



The 2015 Northwest Tandem Rally The Best of Bellingham

By The Northwest Tandem Rally 2015 Committee

The weather was warm and sunny, the cycling routes were challenging and well designed, the community was welcoming, the riders were enthusiastic, and the venue was comfortable as 814 cyclists on 419 bikes made Bellingham, Washington their base over the July 4th holiday weekend for the Northwest Tandem Rally 2015. Even though good cycling weather is not guaranteed in early July in the Pacific Northwest, this year conditions could not have been better. Furthermore, with crops ahead of schedule due to unseasonably warm and dry weather, the blueberry harvest was in full swing; the blueberry farm water stop on Sunday had fresh blueberries!

The rally offered four rides, Friday through Monday, though many participants began to arrive in town as early as Wednesday to check out all that Bellingham has to offer. There

are eight local craft breweries, numerous bakeries, five large bike shops and several smaller ones, museums, restaurants offering a wide variety of types of cuisine, and of course coffee shops galore. Situated in western Washington on Bellingham Bay off the Salish Sea, this bike-friendly community welcomed the rally cyclists. Many community volunteers helped the whole show run smoothly, as did impeccable planning and execution by the Mount Baker Bicycle Club, organizers of the rally. Lodging was at the rally's host venue hotel, many other hotels nearby, or in the dorms at Western Washington University, and camping was on the field behind Civic Stadium, across the main road from the venue.

The rally more or less kicked off officially on Thursday evening with a sunset dinner cruise on the bay and surrounding waters

Above: A happy couple aboard their RANS Seavo recumbent tandem join the throngs of tandem teams enjoying a mass start during the 2015 Northwest Tandem Rally.

for the lucky early responders who managed to secure a ticket. Friday began with an on-your-own ride around town, showcasing as many of the rally sponsors as possible, passing bike shops, breweries, bakeries, etc. After the ride, vendors were set up at the host hotel (Bellingham's Lakeway Inn) all day, and a series of seminars were available. Seminar presentations included sessions about tandeming adventures, sneak-peeks at upcoming rallies, fitness and health, bicycle manufacturers' Q&A, and an exciting talk by stunt tandem riders and racers. An optional BBQ at the hotel was the main dinner offering of the evening, though Bellingham's

many restaurant choices were also enjoyed by participants.

Some of the ride routes were complicated, but made easy to follow by road markings as well as GPS tracks, downloadable from the NWTR 2015 website. In addition to the combination of marked routes and GPS help, the organizers also created a free smart phone app for both iOS (Apple) and Android phones, that had useful information about the rally right at riders' fingertips. The app included the schedule, the route maps, the sponsors, the location of points of interest around town, as well as lots of other useful info. Post-rally, the Mount Baker Bicycle Club will be rereleasing the app as a Bellingham bicycling visitor's guide.

Saturday (July 4) began with hot breakfast at the Lakeway Inn, followed by the official mass start from the Bellingham Civic Field Complex, across Lakeway Drive from the venue. Some of the local Saturday morning ride groups joined the tandem riders for the mass start, so there were more than 850 cyclists at the start! Riders were officially greeted by the ride director, by the Bellingham Police, who provided intersection control for the start, and by local KAFE-101 radio host, who read the mayor's proclamation welcoming NWTR 2015 to Bellingham. The ride out was supposed to have been escorted by Bellingham's antique fire engine, but it broke down on the way to the start, so the riders settled for being greeted by the engine at the side of the road as they pedaled out of town on their way north to Ferndale, Birch Bay, and Semiahmoo. Three distance options were offered on Saturday, complete with excellent rest stops, well staffed and supplied with food and drinks, notably lots of fresh fruit. Eager and friendly volunteers ran the stops and drove support vehicles along the routes. The on-the-beach rest stop at Birch Bay was rated by riders as the best of the rally. Post-ride lunch offerings included either a cookout at Bellingham's Boundary Bay Brewery beer garden, or a choice of fare from the food carts at the Saturday Farmer's Market. After returning to their lodgings and cleaning up, riders could spend the afternoon again perusing the displays of the 25 vendors, most indoors, but some outside the front door of the hotel. While the vendor fair was going on, riders could also look over the great raffle prizes, donated by sponsors and given away in the raffle. At registration riders were given raffle tickets and they could choose which item to try for by placing their tickets in a container



A beautiful example of a custom-built Rodriguez tandem glides by the photographers lens during the 2015 NWTR.

for that specific prize. The raffle drawing was held just before the banquet (the drawings for the biggest, most valuable prizes were held on

stage during the banquet), and winners were either announced or listed at the raffle prize table after dinner.

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Saturday evening was a bit hectic for the staff at the venue. First was a beer tasting event, and then after a very quick turnover of the room the rally banquet saw a packed ballroom with 450 participants enjoying dinner, announcements, and raffle prize drawings, followed by music and dancing with The Atlantics. It was too bad the main ballroom could only hold 450, as more likely would have enjoyed attending the banquet.

For those with energy left in the late evening, the rally offered a special fireworks-watching viewpoint from the top level of Bellingham's downtown parking structure. The "Parkade" was reserved for NWTR by the City of Bellingham and the Bellingham/Whatcom Tourism department, and pre-fireworks entertainment was provided by a brass quintet followed by a juggling show featuring the Bellingham Circus Guild.

The Sunday routes, short/medium/long, showcased famous Chuckanut Drive, some of the most spectacularly scenic riding in the Northwest. Medium and long riders also



Quads were not an uncommon site among the 400+ tandems enjoying the Northwest scenery and hospitality. The Co-Motion team gets extra points for the (almost) matching kit.




enjoyed challenging riding in the Chuckanut Mountains and by Lake Samish. All rides finished at Fairhaven Park with lunch, and Co-Motion Cycles sponsored an ice cream social featuring Mallard ice cream and ices. Sunday dinner was on your own, with many

riders taking advantage of a pizza-and-pints special at the Chuckanut Brewery and Kitchen – another of Bellingham's fine breweries.

Monday, the final day of the rally, saw some participants riding the route along Lake Whatcom, some enjoying local water sports such as kayaking from the Community Boating Center, and others taking an earlier departure, often to enjoy other northwest highlights: the San Juan Islands were a popular pre- and post-rally destination. Fond farewells, hearty handshakes and hugs, and promises to reconnect next year at NWTR-2016 in Klamath Falls, Oregon were common all around town this final morning.

The organizers of NWTR 2015 wish to acknowledge the tremendous sponsor support that allowed the rally to be presented with lots of rider "perks" while keeping registration costs down. There were over 60 sponsors who provided cash, products, and discounts! The top sponsors were Tandem Diversity, SSC, R&E Cycles, Co-Motion Cycles, Rolf Prima Wheel Systems, Calfee Design, Bellingham Whatcom Tourism, Evergreen Tandem Club, WECU, Massage Envy, Cycle Moles, Roger Jobs VW, Mallard Ice Cream and KAFE Radio.

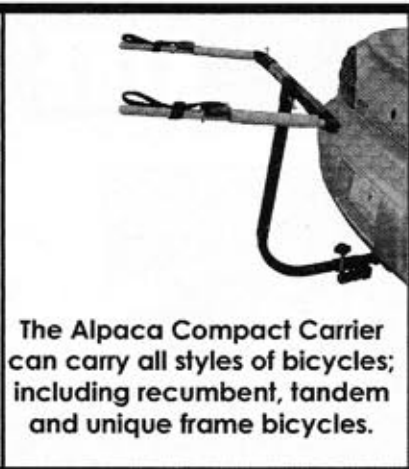
Attendees appreciated the great job done by the organizers, the sponsors, the volunteers, the community, and the riders themselves, to make this a memorable stopover in their tandem journeys. 

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