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Boulder cyclist faces 500 miles in the desert

By Maggie Flanagan, For the Camera
September 28, 2005

Five hundred and eight miles of California desert. Two days. One bike. One man.

Next week, Boulder resident Felix Gallo, 45, will make his second attempt at the aptly named Furnace Creek 508 endurance bicycle race.



Sammy Dallal

Felix Gallo, of Boulder, will race through 508 miles of desert next week in the Furnace Creek 508, an endurance bicycle race in California.

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"I don't think you can get more extreme than 508 miles through the desert in 48 hours," Gallo said.

The ultramarathon race, which takes place Oct. 8-10, starts in Santa Clarita, Calif., passes through the Mojave Desert and Death Valley and finishes in Twentynine Palms, Calif. Along the way, riders will gain more than 35,000 feet in elevation.

"The desert is bleak. There's nothing but sand, cactus trees and sagebrush. Mentally, it just gets you really down," Gallo said.

So, why do it?

"It's a solitary sport. You're testing the physical and mental capacity to endure this kind of pain and this kind of extreme physical feat," Gallo said. "It's a challenge. I want to see if I can do it."

Last year, Gallo dropped out of the race after 325 miles and 25 hours of riding in 50-mph winds. Race director Chris Kostman described the winds as "thermonuclear" and noted that 52 percent of the participants completed the race last year.

"There's always a relatively high dropout rate because it is a vigorous race, but about 10 percent more than usual dropped out last year," Kostman said.

This year's race benefits the Challenged Athletes Foundation, and all riders are encouraged to help raise funds to pay for sport wheelchairs, running prosthetics and training and competition expenses for challenged athletes. Gallo has raised about \$300 of his \$1,000 goal, but he's still taking contributions via his Web site, www.raceforareason.kintera.org/felix.

[org/felix](http://www.raceforareason.kintera.org/felix).

"I think it's really important if you're an able-bodied athlete to try to give back to the sport by helping people who probably can't participate without

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financial assistance," Gallo said. "You're out there riding not just for yourself, but for someone who can't."

Inspired by his father, who has held several national long-distance cycling records, Gallo began endurance racing in 1990 while living in Florida. This year, Gallo's father and mother will act as his support team, following in a vehicle in case anything goes wrong.

"He's very enthusiastic, and I'm very proud," said Victor Gallo, 73. "He used to be my support group, so now I'm repaying him."

Gallo, like most of the race participants, isn't a professional athlete, but he trains an average of 400 to 500 miles per week, sometimes with the Rocky Mountain Cycling Club. He hopes to finish in less than 40 hours, but said he'll just be happy to finish at all. He hopes this year the weather will cooperate.

"That's one of the wild cards of this race," Gallo said. "You don't know the weather conditions. You don't know the temperature conditions. It's really a crapshoot. You could be out there in the best shape of your life, and they could get a heat wave, but it's 48 hours come hell or high water."



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