

# 9,500 riders take off on annual Seattle to Portland Bicycle Classic

Some 9,500 bike riders took off Saturday in the annual Seattle to Portland Bicycle Classic. Some make the ride in one day; others will take two.

By [Sean Rose](#)

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DANIEL MENDIES

David Mendies is riding for his second time.

Some would say David Mendies made a rash choice.

He had never been a cyclist, but two years ago he decided to change that. Along with some friends, he registered for the Seattle to Portland Bicycle Classic and bought his first bike — one month before the 200-mile, two-day tour de Northwest.



On Saturday, Mendies, 29, rode in his second Seattle to Portland (STP) and cruised with friends in an attempt to complete the journey in one day. He was one of the 2,427 riders striving to arrive in Portland on the same day they left Seattle. The rest of the 9,500 cyclists are set to arrive in Portland today.

The annual bike ride is in its 29th year and attracts thousands of novice and seasoned cyclists.

For Mendies, the event represents the prominence of the outdoors in Northwest living, something that originally drew him to the area and prompted him to jump into cycling.

Mendies grew up in Katmandu, Nepal, surrounded by the tallest peaks on earth, the Himalayas. But it wasn't until he lived in Portland and saw the locals' active lifestyles that he appreciated the outdoors.

"I'm from the Himalayas, and I've never climbed a mountain," Mendies said. "That's pretty pathetic. ... It's like living in France and not going to see the Eiffel Tower."

He met his wife, a Portland native, as a student in the U.S. Now his family splits its time between two sides of the world: embracing the tradition and heritage of Nepal and the activity and nature surrounding Portland.

For Mendies, riding the STP turned out to be a sound decision. For Ben Marra and Greg Malcolm, it is no longer a choice — it's tradition.

Marra, 67, and Malcolm, 69, are among the 7,073 cyclists set to arrive in Portland today. It is a route they know extremely well.

This is Marra's 26th STP. Malcolm was a little late to the game. This is his 20th trip.

Marra's first ride was not a good one for him. He "sneezed his brain out" on the first day and was sick from Mexican food the second.

"I wasn't sure if I'd ever do it again," Marra said.

Malcolm's first ride wasn't much better.

The boyhood friends relocated separately from Idaho to the Seattle area, and Marra convinced his old buddy that the STP would be fun. Malcolm finished with cramps in his legs strong enough to bring him to the ground.

"I blame him for talking me into getting into the STP," Malcolm said.

But the ride gave the friends a goal and a reason to keep in shape. And when Malcolm left Bellevue to return to Idaho eight years ago, the STP became guaranteed time together for the friends. As Marra said, there's always something to complain about when training and pushing yourself across a state on two wheels, but "the reality of it is, it's a wonderful thing.

"It's fun because we get to tell the same old stories we've told each other for 66 or 67 years," Marra said.

"We've gotten more handsome and a littler grayer, and that's about it."

As for the future, the friends don't see an end in sight for the STP. Not unless "someone can throw some dirt on me," Malcolm said, "about 6 feet."

Little may have changed between the men, but there are some differences from past years. Most notably Marra's bike. Malcolm still rides a Schwinn he's had since the 1980s, but Marra has upgraded. Malcolm says Marra is cheating. Marra says Malcolm's bike is old enough to be in a museum.

He's right. On a recent visit to the Idaho Historical Museum, Malcolm saw a replica of the bike he is riding into Portland.

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