



Gina Grain celebrates winning the women's Tour de Gastown race on Wednesday night. GERRY KAHRMANN — THE PROVINCE

# Cyclists get powered up for Beijing

BY TERRY BELL  
SPORTS REPORTER

A power outage in downtown Vancouver? What power outage in downtown Vancouver?

Canadian Olympian Gina Grain of Burnaby and Andrew Pinfold a Woodbridge, Ont., rider for Langley's Symmetrics Cycling team had power to burn Wednesday night, taking the women's and men's Tour de Gastown criteriums.

Grain, who'll ride tonight's Giro di Burnaby as her final race before going into training-only mode in her run-up to the 2008 Beijing Games, took the 30-lap, 36-kilometre women's race with a thrilling sprint finish, edging Kelly Benjamin of the Cheerwine Pro Racing team by less than a bike wheel before a crowd estimated at 40,000.

Ruth Corset, an Australian who rides for the New Zealand-based Jazz Apple team, finished a close third.

"I couldn't have asked for a better way to have a sendoff to Beijing," said Grain of the win before the big home crowd. "Absolutely, it gives me a boost. It gave me goosebumps at the start when they played O Canada. It's a good thing I was wearing sunglasses at the start line because I thought I was going to start to crying."

The women's race was in doubt until the final few metres. Grain, the 2006 Gastown winner who will ride on the track in the points race in Beijing, kept attacking throughout the race. Her only Webcor Builders teammate, Victoria's Erinne Willock, who'll ride the road race in Beijing, was right with her all of the way.

"Erinne Willock was absolutely fantastic," said Grain of her teammate, who won Gastown last year.

A number of riders — Benjamin, Australia's Hannah Banks, Vancouver's Marni Hambleton and San Francisco's Jennifer Wilson, kept taking turns sprinting to the lead.

With three laps to go riders

were offered a \$600 prime (a prize for the fastest lap) and Grain decided to risk perhaps spending too much energy and went for it.

"On the backside of the course I wasn't sure if I was going to go for it," she said. "I thought I don't have to work too hard for it and then immediately my mind switched to the Olympics. I said 'Gina, this is your training for the Olympics right here.' I said, 'Gina, you have to suffer.'"

Grain thinks she has a medal shot in Beijing. She said she's ranked about 12th to 15th in the world and the skills she showed here Wednesday night will be the ones she needs in Beijing.

Gastown is now part of the \$500,000 U.S. CRITs series and both the men's and women's fields were as strong as they've been in years.

"I loved it. It's everything I heard it was going to be," said Overton Park, Kan., native Benjamin, who came in for the entire B.C. Superweek series.

Benjamin took Sunday's Tour de Delta road race and Corset won Saturday's criterium in Delta.

Meanwhile, the field for the 50-lap, 60-km men's race was perhaps the best ever.

Symmetrics' Svein Tuft, a Canadian 2008 Olympian on the road, led the field through the final few laps. Pinfold caught him with a couple of hundred metres to go and edged 2006 winner Hilton Clarke, an Australian. Symmetrics Jacob Erker was third.

After a number of close calls it was the first ever Gastown win for Symmetrics.

"Take your hat off to Svein Tuft," an ecstatic Pinfold said of Tuft's amazing work through the final laps. "He's going to Beijing and he showed why to his home crowd."

"With 100 metres to go I thought 'Holy crap, I'm going to win Gastown.' This team is like a band of brothers. We've really stuck together this year." [tbell@png.canwest.com](mailto:tbell@png.canwest.com)