

# Calendar

## Wheel Party

### Rosarito-Ensenada Bike Ride

**T**here are quite a few of us, but it's mostly Americans, it's true," says 48-year-old Mario González Paniagua of Tijuana, who has completed the Rosarito-Ensenada 50-Mile Fun Bicycle Ride half a dozen times in the last ten years. "The people who live along the route figure that everybody's American," he says. "A lot of the cyclists bring candies and throw them, and the kids line up and yell in English, 'Candy! Candy!' I get a kick out of yelling back, 'Tell me in Spanish: Dulces! Dulces!'"

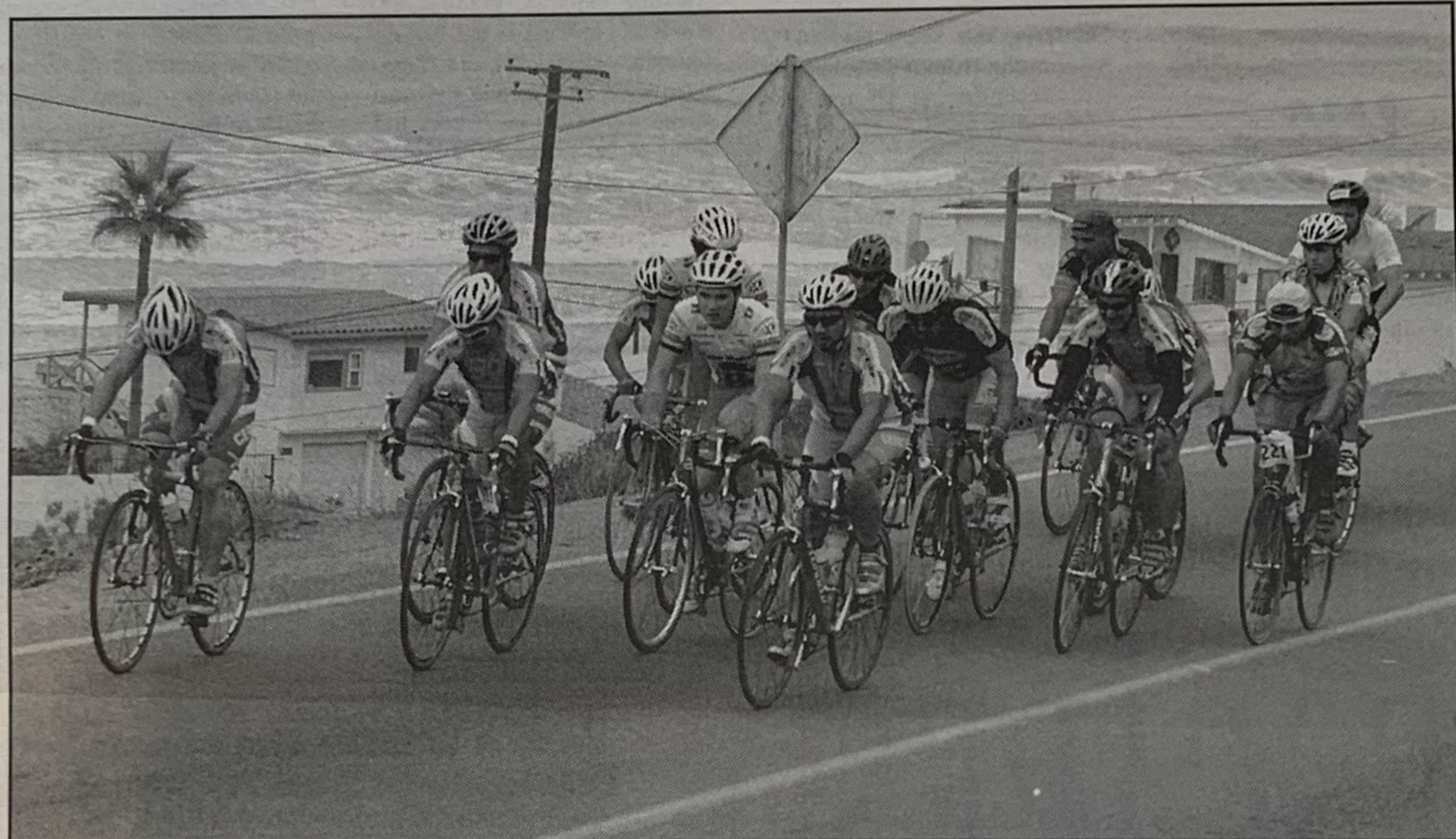
The official percentages are, in fact, 85 percent Americans, 15 percent local Baja residents, according to event statistics.

One wonders what the people who live in those ranchitas and tiny beach towns along the route think of 8000 or 10,000 cyclists wheeling past them, no matter what nationalities they are. "What I've noticed," says Paniagua, "is that the

people are more or less accustomed to it, because it's been going on for so many years. A few people bring out their chairs and sit by the roadside, just watching everybody, because they can't go anywhere anyway. The road is closed, and they're stuck wherever they are."

It's also true that some locals sell bananas and tacos to the crazy gringos each April and September.

Would Paniagua like to see more Mexicans participating, given, of course, that they, like himself, were able



#### LOCAL EVENTS

**Local Events**  
page 75

**Classical Music**  
page 92

**Art Museums & Galleries**  
page 94

**Theater**  
page 95

**Pop Music**  
page 99

**Restaurants**  
page 125

**Movies**  
page 139

to afford a mountain bike and black lycra? "The thing is," says Paniagua, "at least in Tijuana, it's not a very bike-friendly town. So the people that train? They cross the border and ride in San Diego. Drivers here treat you like you're just in the way. That's why I like to take advantage of the roads being cleared of cars for events like this. You know, it's beautiful country and I rarely get to see it on a bike."

The route is the old free road, Highway 1, which runs along the coast, then inland through rural countryside. After 22 miles, there is a steep approach to a mesa. Known as "The Hill," it's 2 miles long and a 7.5% grade. "It's funny how you can recognize first-time riders," Paniagua says, "because as soon as we hit a little upgrade, they'll start asking, 'Is this 'The Hill'?' They've never seen the big one. But when you're riding on the really steep one? Nobody's talking."

Because it's a ride and not a race, lots of people get off the bike and walk it, as Paniagua did the first time. Accomplished

cyclists can make it to the top without stopping. Paniagua usually rides with a group of friends of differing abilities. "So we separate," he says. "Mostly you're alone out there."

How long does the ride take? "I'm one of the bad ones," Paniagua says, because it takes him five hours. "I'm not thin," he adds to describe himself, since this conversation is by phone. "I'm a little heavy. I was going to say 'around the middle,' but I'm heavy around everywhere. The ones who do the ride in a couple of hours have great bikes and great bodies."

It's disappointing to learn that Paniagua won't be riding this time. "I'm out of shape. But the times that I haven't ridden I'm always at the finish line." He'll wait for his friends there and drive them back to Tijuana after the so-called Finish Line Fiesta. All he asks in return is the free beer ticket that comes with each adult ride registration.

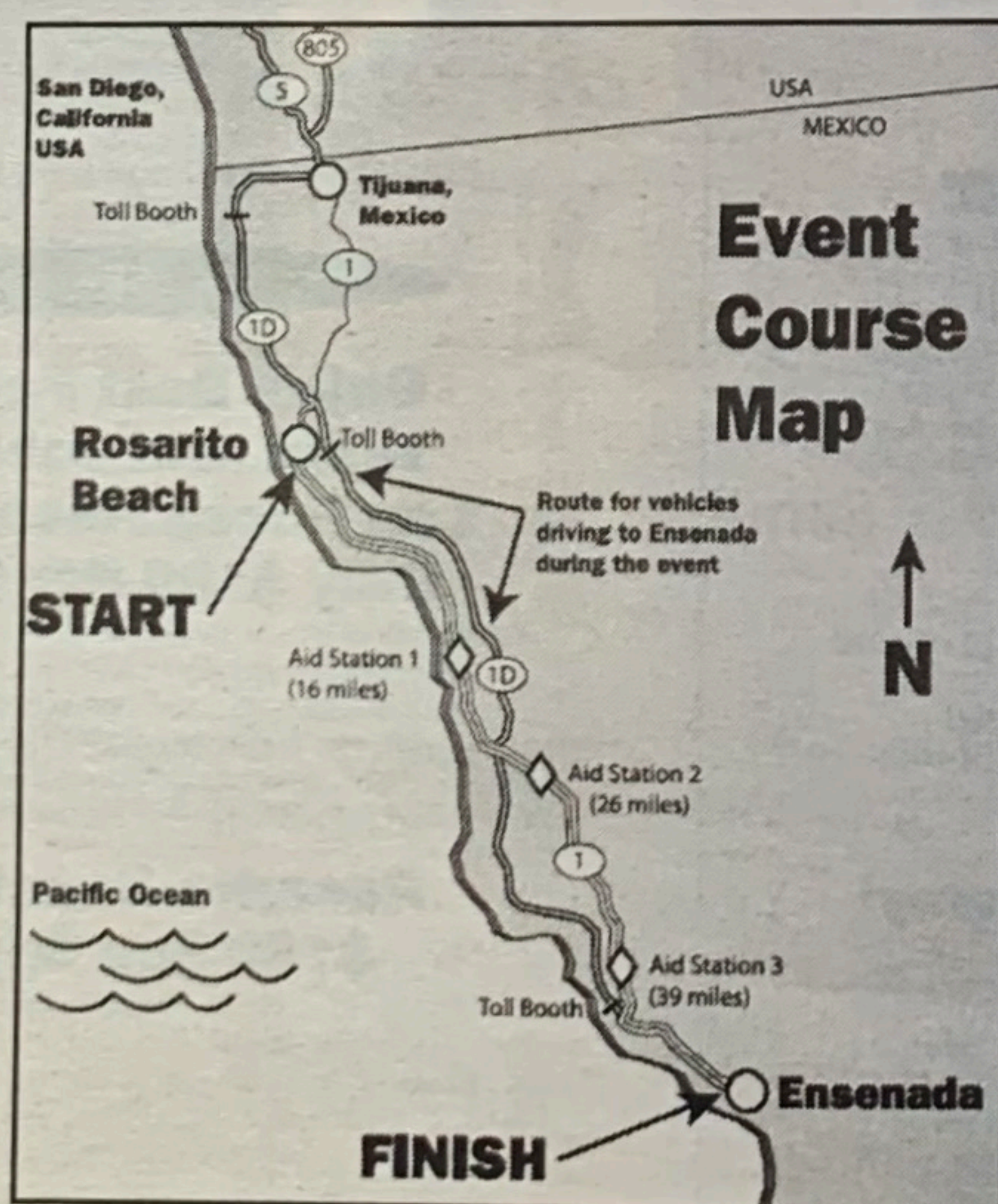
San Diego-based Gary Foster has run the event since 1989, its ninth year, when he was a recent graduate from SDSU. Last summer he bought a half interest in the company that owns the rights to the ride. Foster says this when asked about the party, "We actually brand ourselves as 'a party on wheels.' We're best known for that Finish Line Fiesta. You finish a lot of other events and, I know from personal experience, it's anticlimactic. You go through the finish line; you're done. At our finish line, we have a live band playing from

noon until sunset. We rent the city fairgrounds, located on the waterfront next to the cruise ship terminal. Local restaurants set up booths. The beer companies are there. Massage tables. Chiropractors. It's a street-fair atmosphere instead of what it is after a grueling race, where everybody's dying and wants to go home to bed."

Foster is asked about the Americans-to-locals ratio and if its lopsided nature bothers him. "I have no preference where the riders come from," he says. Later on, he is asked about another lopsided statistic. The male-to-female split, which is 70 to 30 percent. Does he want to change that? "I would love to have it 50-50."

And Paniagua? What does he think about the event's overwhelmingly male nature? "I really couldn't say, since when I'm riding I'm usually just looking at the ladies. I don't notice a lot of guys."

— Jeanne Schinto



**18th Annual Rosarito-Ensenada Spring 50-Mile Fun Bicycle Ride**  
**Saturday, April 17, 10:00 a.m.**  
**Starting line at the Rosarito Beach Hotel Boulevard Benito Juárez #31, Rosarito Beach Baja California**  
**\$30; \$20 for shuttle back to start**  
**858-483-8777 or**  
**[www.rosaritoensenada.com](http://www.rosaritoensenada.com)**