

For immediate release: Emperors Palace Cycling Classic (formerly the Edenvale Cycle Challenge)

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Right royal racing as old favourite bounces back

The Emperors Palace Classic turned into a notable success story in 2008, a tumultuous year for SA road cycling.

Most big events showed a decrease in the number of participants against the backdrop of unfavourable economic conditions.

However, when the gaming giant took over the title sponsorship of the ailing Edenvale Cycle Challenge, it resulted in a spectacular turn-around.

Few could have foreseen the way the race got up to settle, once again, as one of the signature road events on the SA calendar.

The Edenvale Challenge, now in its 21st year, used to be a favourite with SA cyclists, but it was in danger when fewer than 1 000 riders took part in 2007. That was a far cry from its glory days when the event attracted as many as 5 000 participants.

In 2008, the event was brought back on track through the backing of Emperors Palace, and 2 500 road cyclists and 800 mountain-bike racers took part.

Even better news is that the event's foreseeable future is secure, thanks to Emperors Palace, the Airports Company of South Africa and MTN, who have come on board as official partner to the event in 2009.

The 2009 Emperors Palace Cycle Classic takes place on 7 and 8 February and offers an entire weekend of cycling activities — and prize money of R73 950.

The Emperors Palace Cycling Classic is presented by Cyclingnews in association with Edenvale Pedallers, the Rotary Club of Germiston and passionate local cycling shop Sweat and Gears.

The big change will be seen in the total revamp of the road-race course. "It became just too difficult to guarantee the safety of riders on the old route," says race organiser Wynand de Villiers.

"The road toward Bapsfontein, and in particular through Tembisa and into Midrand, have become simply too busy to accommodate the number of riders. Therefore, we had to identify a new route that can stand the event in good stead for at least the next three years.

"The result is that we now have a new, rider-friendly route for events over 99, 50 and 25 km. The 99km route is safer than its predecessor and it should be quite a bit faster because the riders do not have to climb so much in the last 20 km.

"We make use of two highways, out and back, and almost 90 per cent of the route is on double-lane roads with a broad enough shoulder. The 10 per cent where we are on a single-lane road is out in Nigel and the road we chose is a quiet one," he said.

The Sunday, February 8, is reserved for road riders with three distance options.

The Saturday, February 7, sees the second staging of the popular Emperors Palace Mountain-bike Classic, which will start at 08:00 and will offer two mildly testing courses over 20 and 40 km.

The first edition of the Mountain-bike Classic holds fond memories for everyone who took part, with most of the route being right next to the runways inside the grounds of OR Tambo International Airport.

At times, it felt as if the aircraft engines were going to blow you away or that a Boeing might land on top of you.

Sweat and Gears' Lee Stockenstrom did an immense amount of brush cutting to make the previous edition possible. This time, he has a few more aces up his sleeve.

The major change to the mountain-bike route is that it will run in the contra-flow direction over the first section within the Airports Company of SA's grounds so that the signature single-track section is presented on the way back to Emperors.

The Mountain-bike Classic will be followed by the Emperors Palace Kids Classic for riders 2 to 4 years old and 5 to 8-year-olds, which will take place within the Emperors Palace grounds. The kids' event will start at 12:00.

The Saturday afternoon's big action will come in the form of the Emperors Palace Circuit Spectacular, which will take place within the Emperors Palace grounds.

This event is by invitation only to South Africa's top professionals and consists of a 30-minute criterium that will coincide with entertainment, provided by Emperors Palace.

Emperors Palace provides the venue for registration for the all the events on the Friday and Saturday leading up to the weekend. With all the action planned for the Saturday, in particular, it will certainly be a worthwhile day out for the entire family.

Other registration venues are Cycle Lab in Fourways and Sweat and Gears in Benoni.

On-line entries for all the events are open on www.cyclingnews.co.za <<http://www.cyclingnews.co.za>> .

For more information, call the race office on (011) 662 2494

Released by SupaCycling, on behalf of the Emperors Palace Cycling Classic. For media enquiries phone Wynand de Villiers on (011) 662 2494 or email Wynand@cyclingnews.co.za