

# ROANOKE TIMES & WORLD-NEWS

## CROSS-COUNTRY RACER

### CHRISTINA BAUM PREPARES TO SEE THE COUNTRY BY BIKE

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FLOYD - Christina Baum will be one of 30 cyclists tearing across the country in the Race Across America next month.

Twelve bikers began the qualifying in Amarillo, Texas, but only three women and four men finished. Baum placed fourth overall and second among the women in the 583-mile race.

The big race from Irvine, Calif., to Savannah, Ga., starts July 28.

Because there usually is a 24-hour difference between men's and women's finishing times, starting times will be staggered, with the women beginning a day before the men. Race officials want everyone to finish about the same time for the weekend crowd in Savannah on Aug. 7 and 8.

"It's kind of disappointing if you've raced all the way across the country and then no one's there to see you finish," Baum, 26, said with a laugh.

Baum is a full-time graduate student at Virginia Tech, finishing her master's in human nutrition with an emphasis on exercise physiology. She also works full time as a research assistant.

Contestants will be on their bikes for eight to 10 days, sleeping perhaps only 1 1/2 hours each 24 hours. The bicyclists and their crews will travel through deserts as hot as 101 degrees at 1 a.m., cross the Rocky Mountains, and pass through summer storms, blinding rains, brutal winds and dust storms.

They'll fight cramps, hunger, nosebleeds from the dryness, tricks of the mind and exhaustion. But the main fight will be against time.

This is the world's longest time trial. Nearing the finish line in Savannah, a handful of miles can make the difference between a winner and a near-winner. A racer can't look at the course as an overwhelming 3,000 miles, Baum said. Some take it state by state.

Others take it time station by time station. Riders will check in at about 50 time stations

where their times will be recorded and called in to the Irvine headquarters. This information is used by the crews to keep track of how their riders are doing in relation to others.

The support crew consists of six or seven people in two vans who take care of every detail so all the rider should have to worry about is riding.

A crew is selected and trained by the rider and allowed free rein in making judgment calls. Baum hopes to have a bicycle mechanic, a massage therapist, a nutrition expert and three others who will be the "lifeblood of the support crew . . . they'll do anything."

Everyone is a cheerleader and the crew chief is the coordinator, overseeing the rider and crew, making sure the crew eats and sleeps so they can perform well, especially while driving.

Baum's daily training goes through phases, depending on what kind of race she is preparing for. She mimics race conditions as often as possible, keeping extensive records of her sleeping, training and diet. Baum usually wakes up at 4 a.m. to ride to Tech from her home in Floyd. She chooses a 25- or 40-mile route and drinks a liquid breakfast while riding, just as in a race.

Baum, a triathlete, likes the advantages of cross training. During her lunch hour, she runs or swims to exercise leg muscles and keep her arms strong. Baum believes she has an advantage because many consider this region of the country one of the best places to train, with steeper grades than even the Rockies. Many racers say this is the hardest part of the country to bike.

Baum swims for an hour three days a week, runs four or five days a week and bikes six days a week.

She purposely takes off from cycling one, and occasionally two, days to recover from intensive training. During the winter, she rides inside on a bike on rollers. To reduce the boredom, she watches videos and listens to lecture tapes. It takes eight hours of indoor riding to ride 200 miles.

During the past five years Baum has found she is highly competitive.

"If I win, great. If I come in second, I feel good. If I come in third, I have to train more," she said. "I hold great respect for the competition. I know what I've gone through to get here."

While training, schooling and working, Baum also is learning the ropes of sponsorship. She has sponsors who provide products such as Airoshield helmet visors and Tinley shorts, but other expenses, such as crew and van, are costly. A custom bike alone runs \$2,000 and up.

"Why am I doing this? I ask myself that all the time. Why am I not content with doing 100 miles - a `century?' For awhile I was content with that. Then I heard of people doing double centuries, 200 miles. If they can do this, why can't I?"