Wrapping up this month’s week-long extravaganza of good cheer, otherwise known as The Santa Fe Wine & Chile Fiesta, will be the third Annual Gran Fondo Bike Ride. If you’re into road biking and would like to hang with a great crew of celebrity chefs, vintners and pro riders, you might want to take it easy Saturday night, as the event starts at Four Seasons Rancho Encantado at 6:30 a.m., Sunday the 25th, with your pick of 45-, 75- or (for the extra-motivated) 100-mile loops.

I recently caught up with two celeb riders to get the scoop. Tim Duncan is executive VP of sales and marketing at Silver Oak Cellars in Napa Valley. The winery, a long-time participant in Wine & Chile, was founded in 1972 by Tim’s dad and has made a name for itself producing, as reported in the WSJ, an “upfront” Cabernet Sauvignon. Tim’s been into cycling since he was a kid, and has done three centuries this year. “The most recent one was called ‘The Death Ride’ in the Sierra Mountains south of Lake Tahoe. It’s a tough one,” he says. “A hundred twenty-eight miles, and 15,000 feet of climbing, all in one day. So my buddies and I seem to think that’s fun.”

While chef and owner of The Compound, Mark Kiffin, was taking a breather between lunch and dinner in the kitchen office, we met for a talk. “I started cycling in Pebble Beach,” Mark says. “When I opened up the Inn at Spanish Bay, which was in ’87 to ’89. It was a sport I enjoyed and was pretty good at—for me.” Mark continues, revealing his great sense of humor, “It got me out of playing golf. I’m like, ‘Oh good! I can do this and I don’t have to do that any more.’ Learning to golf in Pebble Beach is like learning to ski on the top of Aspen Mountain. No pressure at all!”

Riding, it turned out, provided Mark with a much-needed release from work. “What I like about riding a bike is there’s one seat,” he explains. “When you’re in the hospitality business—and I love this business, I’ve been in it my entire life, but I go out to dinner six nights a week basically; I just want to go by myself. You have to learn, ‘Be here now.’ Stay focused. Ride your ride.”

The Gran Fondo routes take riders through the historic villages of Nambé, Cundiyo, Truchas and Chimayo, with food stops along the way. I’m familiar with the countryside from my own (albeit motor-) cycling adventures. The village of Cundiyo, especially, has always spoken to me. It’s a magical little place, and to visit is to step back in time a hundred years. For the bicyclist however, the terrain may be the most notable feature. We’re talking the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The operative word being hill. Make that hills. Lots and lots of hills. And lest I forget to mention it, they’re steep.

Tim is into some long-haul riding, and I ask if, for him, the Fondo will be a piece of cake. “Well,” he says, and pauses a moment, “we leave [Santa Fe] that day, and I’m trying to be a good husband, so I’ll probably do the 45-mile instead of the whole thing. At elevation, you definitely can feel it a little bit, it can sap you. But I’m not too concerned about getting out there and being able to stick with it.” So perhaps a piece of cake it will not quite be. Tim adds, “We’re going to make a point Saturday night to keep the wine drinking to a minimum and get up Sunday and really go for it.”
The ride is a friendly event and a chance for riders to build camaraderie; nonetheless, I inquire from Mark if there might be any, um, competitiveness? “Oh, well! Every ride’s a race,” he exclaims like it’s a given. “There’s no pedaling around the neighborhood with us! We don’t get on our road bikes and just dink around. No, no. Oh yeah! We’re lining up, we’re going to draft; we’re going to help each other; we’re going to work together. But then when it comes time, I want to beat the—” Mark stops short.

And apparently Tim is on the same page. “Ahh… always,” he laughs. “Like when you ski—there are no real friends on a powder day. [Cycling] is a great equalizing sport… So yeah, we get a little competitive, for sure. Let’s see who’s got the legs to do it.”

Mark, who has ridden the Fondo before, says, “Last year I did the short leg that was 52 miles, and I came in first, which made me smile.” Though he adds as an aside, Wine & Chile executive director, host, and rider Greg O’Byrne, “was being polite to his guests,” I see. “This year,” Mark continues, “it’s at the end of Wine & Chile, after all week of work and everything we do… so I got to get up and do this? I’m doing the shorter thing no matter what. I’m just fine. My ego is not bruised. It’s a doozy going up there, you take that turn and go up to Nambé Falls, and you are climbing that thing. Any cardio sport you have to know, basically, ride your ride. Some people will take off—it’s like the tortoise and the hare… It’s catch and pass. It’s happened to me. You get all ego and excited, and the next thing you know, they’re leaving you.”

Given Mark’s style is more about shorter distances at greater speeds, he’s prepping for the Fondo. “I have an 18.5-mile loop that I do in an hour and two minutes.” An average speed of 18 or so miles per hour on a bike, is by the way, moving. “It’s up and down, and good hills, and I’m by myself. So I’ll start using that. I’ll go around twice, I’ll go around three times,” he says. “It’s like cooking. It’s not a good idea to start practice when you get to the James Beard House.”
Gran Fondo

With these two riders on it, this year’s short route should prove to be a very interesting friendly ride. This mantra “Ride to eat. Eat to ride,” is not uncommon to the cycling crowd, and both Tim and Mark find that riding ties enjoying food and wine into a healthy lifestyle. “Part of the reason we do this is to enjoy life,” Tim says. “And food and wine are part of that. Everything in moderation, except moderation. If you can get out there and really ride hard and exercise, and be consistent about it like we are, then you’re able to get out and have a good time and eat a rich meal here or there.”

As the years role by, Mark wonders, “How can I enjoy my business and be healthier?” We cook healthy, we eat healthy, we’re more focused on that.” But enjoying life is key. Mark regales me with some tremendous stories about riding in Italy. “I’d ride all through Tuscany, all around Florence and Sienna, I’d come back and I’d shower, rest for a little bit, put on a suit and go out to dinner. Steak Florentine! Bottle of wine! Go back to the hotel, fall asleep, wake up the next morning and go on my ride.” Indeed, ride to eat.

“Same thing at the Fondo,” Mark adds. “It’s a good bunch of [riders], we’re all laughing. It’s like, ‘Let’s go have fun together.’” Mark’s newest restaurant, Zacatecas, will be putting on tacos and libations at the finish. “Who doesn’t want a great taco and a glass of champagne at the end of this ride?” Champagne Perrier-Jouët to be exact.

Nationally, rides with a variety of celebs are becoming a popular means of fundraising. Both Tim and Mark are participating in a few such rides. Tim’s ridden for the Challenged Athletes Foundation, “where they ride from Sausalito right over the Golden gate bridge all the way to La Jolla. We do that in a week, 620 miles.” Mark mentions Chefscycle and says he’s been asked “to do a ride in October in Dallas to raise money for kids. It’s a century ride, which I usually don’t do. So we’ll see.” He then lights up in his affable way and exclaims, “I can draft behind some other guys!”

For more information, visit santafewineandchile.org, chefscycle.org and challengedathletes.org.

contemporary clothing...
for women

Wear Abouts
2016 Best of Santa Fe
1st Place Winner

70 w. marcy st.
santa fe
505.982.1399
wearaboutssf.com