

Alpenrose Velodrome

By Daniel J Curran

The Alpenrose Velodrome is a single fixed-gear bicycle-racing track on the Alpenrose Dairy property in Beaverton. Constructed in 1967, it is one of two velodrome tracks in the Northwest; the second, the Jerry Baker Memorial Velodrome, is in Redmond, Washington. The Alpenrose Velodrome was a member of the American Track Racing Association, a group of velodrome managers that provides services to facilitate races nationally.

In 1959, Dutch cyclist Frans Pauwels and his family opened Kissler's Cyclery, a bicycle shop in downtown Portland (it closed in 2009). Pauwels had raced in the Tour de France in 1948 and 1949, and in 1962 he convinced Carl Cadonau, the son of the owner of Alpenrose Dairy, to add a half-mile dirt bicycle racing track to the dairy's community venues, which included baseball diamonds, a rodeo arena, and pony rides.

The dirt track, which opened in August 1962, offered the excitement of European racing, with graduated uphill and downhill runs, banked curves, and natural barriers. The Alpenrose Dairy published notices of the new track in the *Alpenrose Dairyland Gazette*, the house newspaper that was delivered to customers in their milk delivery boxes. Soon, cyclists were gathering at the track to race.

Bicycle racing officially came to Portland a few years later, in 1967. With Pauwels's urging, Carl Cadonau invested \$30,000 in a 1/6-mile Olympic-style velodrome, which was built with the help of workers at the dairy. With the velodrome under construction, and with the assistance of Portland Mayor Terry Schunk, Pauwels secured the 1967 U.S.A. Cycling (USAC) National Championships for the new facility. Pauwels also helped forge a bicycle-racing culture in the Portland area by sponsoring two racing clubs out of his westside bicycle shop—the Pacific Bike Racing Club and the Multnomah Touring Club.

The initial design for the velodrome design came from the Schwinn Company, but it was for a large track that was better suited for motor racing. There was no uniform method for measuring bicycle-racing velodromes, and the transitions into and out of the curves had to be cut to fit into the designated narrow space the velodrome was to occupy on the Alpenrose property. The confined area resulted in abrupt changes going into and coming out of the turns.

The Alpenrose Velodrome is the steepest velodrome track in the United States, with the rounded ends banked at 43 degrees and measuring 268.43 meters around with a 16.6-meter radius, not the typical 25- to 33-degree banks in other velodromes. It is considered one of most challenging as well as one of most exciting bicycle racing tracks due to the larger shape of the velodrome and its short, steep corners.

The Alpenrose Velodrome Challenge began soon after the velodrome was completed as an international event separate from the National Governing Body and nonlocal sponsorship. There were races in three categories: Keirin, Chariot, and Sprints for men and women and for elite and master racers. The Velodrome last hosted the USAC National Championships in 1989.

Other annual notable events at the Alpenrose Velodrome were the North American Six-Day race, the largest six-day race in the United States, and the River City Bicycles Cyclocross Crusade. Both men and women race on the same courses and compete for equal prize money, and the Cross Crusade had the most significant women's daily participation of any cyclocross race. The Alpenrose Velodrome also hosted weekly training sessions for all ages, and it has been a model for many other velodromes that have initiated their own homegrown events with local sponsorship.

The Alpenrose Velodrome was accessible to riders of all skills with no user fees, and cyclists were encouraged to train there to learn how to negotiate the short, steep radius corners. On February 23, 2021, the Alpenrose Dairy property was permanently closed for all community events. The property owners decided to close rather than insuring activity on the property. This property closure includes The Alpenrose Velodrome used for cyclocross races for more than 50 years.

Sources

Dodd, Kelly. "Franz Pauwels: Founding Father of Portland Bicycle Racing." *Bicycle Quarterly* (June 2010).

Alpenrose Velodrome website: <http://velodrome.obra.org>.

The Oregon Encyclopedia

https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/alpenrose_velodrome/