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BIKI GUSTI GOURMET RIDE

*Words by Clive Pursehouse with images from Tammy
Brimner*



We don't all live in places like Southern California or Mallorca, and so for most of us the dream of yearlong riding is just that, a dream. But we have to start our "season" at some point—even those of us knee deep in cyclocross mud take some down time—unless we're, say, an aspiring world masters road champion. So how we start our cycling calendar year varies; it may be a long base-building spring in the rain or, if it was a rough winter in the Upper Midwest, it might be a while. Though smart trainers and Zwifting have made all of this winter business much more tolerable.

You have to start somewhere, but it's tough to top the toe-dip into a new cycling season that one experiences in British Columbia, notably at the Bici Gusti. This Canadian spring ride marks a seasonal opening for the Vancouver cycling set.

Neil McKinnon is one of the new cycling scene's founding fathers, building a reputation on the wildly successful RBC Gran Fondo Whistler, which is North America's most successful fondo event. He has cultivated a cycling community through a series of experiences that emphasize camaraderie and coming together among roadies, as opposed to what we can sometimes experience. Each year's calendar is kicked off on a weekend with the Bici Gusti Gourmet Ride, hosted at the Four Seasons in Whistler. This year's edition takes place May 17–19.



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What may mark the beginning of the season for some has the potential to mark a much more substantial beginning for others. The Bici Gusti vibe offers an inviting, luxury experience for new cyclists, who may have aspirations for taking on some of McKinnon's larger events like the gran fondo or his big, multiday ride, The Intrepid.


"We want people to have a memorable experience, at our fondos or our Bici Gusti events and there's a bit of a luxury element to it," he says. "Our support stations might include wine and nice cheeses. But there's no attitude whatsoever and I think that really appeals to new riders, and in particular to women who want to get into this sport but might see the attitudes or standoffishness of some of their male counterparts as a barrier." However, female participation at the RBC Gran Fondo Whistler is almost 30 percent. And these are some serious roadies, with no roadie attitude whatsoever.

As for the Bici Gusti Gourmet Ride, it's an event that offers a little bit of everything, kicking off with a very personal reception to open the weekend. McKinnon's approachability and attitude are infectious and so within an hour you feel like a member of this growing Canadian cycling family. The itinerary includes yoga and spin classes, pool parties and gourmet cooking demonstrations by some of western British Columbia's most talented culinarians. All of this is done with a family vibe and delivered with the full force of Four Seasons hospitality. There is a 70-kilometer ride on Sunday morning along the mountainous Sea to Sky corridor, and in homage to the Giro d'Italia there's a gala dinner where guests are invited to dress with a touch of *maglia rosa* in their ensembles.

The Bici Gusti weekend places cycling seamlessly into a spectrum of family-centered conversations over food and drinks, with children splashing into the pool, and builds community among riders and their families. It's a brilliant approach and an undeniably good time!

For more information on this month's Bici Gusti event, May 17–19, go to: bicigusti.com (<http://bicigusti.com>)

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