

Vernon's Goldstein bombs up steep hills in women's race

Winning an 80-kilometre road race is never easy. Leah Goldstein just made it look that way Sunday.

And compared to what she's been through recently, perhaps the two hours, 24 minutes, 47 seconds it took to secure a victory in the Tour de White Rock women's road race wasn't so difficult a test.

Just two weeks ago, Goldstein — a Vernon-based rider who grew up in Vancouver, but has Israeli citizenship — won Israel's national road championship and time trial. Officials had to change the road course at the last minute because it had been bombed.

"They had to change the course the day before because bombs were being thrown at it," said Gold-

stein after Sunday's ride through the challenging but scenic and serene streets of White Rock.

"The hilly part of the course [in Israel] was taken out. It was a flat course, so it was bad for me," continued Goldstein, a noted climber. "But it was 44 degrees Celsius, which is good for me."

Still, bombs or bouquets, stifling heat or numbing cold, every time Goldstein, 38, enters a race she must subdue demons that still live in her head after a horrific crash two years ago in Oregon.

In that one, she got bumped by another rider, crashed at 70 km/h and landed face first on the road. She underwent several hours of surgery and spent six months in a

wheelchair. People said she'd never ride again.

"I'm very selective about the races I do," she said. "I only do races that are suited for me. I really can't afford to crash any more. I ride very safe. If I'm safe, I'm happy."

White Rock's road race isn't just suited for her. With its long, steep hills, it's custom made for Goldstein, who finished second last year and hadn't won in four previous attempts.

On Sunday, Goldstein — a Symmetrics Cycling rider — got out on a breakaway with four other riders in the second of eight 10-km laps. Then Goldstein, Rushlee Buchanan — the JAZZ Apple team rider from New Zealand who won Saturday's

Tour de White Rock criterium — and Victoria's Erinne Willock of the Expresscopy.co team got away a lap later. It was a three-woman race after that.

Goldstein kept putting distance between that pair on the course's hills. Buchanan finished second in 2:25.37 and Willock third in 2:25.49.

"It always comes down to a sprint and everybody knows what kind of sprinter I am — not," joked Goldstein, a former world kickboxing champion and an ex-commando in the Israeli army.

"I was watching on the climbs because I knew I had the legs and that they were hurting. I was hoping someone would come with me on the break, but I felt good. It was

tough, but I just pretended I was in a time trial. I put my head down and I made sure that when I hit the hills I'd go really hard.

"This race was hard today. It was stiff competition."

Buchanan knew Goldstein was the woman to beat in the record 41-woman field.

"I knew she was the rider to watch, she was obviously the strongest," said Buchanan, 19 and making her racing debut in Canada.

"She just took off, I didn't have the legs to go with her. Erinne and I never gave up. We tried to bring her back, but there was no bringing her back. She was holding the gap very well."