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NEW WOMEN'S TEAMS, NEW TACTICS MAY CREATE NEW WINNERS IN BC SUPERWEEK

The superwomen who have dominated BC Superweek on their own may soon be doomed by the future growth of super teams. The formation and development of the largest teams to ever race the women's events has already begun in BC.

"We've stepped it up in BC this year, we're really making the racing interesting," says Leah Guloien of Port Moody, the runner-up at the 2007 Provincial Championships road race earlier this month.

The 25-year-old is one of the stars of Team Giant, the province's newest women's team. The first year team is named for its sponsor, a bike manufacturer but is a giant in more than just title. "We've got 9 women and 1 junior racing on our elite team and only one of them is over 25 years of age," reveals Team Giant Manager, Jeremy Storie. "We had almost all of them at the Provincials and another team from Victoria, Oak Bay Bikes, had half a dozen women there. It's nice to see the large teams and team tactics happening more and more."

The women's fields at BC Superweek are about a third the size of the men's events. With only an average of slightly more than 30 riders it's been easy for stars like American Sarah Uhl and Canadians Gina Grain of Burnaby and Leah Goldstein of Vancouver to breakaway on their own and sweep most of the races. Grain won the Giro di Burnaby and Tour de Gastown last year and will back to defend both titles, hoping to see more competition this year.

"The east (Eastern Canada) has tripled their numbers of women participants," she says. "The difference between the east and the west is media exposure to the sport. People know about cycling out east because of the media exposure. Out here in the west nobody hears about cycling in the papers or on radio or TV. The courses at BC Superweek are good and so is the level of competition for Canadian content. I think events like these are crucial to the resurgence and continuing interest and participation of cycling. But to increase the size of fields you need advertising, not just in BC but all over North America."

There are signs that things are starting to improve in the west as the sizes of the fields at women's events are rising. And this year, there could be record fields with Team Giant and Oak Bay Bikes planning to send large teams to BC Superweek, which includes the Coast Capital Savings Tour de White Rock, July 13-15, the Tour de Gastown presented by BC Hydro Power Smart on July 18, the Giro Di Burnaby, July 19, and the Tour de Delta, July 20-22.

"I think that no matter the size of the field I don't think we'll see one or two women dominating the results," predicts Storie, the Team Giant manager and coach who helped

Langley-based Symmetrics become one of the best men's teams in North America. "We're going to start seeing a lot more parity but these things don't happen overnight. It takes time. It's all about developing riders. Ours have all bought into the program and are elevating their game. They're willing to sacrifice for each other and take turns doing all the grunt work that makes team tactics pay off."

It's paid off with three top ten finishes for Team Giant's Jenny True in US pro circuit races and a big win against a strong field in Emunclaw, Washington for Leah Guloein, who is well on her way to achieving her goal of becoming a world class rider.

"When I started there were only half a dozen riders winning all the local events," she says. "When you see a Leah Goldstein running away from you race after race, you have to step up. That's what we've done. Instead of a random collection of individuals, we're racing together as a team, using team tactics and it's working."

"It is pretty cool to see what can be done with a large team," agrees Oak Bay Bikes' Claire Hall-Patch, the only rider to finish ahead of Guloein at the BC Provincial Championships. The 24 year-old Victoria rider has won two straight BC titles since returning last year from a four year retirement. A year after winning the inaugural Tour de Delta Road Race in 2001, the multi-talented Hall-Patch was burned out racing both road and mountain bikes and walked away from cycling to concentrate on getting her clinical psychology studies degree at the University of Victoria.

Now that she's close to finishing her degree she's back racing and enjoying it more than ever. "It's a lot of fun," she says. "I really enjoy the team aspect of it more than ever. I love being with teammates and it's neat to race with team tactics, something we never did before. We're really looking forward to BC Superweek. We won't have as big a squad as Giant but we should have four or five for White Rock and Delta, two of my favorite courses. I think you're soon going to see that instead of one or two people winning everything, it's going to be one or two teams that dominate all the races."

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