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Bicycle team mixes tough rides with fun

By Larry Ward

Staff Writer

When Tina Beatini, Joe Wells and his son, Joe, wheel their bicycles down the driveways of their Ahwatukee Foothills homes, it's usually not for a casual ride.

Beatini and the Wells are members of the Masters Elite Team One racing team, and that means no slacking off even on a 50-mile training run through Ahwatukee Foothills or longer, more challenging routes like Usery Pass in East Mesa, the outskirts of North Scottsdale or the Apache Trail, a wicked climb up to Canyon Lake and Tortilla Flat.

Jim Kuhn and his wife, Wendy, veteran national road racers from Scottsdale, helped set up the 30-member team five years ago. They have raced in some of the biggest events in the country, and Wendy wears the World Cup championship stripes she won in Austria in 1999 on her blue and yellow uniform.

"This is a racing team," Kuhn explained. "It's not a club. You have to be invited onto the team with the understanding that you have to race in so many races a year."

That may seem hard-core, but the elder Wells said racers are able to keep the proper attitude.

"It's a hobby and it needs to be fun," Wells said. "Once you take the fun out of it, you've lost the perspective of what you're trying to do. There's no problem trying to excel and do your best, but you have to have fun with it, too."

Wells has been an Ahwatukee Foothills resident since 1978, and began riding in the early 1980s when his son became involved with riding.

"I was a 'Little League dad,' and my wife thought that was unacceptable behavior," Wells said with a grin. "She told me if I was so smart, I needed to get on a bike myself. I got hooked, and I've been doing it ever since."

The bike friendly streets and elevation changes through Ahwatukee Foothills make it a popular area to train. Sponsors like Spooner Physical Therapy in Ahwatukee Foothills help give the team a local identity.

Wells, 63 and retired from Motorola, recalls the mid-1980s when there were no traffic lights on the Warner-Elliot Loop, he and his son would ride time-trial laps.

"We burned up a lot of tires on that loop," chuckled Wells, who trains and coaches riders and is also a United States Cycling Federation official.

He won the Masters Ontario (Calif.) Criterium, (a close circular course) in 2001, the McDowell Mountain Circuit race in 2002 and the Saturday Night Tucson Criterium in 2003. He also finished fifth in his age category at the Barrio Logan Criterium/California State Championship and 10th at the Master Nationals Criterium.

Wells' 35-year-old son started cycling when he was a student at Tempe Corona del Sol High School before Mountain Pointe and Desert Vista were built.

"I tried other sports and didn't really achieve any success," said the younger Wells, who works with computers. "I didn't want to take the bus, so I started riding my bike to school. There were some other guys who lived near me and we just sort of hooked up."

The catalyst was the 1984 Summer Olympic Games.

"I thought I could do that and that fall, I entered my first race in Scottsdale," the younger Wells recalled. "I crashed and ruined my bike beyond repair. It wasn't the best experience."

Now, he is among the diehards who ride before sunrise even on cold, winter mornings.

The team usually heads out as a group on weekend mornings, but Kuhn said there are some who ride every morning before they go to work.

"That's a lot of hours on the cold, dark mornings, so it's pretty serious," Kuhn said. "We all want to win, but we also want to work together and help each other out. Sometimes personalities don't always work out, so we decided to try something based on personalities and the commitment to work for each other."

There are several races during the season, usually from the early spring through late fall in Arizona, but team members have also raced in California, Oregon and Michigan.

New members are invited to ride with the team before they join. "We want to be sure they get along with us and we get along with them," Kuhn said.

Newcomers start out on a developmental squad and work their way up to full team members. Beatini, who joined the team in May, is on the developmental team, but she is just as committed as veteran racers.

"I was looking for something to better my cycling skills," said Beatini, an operations analyst at Wells Fargo. "I started looking at clubs and realized that wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to race and I wanted to race with a team. I found some teams through their Web sites and met with a couple different teams. I wanted to make sure it was a good fit."

When she hooked up with Team One members Wendy Kuhn and Barb Sollars, she realized she had found a fit.

"I knew this is what I wanted to do," Beatini said. "I did everything I could to ride with these girls. It was like an initiation. They would take me out on rides where I thought I was going to die. I kept asking if I could be on the team."

Beatini was finally asked to join.

"You have to really work hard to be on this team," she said, "and they stick to their philosophies. There aren't any egos or bragging."

Beatini grew up in Connecticut where she played the violin and didn't realize women were

permitted to race bicycles.

"I had only seen guys," she said. "I thought female cyclist were only doing triathlons. I was so happy when I saw a bunch of female riders."

In Arizona, she sought out a team that had strong women riders so she could learn from them .

"That was important to me because there are a lot of clubs where people aren't willing to share their knowledge and experience" she added.

This season Beatini plans to do a national time trials race and eventually move into criterium and road races.

"We help each other to succeed and I think that's one of the reasons why it's so successful," she said. "They really dedicate a lot of time to making you a better cyclist and better person all around."

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