

TOUR DE WHITE ROCK |

Bombings, horrific injuries fail to derail women's champion

BY GARY KINGSTON

VANCOUVER SUN

A two-and-a-half-hour road race could hardly be considered stress-free for an elite cyclist. Considering where Leah Goldstein was two weeks ago, Sunday's 50-second win in the Tour de White Rock, even with its killer hills, surely must have seemed like a relaxing cruise.

Goldstein, a 38-year-old Vancouver native of Israeli ancestry, won the road race in the southern part of that country in blazingly hot 44-degree temperatures and after organizers altered the route because of bombing the day before.

"I told her if she hears the bombs, pedal faster," laughed mom, Ahoova, who had gone to Israel with her daughter.

About the only thing Goldstein had to worry about in White Rock was a bomb from a passing seagull or shrieking whistle of the passing Amtrak train.

Goldstein, who races for Langley-based Symmetrics Cycling, completed the tough 80-kilometre race that runs along scenic Marine Drive and up into the hillside subdivisions in two hours, 24 minutes, 47 seconds to beat New Zealander Rushlee Buchanan, who won Saturday's Tour de White Rock criterium, and the rest of the 42-woman field.

The powerful Symmetrics team, which currently leads the UCI Americas point standings, later swept the podium in the men's road race. Will Routley of Whistler won his first Tour de White Rock, pulling away from Christian Meier of Langley on the final lap to win by 21 seconds. Cam Evans of Tsawwassen, who won the national road race title in Quebec on Wednesday, was third, another 37 seconds back after he nipped Kristian House of Great Britain and the Navigators Insurance team by half a wheel length at the finish.

As impressive as the men were, Goldstein is one of the most heroic figures in cycling.

Two years ago, she suffered horrific injuries in a face-first, high-speed downhill crash in Bend, Ore., when she was clipped by another rider. She broke her cheekbone, her right arm and several bones in her pelvis and spent a few months in a wheelchair. She was initially told she would never race again.

But the gutsy Goldstein, who was a world kickboxing champion in the late '80s and who spent part of her 20s as an anti-terrorist commando in the Israeli army, was back on a bike by December of '05 and finished second at last year's Tour de White Rock.

She has had strong start this year, winning the Mt. Hood, Ore., stage race in June against some top American riders and capturing both the road race and time trial as the Israeli nationals, a first step to winning a spot at the Beijing Olympics.

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Men's champ credits Symmetrics team

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On Sunday, Goldstein was in an early breakaway with Buchanan, eventual third-place finisher Erinne Willock of Victoria, Alison Testroete of Abbotsford and Shelley Olds of Saratoga, Calif., before leaving that group behind at the midway point.

"I knew I had to breakaway and come in solo to win because I just don't have a sprint," said Goldstein. "I was watching on the climb and I knew I had the legs. I knew they were hurting."

When no one came with her, she said, she just pretended "I'm time trialing. I put my head down and make sure when I hit the hills I go really hard."

The 1-2-3 by Symmetrics in the 134K men's race marked the first time the five-year-old team has swept a podium during BC Superweek.

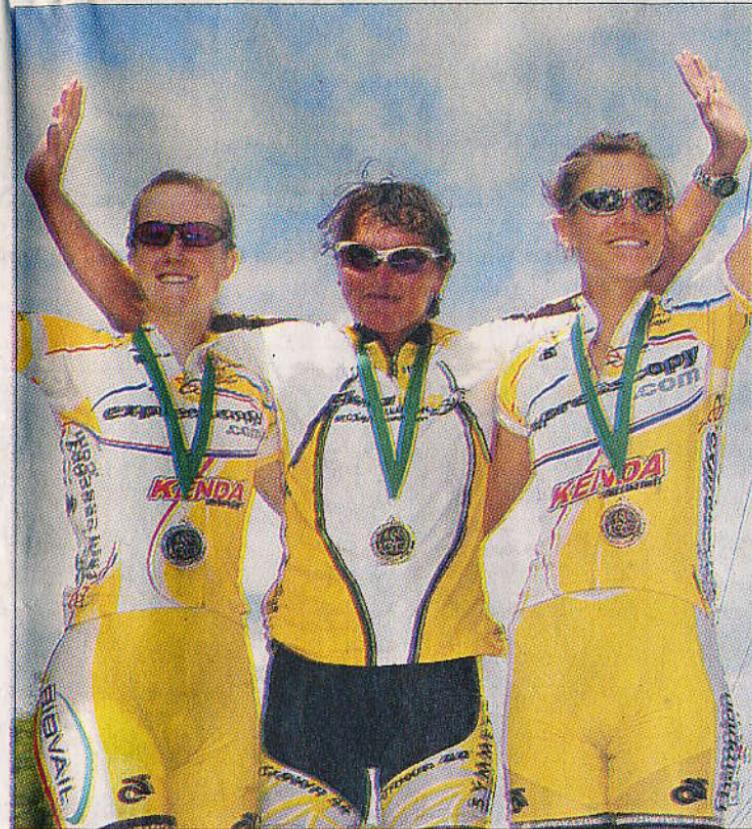
Even more impressively, it was done by the kids. Routley is 24, Meier, who won the Canadian under-23 title in Quebec on Tuesday, is 22 and Evans, 23.

"It's good to keep it all in the family," said Routley, who made a break with Meier halfway through the race. "The Symmetrics team is doing unreal this year. We're all riding on a high."

"A few years ago, I finished second here and it's just of those races that always seems to sit under my skin," added Routley, who won in 3:35.43. "I always feel pretty strong, just with how much climbing there is. It's nice to get a little redemption."

The riders now break for two days before the eight-race Superweek resumes Wednesday with the Tour de Gastown criterium.

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IAN SMITH/VANCOUVER SUN

Tour de White Rock women's race winner Leah Goldstein is flanked by second-place rider Rushlee Buchanan (left) and Erinne Willock.