

# Mount Airy, North Carolina Couple aims to sweep top titles at US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship

*The 5th annual US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship will be held March 22-24 at Blockade Runner Beach Resort, Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina*

WRIGHTSVILLE BEACH, NORTH CAROLINA, USA, February 12, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Robert "Fear the Beard" Marion captured the men's elite title in the 2016 US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship. Two years later, Philicia Marion pushed to victory and earned the elite title in the women's division. This year, the husband-wife professional biking team from Mount Airy, NC aim to carry the day and secure both titles.

"How awesome would it be if we could win both titles in the same year?" said Robert Marion, who has worked his way back into the top-ranks of cyclocross and mountain biking following a serious injury in 2017. "There will be a lot of really strong guys and ladies showing up for this race, but that's what we're shooting for."



Robert and Philicia Marion of Mount Airy, NC – Courtesy Robert B Butler

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*Robert 'Fear the Beard' Marion*

“Going into this race, one of our goals is to win it together,” added Philicia Marion, a top mountain biker in the region and ranked in the top 30 nationally in cyclocross.

“Hopefully, we can make both titles go our way this year.”

The 5th annual US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship, presented by Alpha Mortgage, will be held March 22-24 with activities and races based at host hotel Blockade Runner in Wrightsville Beach. Early registration has

attracted bikers from nine states, including North Carolina, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Maryland, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island.

“Athletes check-in Friday at Blockade Runner to inspect the race conditions,” said Shawn Spencer, Race Director and owner of Bike Cycles. “Saturday there will be a bike expo on the beach-side lawn before and after the races, followed by the awards ceremony. Competition includes a two-hour elite race; a 90-minute intermediate event; and a 60-minute race for beginners. Popular obstacles will be on the course this year with fresh surprises to challenge the bikers.”

The competition will be intense in all races, especially the two-hour elite race.

"It's just hard," said Spencer. "The elite race requires conditioning beyond any other type of sport, plus the mental fortitude not to quit regardless of your suffering."

Sunday features an optional 18-mile social bike ride on the beach from Fort Fisher to Bald Head Island and back.

With a deep lineup of competitors in the elite 2-hour event, racers to watch include past elite champions John Overton of Wilmington (2018), Zdenka 'Zoe' Worsham of Raleigh (2017), and Jesse Piersol of Downingtown, PA (2016).

Returning champions in the 1.5-hour intermediate category include two-time winner Ed Stilley of Wilmington (2017-18) and Terry Slack of Hope Mills (2016). Matt Smith of Southport, past-champion in the 1-hour beginner division (2018) has signed up for this year's 1.5-hour intermediate race.

Already the largest fat bike beach race on the East coast and named one of the Top-20 festivals and events in 2018 by the Southeast Tourism Society, the US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship may double in size in 2019.

"For the past two years the race has been limited to 100-participants," said Spencer. "We're expecting a larger field in 2019 and have raised the cap to two hundred."

To accommodate the increase, Spencer plans to have two race times, segmenting the elite category from the intermediate and beginner groups, limiting each wave to 100-bikers.

"The elite racers will have the track alone for the first time," said Spencer. "The elite, intermediate and beginner races will be more exciting with less congestion on the track."

The field of women in the US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship has increased from near zero to sixteen-percent over the past four years. The growth rate is expected to continue in 2019.

The US Open Fat Bike Beach Championship will benefit the Wrightsville Beach Foundation, a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving public parks and amenities.



2018 Men's Elite Champion, John Overton – Courtesy Robert B Butler



2017 Women's Elite Champion, Zdenka 'Zoe' Worsham – Courtesy Robert B Butler

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