

# TAOS COMPOSITE

## MIDDLE SCHOOL MOUNTAIN BIKE TEAM



**Welcome to the 6<sup>th</sup> season of Taos Composite Middle School Mountain Bike Team!** This is a cross-country mountain bike team that is part of the New Mexico NICA League. We were the first National Interscholastic Cycling Association team in New Mexico and are based right here in the Enchanted Circle region. We welcome middle school mountain bikers of all levels and backgrounds from all area schools as well as homeschoolers. We are a diverse and inclusive co-ed team with scholarships assistance available to athletes needing financial support. We have several coaches, ride leaders, and volunteers ready to roll and are always looking for more. We are looking for sponsor support as well to continue making this team accessible to all.

**Why join?** Taos Composite has much to offer: as a team we learn skills quickly, receive valuable coaching, and inspire each other to achieve. We set goals and work collaboratively to not only attain these goals, but to also develop a wide range of effective skills. When you ride with a team, it makes riding and training FUN! Most importantly, this team is about having fun while setting goals, improving skills, and achieving personal bests. This a cross-country mountain bike team, a specific form of cycling which is different from road riding, downhill, enduro, dual slalom, trials, BMX, cyclocross, and track racing. Cross-country mountain biking includes a broad range of skills and team members often bring with them backgrounds and skills gained from other sports. This team's activities are focused upon preparing for and racing at cross-country mountain biking events. The coaching staff's highest goal is to provide students that have the desire to mountain bike the direction and camaraderie that will help them achieve both competitive success and personal development in a safe and enjoyable manner.

The entire coaching is excited to welcome you to a new year. Please read through the requirements and important dates (attached). If you are not sure about the commitment or the requirements, please contact us directly so we can talk about your situation. Also, if you are in need of equipment or a bike, please let us know as soon as possible. We are looking forward to riding and to getting to know ALL members of this team! Thanks for your interest and enthusiasm.

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## 2026 HOW TO JOIN!

You've heard about the Team, had some questions answered, and are a middle schooler (or know one) who wants to join. Now what?

How to join:

- Get Taos Composite middle school team paperwork from our website [www.fitaos.org](http://www.fitaos.org) (click on Cycling Programs and then find Middle School Mountain Bike Team).
- Complete all Team paperwork and return to Susie or Sean at FIT Base Camp or by mail.
- Pay Taos Composite team fees. See sliding scale for 2026.
- Visit the New Mexico NICA League (NMICL) website [www.newmexicomtb.org](http://www.newmexicomtb.org) for athlete registration and race registration. This is where you pay your NICA annual fee (\$60) plus your NMICL League fee (\$100) as well as race fees for individual races (\$35 per race) or \$310 total (before August 1<sup>st</sup>). Scholarships are available through the website, as well. The Student-Athlete scholarship can potentially cover your race entry fees.
- You will also complete NICA paperwork during the online registration process.
- Once these steps are completed, your athlete may participate in all Team practices and events.
- Need to borrow a bike? Please reach out to Sean with your needs and we will see what we can do to get you a bike for the season.
- In the meantime, WELCOME! Follow our Instagram and get ready for a great season!

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## 2026 Things You Need to Know - For Parents and Athletes

We are proud of both the fun and great success we have seen as the team grows and develops great riders.

**Overview:** Like other schools racing in the New Mexico NICA League (NMICL), our program seeks to strike a balance between being an individual and a team sport while retaining some relaxed recreation club qualities. For athletes new to cycling, immersion into training, racing, and the perceived pressure to perform may be intimidating. This is the reason there are various racing classes so riders are racing only against peers in the same grade. Middle school riders are placed in the following categories: 6<sup>th</sup> grade, 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

There will be four NICA races in NM, most a 2-4 hour drive away. Riders are scored individually and on a team basis. Girl's scores and boy's scores are added together in the team computation. Riders **must** register with the NMICL to participate. The season runs from August through October. All middle school students are welcome to participate. Our high school riders participate in the Colorado League.

**Why cycling?** Cycling is a fun, outdoor, lifelong sport with great social qualities. Groups of cyclists (except when climbing difficult hills) can talk, joke, and sometimes even sing as they ride. Enthusiasm for cycling as an alternative sport and healthy, active lifestyle is at an all-time high, especially here in the Taos Area with so many good places to ride.

**Why Cross-Country Mountain Biking?** NICA leagues are made up of cross-country mountain bike teams. All races within the high school leagues are cross-country style. The goal of this team and of the National Interscholastic Cycling Association is to bring mountain biking into the school arena as a legitimate, respected, accessible sport while developing the love of a lifelong sport in student-athletes. We develop physical and mental skills, self-reliance, and a connection to the outdoors. This is about both the individual and the team. The cross-country discipline of cycling is accessible both financially and physically. We understand the varied interests in cycling among our athletes (road biking, cyclocross, downhill and enduro) but our team will focus on cross-country training and racing only. The skills and fitness developed will carry over into all other cycling disciplines. We are all cyclists!

**Is Participating Dangerous?** Are you new to mountain biking? Forget what you have seen on TV with the X-Games or soft drink commercials. In cross-country bike races. The average speed is usually around eight to twelve miles per hour. This is an endurance sport where athletes with the perfect combination of fitness and skills will excel. Each year, the League collects data on injuries from every team. Statistically, we suffer fewer serious injuries than most other mainstream sports, including soccer.

We do our best to minimize the risks to your athlete. Certain risky behaviors are discouraged or forbidden, the helmet rule is strictly enforced and we teach each athlete bike control skills early in the season to minimize the risk of crashing. Of course, even with our best efforts, crashes and injuries can occur. We do our best to provide many parent/coaches as ride leaders, each equipped with a first aid kit and cell phone on every ride, one adult for each group when we split the team.

**Bike Racing is Girl-Friendly:** YES there are a bunch of girls racing in the League! In fact, girl participation is our fastest growing demographic. We aim to have significant girls' participation and your coaches work hard to make this happen.

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**How We Build Our Team and Train:** We don't have tryouts. If you try, and keep trying, you're on our team. No one is "cut." We create capable and confident riders out of timid, out-of-shape riders, year after year. Athletes who are already in good condition from other sports adapt quickly and do very well. We value and promote excellence, believing that ordinary athletes can attain big results through setting goals, mapping a strategy, and giving the task disciplined effort. Our riders will work hard and be transformed by the process.

We split the team workouts into fitness and skill-based groups since our goal is to challenge but not overwhelm each rider. All groups do a similar type of ride, albeit at different paces. We do our best to design a training plan appropriate for each rider's level of experience, fitness, and personal ambitions.

New riders and parents may be surprised when we tell them that by season's end they will most likely be able to easily ride a full 3 hours in hilly terrain but it's true! Riders who "made it to practice," that is. Athletes who follow our progressive training schedule will steadily gain fitness and those who skip practice may soon find themselves struggling to keep up.

Practice will not take place each weekday like some sports. A combination of longer rides, skills development, and interval training are effective in creating the endurance, strength and skills we need. If your athlete ignores our schedule and trains intermittently on his own, he/she will likely fall short of potential. On our Sunday "Stoke Rides", we have a unique opportunity to get some great riding and cover some serious miles. These are long days but by starting in the morning, we try to allow for family time and homework in the evening. Combined with one shorter weekday ride plus recommended core body strengthening, stretching, and rides during the week, this schedule is designed get us fit and race ready in a time-efficient way, minimize time on the bike, avoid injury, fatigue, and mental burnout.

Practices begin in August after school on Tuesdays. Practices will consist of skills development, interval training, and riding. On Sundays, we have occasional longer endurance rides, also critical to athlete development. Each athlete will need to continually monitor his/her own fatigue and stress levels and communicate with the coaches. Rest and recovery are a critical part of any training plan.

**What to Eat:** Athletes are expected to be informed and responsible with their eating habits. Your athlete will need more high-quality calories from complex carbohydrates and will also need more protein than is required for a non-exercising lifestyle. An inadequate or junk food diet will put your athlete at a disadvantage against those who are eating to win. Caffeine is considered a banned substance in NICA and as such should be avoided by our team athletes.

**Parents and Others Ride Along:** Training is a lot of fun and going to the races and camping with the team is the best of all. At the races, the whole gallery of spectators cheers and rings cowbells not just for their own kids, but yours too! This is a very friendly sport. Parents are encouraged to join at the races. Your help is critical in helping the team travel to each venue and eat as a group.

**About Commitment:** : If your athlete consistently misses workouts, especially the Sunday rides; he/she will not progress at the same rate as fellow athletes. This may become a source of frustration for your student once they start having difficulty keeping up and will send a clear signal to others that they are not committed to the team. This is a race team and, as such, each participant is strongly encouraged to try at least one race.

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**How Communication Happens:** We communicate with parents and athletes via Team App. This method is efficient and effective. Team App notifications will include training schedules, team news, tips, motivation and encouragement, recognition, planning for races, travel plans, and more. Please check Team App regularly!

**Schedule:** Please find the 2026 schedule on the FITaos website.

**Race Travel:** Race travel for our middle school team is up to individual families. We camp as a group and we provide coaching at all races but families provide their own transportation, food, and supervision when athletes are not on the course.

**General Health Guidelines:** Out of respect for the health of teammates, it is very important that athletes and coaches do not come to practices and/or races or ride in FIT vans if they have symptoms of any illness

**Code of Conduct:** We are committed to safety. We think about safety, teach safety, and require each rider to ride in a safe manner. Riders who repeatedly ignore our safety rules or engage in behaviors that present unnecessary risk to themselves or others will be dropped from the program. As representatives of the Taos Composite team and ambassadors of cycling, athletes are expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with that status and follow the rules of behavior at all times. **If a team member is seen riding without a helmet at any time during the season, the rider will be removed from the team – no excuses.**

**About Academics:** The goal for this team is to help develop our students academically, physically and socially into mature young adults. To qualify to participate, each athlete must be achieving academically in a manner satisfactory to wishes of his/her parents and the standards of the school.

**You'll Need Some Equipment:** Your athlete will need an appropriate bike, cycling clothing, and other items. Please consult with us before you buy anything so we can help you get the right gear and minimize the cost. Bicycles and helmets must be approved for function and safety, then re-inspected at regular intervals. Rift Cycles supports the team by providing discounts and we encourage you to utilize them. We have loaner bikes and helmets that are available to borrow.

**Team Sponsorship:** Our team will require a significant amount of sponsorship to help us make racing accessible to all. **Please contact us if you wish to become a sponsor or help us secure new sponsors.**

**Parent Ride Volunteers and Team Support:** To be successful, we need lots of help from team parents and volunteers. Some help with transportation and other things, some act in the capacity of ride volunteers. Riders should consider taking on some of the important responsibilities that make the team function. Less experienced riders need lots of help learning to keep their bikes in top mechanical shape and lots of encouragement and reassurance from those who were beginners not very long ago. If you or your rider would like to be formally designated as a mentor in some specific area, let us know. We are always looking for parents who would like to be trained as ride leaders and coaches. You do not have to be a talented rider or racer to function effectively in this role, you learn as you go, and it's a lot of fun.

Please be sure to let us know if you have any questions. Riders planning to be on the team must have all forms completed before they are able to attend team practices and events.