

EVENTS/CAUSES

Lexus holds cookout for cyclists to showcase brand lifestyle

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Lexus GS F

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

Toyota Corp.'s Lexus is showing consumers its experiential side with its inaugural Gran Fondo event.

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The Gran Fondo is a culinary and cycling event that will take place in Massachusetts May 27-30, showing consumers that the brand is about more than selling vehicles. With the economy's turn toward the experiential, the event gives Lexus a chance to make a clear brand proposition that affects the consumer beyond the wheel of the car.

"Lexus creates robust sports and culinary programs because we know these are passions for our customers," said Steve Jett, national manager, digital media & engagement events at **Lexus**. "We've aligned with some of the best athletes, chefs and hotels to create unique events and experiences that mimic the style, luxury and excitement of the brand.

"The Lexus Gran Fondo is no different," he said. "This event will bring together Lexus' hotel, culinary and cycling partners for three days of challenging rides and distinctive food and wine offerings that celebrate the local region."

Pursuit of perfection

XV Beacon is Lexus' official Boston-based partner, with Chatham Bars Inn in Chatham, MA also joining as a hotel partner.

Three days of challenging bike rides, of 28-, 50- and 100- miles, as well as food and wine pairings with a regional focus will highlight the event. The 28- and 50-mile routes will start and end at Chatham Bars Inn, while the 100-mile route takes cyclists between the two hotels.



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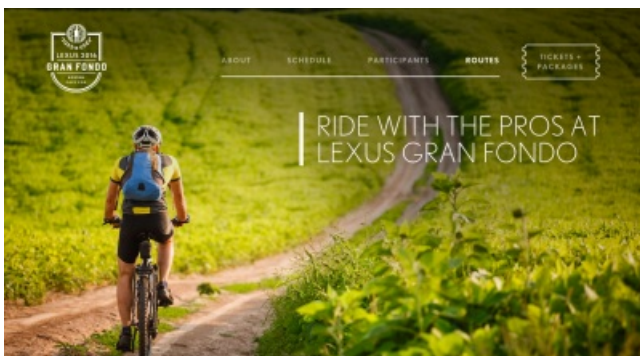
Lexus cyclist Christian Vande Velde and George Hincapie, who worked with Lance Armstrong on all seven of his Tour de France victories, will join those who opt for the 100-mile ride. Those who are unable or opt not to bike will enjoy the drive in a complimentary Lexus vehicle.

Upon finishing, all riders will be greeted by Lexus culinary master Dean Fearing's barbecue cookout. On hand for wine pairings and dinner will be Carlton McCoy and another culinary master, Carlo Mirarchi, co-owner and chef of Blanca, a two-Michelin star restaurant in New York.

Throughout the weekend, cycling will continue along local Cape Cod trails. A farm excursion and preserving class, a Champagne brunch and demonstration and more culinary events will also feature.

In addition to culinary and cycling events, the weekend will also feature scenic drives around the area and a clambake beach party on the shores of Chatham.

The welcome reception and rides can be purchased [here](#), separately or in packages, with selections ranging from \$140 per person for the 28-mile ride to \$760 for the culinary journey and 100-mile ride. Rates at the XV Beacon begin at \$425 a night, while the Chatham Bars Inn has rooms from \$475 per night. In addition, Lexus owners can receive a 15 percent discount.



Lexus Gran Fondo

Pricing events separately opens the Gran Fondo to aspirational consumers who may be less familiar with Lexus but interested in the cycling or culinary aspects of the journey.

With consumers now looking for experiences more than products, and with automobiles being infrequent purchases to begin with, events that expand the brand into other aspects of the lifestyle have emerged as frequent branding activities for automakers. Besides having the potential to initiate consumers interested in the experience rather than the brand, it also allows the automaker to boost ties with its consumers, helping to ensure that they do not jump ship with the next vehicle.

"We're looking to reach an affluent audience who live active lifestyles and value high-quality experiences like cycling and exceptional dining," Mr. Jett said. "We created this event to offer a full Lexus experience to participants, whether they are Lexus owners or not."

From automobiles to bicycles

Lexus has recently been leaning toward cycling as a way to attract a younger crowd.

For example, Lexus brought its "pursuit of perfection" to light as the exclusive automobile partner of the 2015 Amgen Tour of California.

During the professional cycling race, more than 125 Lexus vehicles served as transportation for the event's personnel, teams and medical staff. To further its presence at the sporting event, Lexus entitled two stages of the races and was present at daily podium awards ([see story](#)).

Additionally, Lexus explored a different kind of life on the road with an immersive video experience featuring Mr. Vande Velde.

"Lexus Elevate" uses 360-degree video technology to follow Mr. Vande Velde on a cycling excursion, presenting the viewer with a virtual reality experience enhanced by visual and audio effects. By focusing on the journey itself and life on the road, Lexus is reminding consumers of its expertise and encouraging them to set off on travels of their

own ([see story](#)).

Because of the potency of lifestyle branding, automakers besides Lexus are crafting similar experiences.

For example, British automaker Aston Martin is offering adventurous consumers a taste of elegance with a countryside tour.

Alongside travel retailer Elegant Resorts, the automaker is offering a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to tour Scotland, England and Italy in one of its sports cars. Such offerings are gaining popularity within the automotive sector because they introduce the brand to travelers and create ties to less tangible experiences ([see story](#)).

"Our involvement with non-automotive partners and events is a definite shift in strategy away from traditional media-driven partnerships," Mr. Jett said. "Consumers want brands to enhance their lifestyle with exclusive, one-of-a-kind experiences.

"We're committed to being more than an automotive brand as we continue to explore innovation in the performance, technology and luxury categories."

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