, I peak to the cheers of a small crowd recovering from the climb at the top. I can see the finish line at the bottom of the hill—which happens to have a pitch steeper than a ski jump. I take a deep breath and make the plunge.

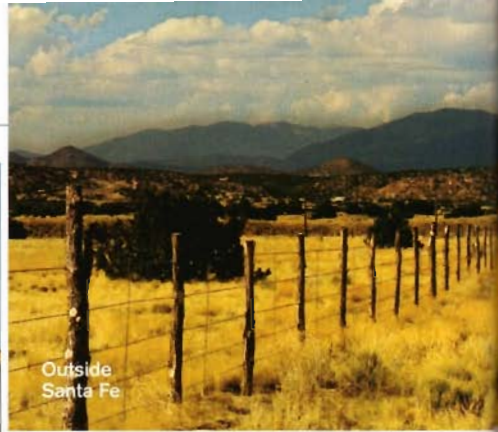
After 86 miles and about 8 hours on the road, I glide over the finish line, where Haass has been waiting for 45 minutes. But a wave of pride doesn't hit me until months later, when I bump into Nina Baum at a holiday party. Baum's a pro mountain biker for the Bear Naked-Cannondale Team, and I'd watched in awe when she completed the same century ride in 2000. I confess my shortcut and humbly admit, “I'll never be as hardcore as you.” Her response: “Anyone who attempts a century is hardcore.” I could've kissed her.



Ride on.



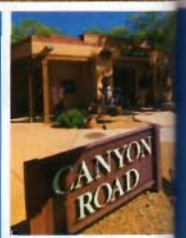
La Fonda Hotel



Outside Santa Fe



Ten Thousand Waves Spa and Resort



CONQUER THE DESERT ON TWO WHEELS, THROW BACK TEQUILA, AND BROWSE A WALL OF ART

## the WH long weekend

### Day 1

**Fly into Albuquerque** and rent a car (how about a convertible?) for your 3-hour drive to Red River, the tiny ski town where the century ride starts. **Take a quick detour to Wild Oats Marketplace** ([wildoats.com](http://wildoats.com)) on the Saint Francis Drive exit in Santa Fe to grab lunch and pick up Cliff bars, the perfect race day snack. Once in Red River, **check in at the Lifts West Condominium Resort** ([liftswest.com](http://liftswest.com)), where you can cook a prerace breakfast in your private kitchen. For dinner, **head to Capos Corner Italian restaurant** ([redrivermm.com/capos](http://redrivermm.com/capos)) and devour a giant plate of carbs (this is so not the night for refried beans!) in front of a roaring fireplace.

### Day 2

**Hit the starting line** at 8 A.M. in front of Town Hall on Main Street. While pedaling your heart out, don't forget to take in the jaw-dropping views of northern New Mexico's Sangre de Cristo Mountains, alpine forests, and aspen groves. Back in Red River, **grab a seat at the Sundance Mexican Restaurant** ([redrivermm.com/sundance](http://redrivermm.com/sundance)) on High Street and toast your awesome ride with a few glasses of homemade sangria. Remember, you've just burned upwards of 3,000 calories—if you can't decide between the rib-eye and the stuffed sopapilla, order both.

### Day 3

**Drive 2½ scenic hours to the Ten Thousand Waves Spa and Resort** ([tenthousandwaves.com](http://tenthousandwaves.com)). This Japanese-style day spa offers private outdoor baths with mountainside views and a shiatsu-do massage that will relieve tension in your achy lower half. Then **roll into nearby Santa Fe and hit Maria's New Mexican Kitchen** ([marias-santafe.com](http://marias-santafe.com)) for nachos and tequila; there are over 100 to choose from, but our fave is the extra-smooth El Mayor Reserve Reposado. **Walk, don't drive, back to your hotel—the chill Old Santa Fe Inn** ([oldsantafeinn.com](http://oldsantafeinn.com)) or the posh **La Fonda Hotel** ([lafonda-santafe.com](http://lafonda-santafe.com)), both located near the historic **Santa Fe Plaza** and the **St. Francis Cathedral**.