

Cyclist's tour of duty aids her on the Tour de Gastown

HYPERACTIVE

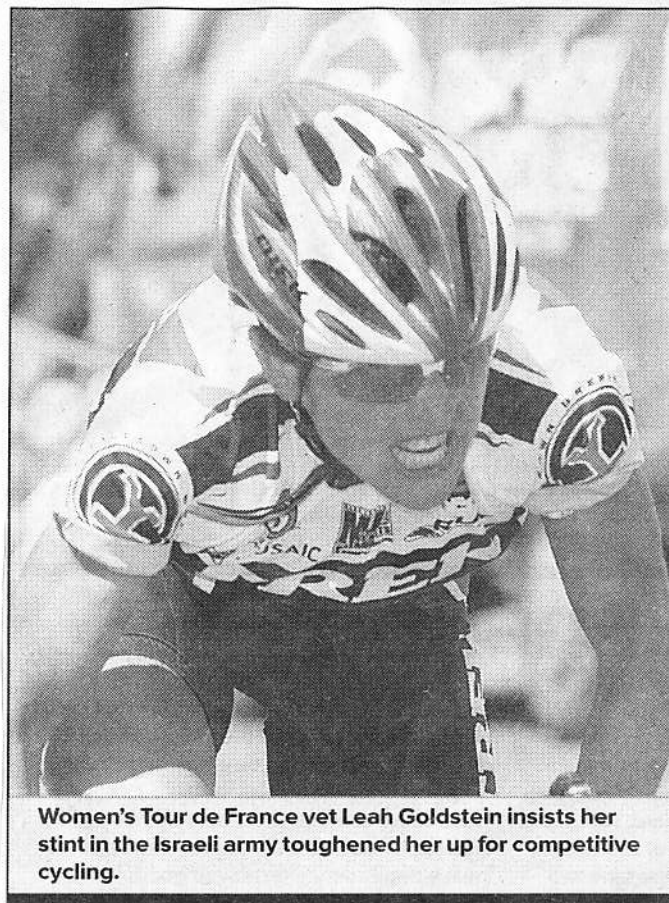
By Lori Kittelberg

Military training can be pretty darned helpful when it comes to competitive sports. And I'm not talking the physical part of it; I'm talking the mental aspects like discipline and focus. It's psychological strength that Vancouver cyclist Leah Goldstein plans to draw on for racing the Tour de Gastown on July 20, along with the Tour de Delta from July 15-17, and Tour de White Rock from July 22-24 — all part of BC Superweek.

"Cycling is a really mental sport. If you're mentally weak, you really can't do it," says

Goldstein. This cyclist knows mental toughness. Goldstein's mother was seven months pregnant with her when she moved to Vancouver from Israel. Goldstein has dual citizenship and, at 18, returned to Israel to do her mandatory two years of military service. She ended up staying for nine years, first as a commando, then transferring to secret police services. Now she returns every winter to work as a commando and police trainer.

Applying this serious determination to cycling, Goldstein joined the Canadian national cycling team and headed to the women's Tour de France in 1999, with only two years of experience



Women's Tour de France vet Leah Goldstein insists her stint in the Israeli army toughened her up for competitive cycling.

under her belt. The team president voiced his doubts she could hack the pressure. "I kind of laughed," says Goldstein. "The physical is only 50 per cent of it. The rest is mental. You really have to play it smart."

So far, playing it smart has served her well. Racing on her own rather than as part of a team, she is often targeted by U.S. teams whose cyclists will gang up on her on the racecourse. Goldstein says preparation is key, and she studies the strengths and weaknesses of her competitors before every race. "They have to work me over," she says. "It makes it much harder for me, but it also makes me much stronger."

Her tenacity was tested when she broke her right hand during a race in Pennsylvania last July; she was heading downhill when she hit a pot-

hole, breaking her hand when she fell. She then held her injured hand above her head to protect herself from other cyclists who toppled over her. To add insult to injury, the break was set incorrectly and needed to be put right after her return to Vancouver. "I knew when they casted it, it was incorrect. It was insane," she says of her experience at the Pennsylvania hospital. "I was waiting from two until nine p.m. They left me in my dirty clothes with no pain killers."

Today, Goldstein has titanium pins in her hand, which are still sensitive to the cold. At a recent race in Oregon, she was the only woman cycling wearing ski gloves. She was undaunted by the titters of her competition, particularly after she won the race. She is scheduled for further surgery after the season is over, as some of her skin has become attached to her tendons.

This year is Goldstein's first doing the Tour de Gastown. Stronger at climb-

ing than sprinting, she admits that the Gastown race — and the thought of crashing on the slick cobblestones, in particular — makes her nervous. "It's hard to break away on a flat course," she says. Her game plan is to go with the flow so she doesn't tire too early and work her competitors hard. "With numbers [in teams], they have a big advantage," she adds.

However, Goldstein welcomes the challenge. Indeed, she turned down racing with the Israeli team at the European championships this month so she could participate in the BC Superweek races. It's the White Rock race, chock full of hills, where Goldstein hopes to shine. "I want to win that," she concludes.

For more info on BC Superweek races (all free to watch), see bcsuperweek.com. 