



## **SUZUKI 24 Hour National Point Series Kicks Off at Vail Lake** **Top Athletes Come From Across the USA**

TEMECULA, Calif. - The Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series kicks off its 2008 race season at the picturesque Vail Lake Resort outside of Temecula, California. The Suzuki 24 Hours of Vail Lake, the first stop on the six-race nationwide team relay and solo mountain biking circuit, will run around the clock from noon on Saturday, April 26 until the following afternoon on Sunday, April 27.

"We're really excited that Suzuki Auto is taking a position in mountain biking," said **Laird Knight**, race director and president of Granny Gear Productions. "The 24 Hours of Vail Lake uses one of the most fantastic trail systems in southern California. With the excellent weather this area is known for, it is a perfect venue to the season-opener."

"Suzuki is increasingly becoming known as an active, energetic brand that embodies its 'Way of Life!' brand philosophy," said **Gene Brown**, vice president of marketing and PR, American Suzuki Automotive Operations. "Whether you're participating in the team relay or the solo event, the 24 Hour Series participants exemplify the active lifestyle Suzuki embraces. And for getting to the trailhead, few vehicles are better than Suzuki's SX4 Crossover or Grand Vitara."

By virtue of having hosted this race for the past six years, Vail Lake is rapidly becoming a highly regarded mountain bike center for Southern California cycle enthusiasts. The resort is located nine miles east of I-15, on Hwy 79 and covers 9,000 acres, with frontage onto Vail Lake itself. It offers tent camping and 500 RV sites with full hookups.

Over the years, rider feedback has been incorporated into the Vail Lake course design, resulting in a 10.22-mile route that includes 1,498 feet of vertical ascent each lap. Lap times range between approximately one hour for advanced riders and nearly two hours for intermediate riders, with the majority of competitors somewhere in between.

"It's exactly what I look for in a race course, especially one for 24-hour racing," said **Knight**. "There's a big, long climb early in the lap and a fast and fun roll through the rest of the circuit. What sticks out in my mind is how much fun the course is to ride."

Vail Lake is a season-starter for some of the finest ultra-endurance cyclists, including last year's 24 Hour National Point Series champion **Rob Lichtenwalner** of Nazareth, Pennsylvania, and Hawaii UltraMan world champion and 2006 Race Across America (RAAM) winner **Shanna Armstrong** of Lubbock, Texas.

"This will be my first time at Vail Lake, it looks like a pretty cool venue." said **Lichtenwalner**. "By the time I quit racing, I want to be able to say I've competed on every Granny Gear course. I never get bored riding Laird's courses, which is a big factor for a 24 hour solo racer." Lichtenwalner says he's bringing his best form with him.

**Shanna Armstrong** returns after making her 24 debut here last year. "The 2007 Vail Lake race was only the second bike race I've ever competed in. I finished, but I came in last! It's a miracle that I survived it," joked Armstrong. "Where do I start? My bike was too big for me, my shoes didn't fit quite right, I didn't know that it was a momentum course, or that I'd have to learn to spin in a small gear to get over these hills, I didn't know that it can get down near 30 degrees at night, or how steep the descents were, and I didn't spend time learning the course beforehand. I finished the first loop and got scared to death! I realized how dumb I was to sign up for this race, but I survived the first lap, and I actually wanted to go back out for more. It was exhilarating and made me realize how tough mountain bikers are! I'm more experienced at mountain biking now, so my goal is to ride through the night," said Armstrong.

Since her first race nearly one year ago, Armstrong has competed in mountain bike events in Switzerland and her native Texas.

While Shanna Armstrong finished at the tail end of the field last year, another RAAM challenger, **David Haase**, finished at the other end, taking the victory. This year, Haase, a bicycle shop owner in Fond du Lac, Wisc., is hoping to find time in a busy spring to defend the title and visit with his sponsors Nite Rider, a bicycle lighting manufacturer headquartered in nearby San Diego.

The Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series will visit six premier mountain biking destinations from April through October, including the series finale in Moab, Utah on Oct. 11, considered by many as the greatest mountain biking race in the world.

For more information about the Suzuki 24 Hour National Point Series, please visit [www.grannygear.com](http://www.grannygear.com).

### **About Granny Gear Productions**

Granny Gear Productions, a sports marketing and event production company, has earned a reputation as mountain biking's most innovative and successful event organizer. With more than 26 years as a mountain bike race promoter, Granny Gear President and CEO, Laird Knight, created the 24-hour racing format in 1991. In 2001, Knight became West Virginia Tourism's Person-of-the-Year and in 2002, Knight was inducted into The Mountain Bike Hall of Fame.

In 2000, GGP created its unprecedented and unrivaled RealTime™ Scoring System, that tracks every rider and every lap, posting results for every team in real-time on the web. [www.grannygear.com](http://www.grannygear.com)

### **About Suzuki**

The Brea, Calif.-based Automotive Operations of American Suzuki Motor Corporation was founded in 1985 by parent company Suzuki Motor Corporation (SMC) and currently markets its vehicles in the United States through a network of approximately 500 automotive dealerships in 49 states. Based in Hamamatsu, Japan, SMC is a diversified worldwide automobile, motorcycle and outboard motor manufacturer with sales of more than two million new automobiles annually. Founded in 1909 and incorporated in 1920, SMC has operations in 187 countries. For more information, visit [www.media.suzukiauto.com](http://www.media.suzukiauto.com).

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