

# Locals road race into the sky

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Telluride, Colo. -

The mountain looms above. The highest paved road in the country paints a silver stripe to the top of Mount Evans, 14,264 feet tall.

Last Saturday, they gathered below, a spandex legion waging war on a mountain armed with only water bottles and svelte road bikes.

“It was just get on the bike and go uphill,” said Rick Fusting, first-time Bob Cook Memorial Mt. Evans Hill Climb racer. “I just put myself in a bunch of pain.”

It was his first true road race and he came in 29th in the senior men’s 35+ category with a time of 2:33. He laughs about the prospect of doping for recreational riders. “How do you know I wasn’t,” he jokes. “No, no Ricardo Ricco for me.” Ricco, the young Italian climber, is the most recent professional rider booted from the Tour De France for using drugs.

But enough about that. At Evans, the riders are clean in their suffering.

Fusting trained for the ride by climbing Red Mountain Pass a few times and riding to Durango and back with a group, including local hammer Daniel Murray, a lithe climber.

He rode the first part of the course with a group then tried to pick off riders who’d leapt ahead of the main group all the way to the top.

“Once it kicked around 6-7 miles, that’s when people started making big moves,” he said. “I just tried to leapfrog people, make my way up the hill.”

He started telling himself at 11,000 feet that living in Telluride, that climbing these mountains, would make a difference.

“It was fun, a good time,” Fusting said. “A very good time. I liked it.”

Sounds fun, right?

The race starts at an already-lofty 7,540 feet in Clear Creek, climbs to Echo Lake where the pack explodes toward the summit. Over 28 miles, nearly every pedal stroke uphill, riders spin their smallest gears clawing to the summit. The air gets thinner. The road gets steeper. The switchbacks keep ... switching.

The Paragon Racing Team was in full effect and so were a few other Telluride cyclists, no less serious.

The race team’s Murray took 20th in the pro field with a time of 2:03:39, a little more than 10 minutes back of the overall winner, Kevin Nicol of the professional Tokyo Joe’s squad.

Recently, Murray won the Lizard Head Pass Hill Climb by a narrow margin over another local on Evans, JuJu Jullien.

Jullien took 27th in the senior men 35+ category with 2:23:15. Jeff Bush came in 43rd in the same class, over the line in 2:40.

In the Senior Men Category 4, Paragon wrench and all around good guy Travis Young took 46th, riding a solid time of 2:41:46.

Paul Reich posted a strongman's result, coming in 14th in the senior men 45+ in an impressive 2:15:52. Reich won last year's Mountains to Desert race/ride after he broke away from the main field just outside of Bedrock.

The Paragon Racing Team's Chris Cardoza came in 37th in the same class, riding the peak in 2:30:30.

Some of the biggest names — and hearts and lungs — in cycling have come to conquer the mountain, most recently Durango's Tom Danielson, who's ridden alongside Lance Armstrong. That day in 2007, Danielson shattered the course record and put up a mark — 1:41:20 — that's likely to stand the test of many a professional rider to come. The senior women's course record is held by Jeannie Longo of France with a time of 1:59.19.