



INFORMATION
YOU NEED ABOUT:
RACING

THE GUIDE



This Is Where the Fun Starts

Every year, thousands of Americans race. Very few of them win. All of them have a blast. Isn't it time you joined the party?

Race face:
A Bay to
Breakers
competitor



YOU CAN'T LOSE

Lance Armstrong isn't returning to racing; he never quit. Those marathons he entered during his retirement weren't fun runs. And the fact that a guy with his money, records, and little black book kept coming back for more tells you all you need to know about racing: Once you start, you never really stop. ¶ Set a race in your sights and everything you do changes. Food becomes fuel. Sleep becomes recovery. The resignation to exercise becomes the compulsion to train. Winning? That's a moving target; if your goal is only to enter, you've won as soon as you show up. From there, your limits are up to you. ¶ Consider this your starting line. We've not only picked the best races of the next year—a full calendar of contests around the U.S. for everyone from pros to regular Joes—but we're going to help you get to the finish in style. Study up, mark your calendar, and get to work. There's a long, fun road ahead.

Pole Pedal Paddle

Jackson, WY // April 4

With the Tetons as a backdrop and divisions for everyone from enduro-geeks to families, this is arguably the country's best multisport race. But the variety—a three-mile, 3,500-vertical-foot downhill ski; 10K cross-country ski; 20-mile road ride; and final nine-mile, Class I-II boating leg down the Snake River—can be a gear debacle, warns Olympic gold medalist and race veteran Tommy Moe. "If you're competing as an individual, having someone help you at the transitions is huge," he says. Another secret: On the river leg, "if you have a really fast downriver boat, you can make up a lot of time." Or round up your buddies, get some good costumes, and enter the "Fun Class," where entrants are judged not on time but, rather, as the rule book states, "how much fun they appear to be having." From \$35; polepedal-paddle.com

Sea Otter Classic

Monterey, CA // April 16–19

The Classic is huge, with 10,000 bikers competing in nine events and dozens of classes—everything from cross-country to downhill to criteriums (short-course road races)—in front of 50,000 spectators. That means there's a race for everyone, but don't overdo it. Focus on no more than one per day and pick your best event—with so many entrants, the competition can



Pole Pedal Paddle

be tough even in beginner races. Study the complex schedule so you aren't late for your race. (Staying away from the beer tent helps.) Be sure to catch the crit and short-track races, where you can get right next to the action, and bring some binocs to watch the dual-slammer racers charge downhill, kamikaze style. From \$35; seaotterclassic.com

Athens Twilight Criterium

Athens, GA // April 24–25

"This is the hippest rock-star crit in the country," says 2007 pro-division champ Mark Hekman. "It's at night, the crowd is ten people deep, there are lots of wrecks, and the atmosphere's electric." Athens is

small, so hotels fill up with cyclists and spectators (book early) and parking downtown is scarce (ride from your hotel). If you make it through the qualifier, on a mellow, azalea-lined neighborhood course, you'd better have your pack-riding skills polished. You'll pound 20 laps on the same kilometer-long downtown loop the pros ride—including 90-degree, beer-slicked turns in fields of 100 or more. The scariest corner—Clayton and Lumpkin—is also the best place to watch the carnage that is an integral part of crit racing. \$30; athenstwilight.com

Wildflower Triathlons

Lake San Antonio, CA // May 1–3

"The Woodstock of triathlons" is not only a classic three-race event (Olympic distance, long course, and mountain bike); it's also a massive campout, replete with roaring bonfires and post-race partying for 7,500 athletes and 30,000 spectators in a central-California county park. Competition for good camping spots is fierce, so plan to arrive at the race site



Sea Otter Classic



Wildflower Triathlons

by Thursday afternoon if you care about sleeping comfortably. Bring a wetsuit—Lake San Antonio averages 66 degrees—and put your bike in its granny gear for the transition, since the ride starts with an immediate, ramp-like hill (the first of many). The run course is mostly off-road, so bring light trail runners. And pack your allergy meds; the pollen levels are off the charts around the lake in early May. \$260; tricalifornia.com

Bay to Breakers 12K

San Francisco, CA // May 17

The Bay to Breakers is really two races: a screaming-fast elite 12K across the city to the

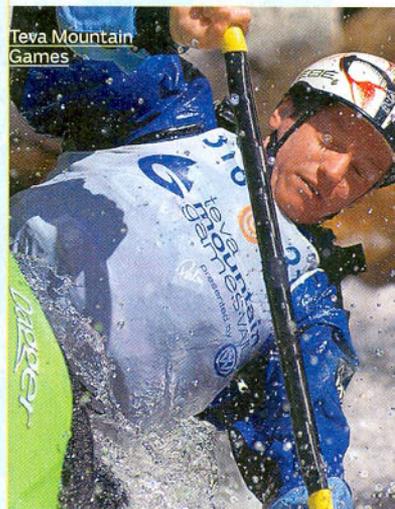
ocean and a carnivalesque parade of 65,000 runners in various states of both costume and undress. If you're there to race, arrive at least an hour before the gun to slip into one of the new corrals for more serious runners near the starting line, so you won't have to slalom through the jogging mariachis, the human six-packs, and the infamous school of upstream-running salmon. Don't blow your reserves on the 11 percent climb up Hayes Street; save your breakaway for the top and the next 4.5 miles of gradual downhill through Golden Gate Park. If you're there to party, don't wear anything you'll regret after five

miles (like a fat suit), and don't flaunt your fun. The cops won't return that ingenious kegmobile, full or empty. \$44; ingbay-tobreakers.com

General Clinton Canoe Regatta

Bainbridge, NY // May 22–25

With fireworks, carnival rides, and 3,000 paddlers racing up to 70 miles on the scenic Susquehanna River, the 47-year-old General Clinton is the most welcoming river race out there. While Olympic hopefuls and pros will show up with their 20-pound graphite canoes and carbon-fiber paddles, there are dozens of shorter races for families and ama-



Teva Mountain Games

teurs. "Any old canoe will work," says Jim Genkos, owner of nearby outfitter J & J Canoe Supplies, "but you should invest in some foot braces and foot straps for improved stability and easier steering." His other tips: Pre-run a few sections of the course (especially the put-in and the fast stretch below the Oneonta Dam) and persuade some friends to drive along the river with supplies so you can keep your boat light. From \$32; canoeregatta.org

Teva Mountain Games

Vail, CO // June 4–7

If you're a multisport junkie, the Teva Mountain Games is your fix. It draws top athletes from half a dozen disciplines, including trail running, white-water kayaking, cycling, climbing, and adventure racing, but amateurs can compete alongside them in almost all of the events. The best strategy is to treat the three-day weekend like a marathon. Pace yourself at the parties and concerts—past acts include Jurassic 5 and Ozomatli—so you'll still have energy for your events. The best all-comers race is Saturday night's 5K mud run, which boasts a start/finish area built around a beer garden. Don't miss the spectator-favorite 8 Ball Kayak Sprint and freestyle mountain-bike events. From \$20; tevamountaingames.com

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL RACERS

You've registered and bought the gear. Now make the most of your big day.

1. Train high, race low.

Don't expect to be at your best if you're training at sea level and racing in the Rockies. But if that's what you have to do, make a vacation out of it and arrive a week early to acclimatize.

2. Pick the right team.

Success will hinge on having everyone, from relay mates to support

crew, working toward the same goals. Talk through your expectations before you commit, especially when large fees and travel are involved.

3. Give yourself enough time. Allow a full day to recover from travel before an important race, and get up early. Race-day mornings are always more compli-

cated than they seem the night before.

4. Never try anything new on race day.

Unless you like equipment failures, blisters, and Porta-Potty lines, save the experimentation for the post-race party.

5. Know the course.

You can't pace yourself if you don't know what's in store.

6. Start slow. Everyone feels like a hero at the starting line; chill out so you can finish like one.

7. Eat early and often.

Aim for at least two gel packets (50–60 grams of carbs) or the equivalent per hour of exertion—and enough electrolyte drinks so you never feel even close to thirsty.



24 Hours of Moab

Pikes Peak Ascent

Manitou Springs, CO // Aug. 15
Running 13 miles to the top of a Colorado fourteener, mostly on singletrack, will alter your understanding of runner's high. The key to minimizing the hurt, says six-time winner Matt Carpenter, is to take it easy on the 13 switchbacks in the first three miles—the steepest section of the course—and start picking off runners on the wider, easier section above them. The aid stations are too far apart for mid-pack runners to stay fueled, so bring a few gels to avoid bonking. And no matter what the weather is like down low, bring gloves, a hat, and a jacket for above tree line. "Hypothermia will slow you down," says Carpenter. \$95; pikespeakmarathon.org

Hood to Coast Relay

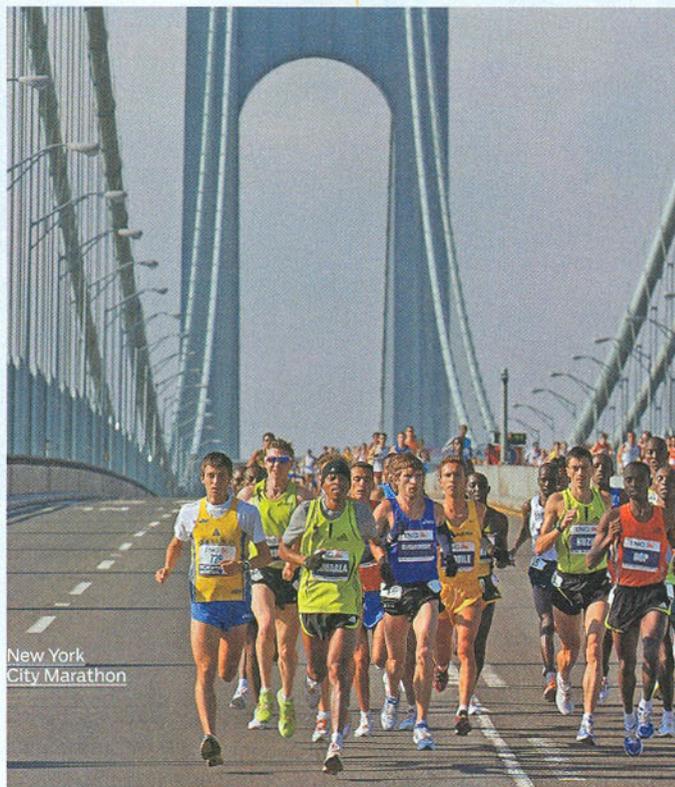
Portland, OR // Aug. 28–29
Bad news: You'll be running 197 miles nonstop from Mount Hood to the Pacific Ocean. Good news: You have 11 teammates to help. Use them wisely. The 36 relay legs average five and a half miles, but the two best runners should take the fifth and ninth posi-

tions—the hardest and longest shifts overall—while the slowest racer should take the first, the descent from Mount Hood. Key tip for the downhills: Vaseline on your feet. "Blisters knock people out of the race more than anything else," says race founder Robert Foote. Pack your two chase vehicles well—beware of the long rural stretches with few amenities like food and gas—and don't forget your map. \$95 per runner; hoodtocoast.com

24 Hours of Moab

Moab, UT // Oct. 10–11
It's the most famous 24-hour mountain-bike race, held in the

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New York City Marathon

mecca of the sport, which is why 4,000 racers and spectators swarm this 15-mile loop every October. "The course alternates between rocky and really sandy," says Chris Eatough, six-time 24 Hour Solo World Champion. "So go with a wide tire—2.2 or 2.3 inches—since tread doesn't do much in deep sand or on rock anyway." And don't forget about comfort: Soft saddles, cushy suspension settings, and warm clothes for

the freezing nights will make the course a little less painful. \$150; grannygear.com

New York City Marathon

New York, NY // Nov. 1
First, you must remember this is the largest marathon in the world; you'll have 38,000 runners to contend with even before the race begins. If you're fast, you can guarantee a berth by logging a qualifying half- or

HOW TO CREATE YOUR OWN RACE

From the smallest charity 5K to the Tour de France, every race begins as someone's dream. For advice on launching your own event, we spoke with the man behind 24 Hours of Moab, Laird Knight, who's been promoting races for 25 years.

Pick the Right Spot > Getting insurance is pretty easy; there are standard policies. But land access will make or break you—dealing with private owners, the state, etc. Just know going in that this will be a lot of work. Also, do you have water and electricity or will you have to bring it in? That's a lesson I learned the hard way. The 24 Hours of Moab site is 12 miles from the nearest utility.

Get Volunteers > Be enthusiastic, and share that. If you know where you want to go, people will help you get there. And take good care of them. Tell them what they're going to do and for how long, feed them, give them a memento, and thank them.

Prepare to Spend > It's a labor of love, for sure. At best, you lose money the first two years, break even the third, maybe earn back in year four what you lost the first two, then go into the black in year five.

Lose the Jerks > Listen to complaints, especially if they're offered with good intentions. But if someone is just mean and mistreats you or your staff, ban them. Remember, you're here for fun.



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largest in the U.S., with 5,000-plus entrants snaking through thick pine forests from Cable to a tent city in Hayward, where finishers are rewarded with local beer and brats. Although racers set off in ten waves, based on prequalifying times, the start is still no picnic. The waves go five minutes apart, so be at the adjacent warming tent an hour early to get a good position. "Give yourself space," says 25-time competitor Marcia Engbretson. "Crashes occur, poles are broken—be sure to wear eye shields." Start slow: The highest elevation, about 1,700 feet, is in the first third of the course. Near the end, the wind can be blasting on the mile-long section across Lake Hayward. Draft off of someone if you can. From \$70; birkie.com

full-marathon time (the 2008 bar was set at 1:23 and 2:55, respectively, for men under 40) and applying by May 1. Otherwise, the standard lottery odds are a dismal one in eight. As soon as you're confirmed, book a hotel near Central Park. The night before the race, reserve your taxi to the ferries (or the official buses), so you won't miss your boat to the starting line, on Staten Island. Watch your pace: The first 16 miles are flat, but that changes after the Queensboro Bridge. "Our course is tough," says race director Mary Wittenberg. "Run the last 3.5 miles of the course beforehand; that alone shows you how hilly it is." \$155; ingnymarathon.org

The Iceman Cometh Challenge

Traverse City, MI // Nov. 7

The largest single-day competitive mountain-biking event in the U.S., this 27-mile point-to-point race is held just as often on snow as it is on dirt. Jeremiah Bishop, the 2008 champion, recommends riding a hardtail 29er to help power across the soft

stuff. Keep a steady cadence and stay loose on your bike so you don't squirm when it does. The final five miles are the hilliest, so ride them the day before to know what you're facing, says Bishop. And wear a full-zip jersey and light shell over a base layer so you can vent when you overheat. If you're interested in the 2009 race, you'll need to be fast before you even get there; registration opens February 27, and the 2,500 spots will probably go in two days. \$65; iceman.com

Silver Belt Banzai

Sugar Bowl, CA // Feb. 13-14

If the Olympic downhill and the U.S. Extreme Freeskiing Championships had a love child, it would probably look a lot like the Silver Belt Banzai. Skiers battle it out in mass-start heats of six, launching off cliffs, dodging trees, and navigating chutes in an all-out dash from the summit of Mount Lincoln. "It's a free-for-all," says Olympian and X Games skier-cross medalist Daron Rahlves, who's helping organize the event. "But there's not just one line to the bottom. You can stick to the open slopes or take the higher-risk/higher-reward option and air it off rocks." But,

face it, with 100 racers—and many a pro—you're not getting in on the \$10,000 purse. Play it safe and stick to skier's right. You might just survive your 90-second run and make it to the next round. But before you show up, be sure to get your ski legs in order. "Do some non-stops," says Rahlves. "It's not easy to send it all the way to the bottom. You're going to be hurting." \$100; sugarbowl.com

The American Birkebeiner

Cable, WI // Feb. 27

The 31- and 33-mile nordic-ski marathons at the Birkie are the



GO FOR GOLD

GT wants to give you a mountain bike. And a pit crew. And cheerleaders. All you have to do is be the highest-placed amateur at one of the seven events in the Golden Bike Series, which begins with April's Sea Otter Classic (see page 44). Your reward: Either a GT Zaskar hardtail or Marathon full-suspension bike—in a one-off gold—plus mechanics, eight cheerleaders, and both your entry fee and round-trip airfare for two to the next race. Win again and the good times continue; lose and it will all be taken away from you at the finish line and given to the victor—your old bike now the pumpkin in your Cinderella story. (Don't worry. At year's end, all winners receive a bike to keep.) gtisgolden.com

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Disagree with our picks for the best races in America? Got one we missed? Join the debate at outsideonline.com/races.