

5th Annual Wilmington Grand Prix Gran Fondo

World-class ride through world-class attractions

The Brandywine Valley offers some of the best cycling terrain on the East Coast. On Sunday, May 15, riders can experience the spectacular rolling hills of chateau country during the Wilmington Grand Prix Gran Fondo, presented by Capital One.

The ride will offer cyclists the unique opportunity to traverse a 100-kilometer course linked by 13 cultural attractions, including stunning rides through world-class institutions such as Hagley Museum & Gardens and Winterthur Museum, Garden and Library. The Delaware Gran Fondo is the one time per year that cyclists will have the privilege of passing through these attractions on the same ride.

“This is a bucket list ride,” said veteran cyclist Stan Markwalder. “Cyclists have loved riding the Brandywine Valley for years, but we’ve always had to ride around the attractions. To be able to go through them as part of one ride is a fantastic opportunity.”

The ride will begin at 8 a.m. with a mass start – professionals and amateurs – at the Delaware Art Museum on Wilmington’s Kentmere Parkway. Riders will then circle Rockford Park, passing the iconic Rockford Tower and working their way to the Brandywine River and the gates of Hagley Museum. Once inside Hagley (site of the gunpowder works founded by E. I. du Pont in 1802), riders will meet their first significant challenge, a 1.6-mile climb that begins on the banks of the Brandywine River and works its way past Hagley mills and residence and onto Buck Road.

Riders then proceed to historic Route 100 and endure a mild 1.5-mile climb to the gates of Winterthur. Riders will enjoy a magnificent 2.5-mile ride through the bucolic 1,000- acre estate, passing the 175-room mansion, a portion of the steeplechase course, and exiting onto perhaps Delaware’s most popular road for cycling, Route 52, a road designated as a National Scenic Byway.

Once past the historic village of Centreville, it is on to the hills and dales of the Northern Loop where riders cross the Brandywine River over the first of two covered bridges. The riders meet their biggest challenge of the day – a .8-mile/4.5 percent-average-grade timed climb up the “steps” of Ramsey Road, and finish the loop on the .25 mile/2.5 percent climb for time up Route 52 before the first rest stop at the Delaware Natural History Museum. After nourishment and sharing bragging rights for the climbs, the riders get to experience the exhilarating downhill over Hoopes Reservoir. Riders will follow the banks of the Reservoir via Hillside Mill Road and empty onto Barley Mill Road, where they climb the fabled Barley Mill hill. They then pass through the shadows of the second covered bridge at Ashland. Sharpless, the hill that keeps on giving, is the last major obstacle before settling in at the Mansion of Auburn Heights.

Then it is on to the Southern Loop, through Hockessin, Pike Creek and on to the outskirts of Newark before the hosts at Woodside Creamery make it all worthwhile with dishes of their delicious homemade ice cream. In case you were wondering, there are several more climbs before a revisit to the Delaware Natural History Museum rest stop. The Gran Fondo concludes with a pass through the lower part of Rockford Park before returning to the Delaware Art Museum, where a robust post-ride party in the museum’s sculpture garden awaits the finishers.

“It’s a world-class ride through world-class attractions,” said Jerry duPhily, a coordinator of Grand Prix weekend. “Bicycling Magazine recently did a feature, 50 Once In a Lifetime Rides. This is that type of ride.”