

Triathlon at Elk Lake good experience for rookies, world-class alike **GIVING IT A TRI**

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Triathlete and Brentwood Bay resident Jodi Hensel puts feet to trail at Elk Lake during her regular training run. She, along with hundreds of other athletes, will be on that trail during the 29th Annual Self Transcendence Triathlon on August 3.

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Jodi Hensel knows what she needs to practice for the 29th Annual Self Transcendence Triathlon: getting her wetsuit off.

“I tend to get stuck,” she says. Last year, her first at the Self Transcendence, the zipper got stuck and she struggled with the transition between the swim portion and the bicycling portion. “I’m practicing taking the wetsuit off after swims at Thetis Lake,” she says.

Ian Phillips, part of the triathlon organizing committee, has a tip to help competitors strip: spray their bodies down with Pam before putting on the suit. Last year there was even a Pam spray station at the triathlon, although he’s not sure that too many competitors realized it was there.

While the triathlon, the longest-running in Canada, attracts world-class athletes, it’s also a good place for those hitting their first triathlon, according to Phillips. “The philosophy [of the race] is about transcending, and encouraging everybody of all ages to participate and enjoy physical activities,” he said. The triathlon has strong community roots, he added, which is why Hensel, a Brentwood Bay resident and Central Saanich firefighter on her seventh triathlon [and second go at the Self-Transcendence], is a good representative of the event experience.

For Hensel, although she had done triathlon events before, last year’s Self-Transcendence was her first Olympic distance [1.5 kilometre swim, 40 kilometre bicycle ride, and 10 kilometre run]. “A lot of the [triathlons] out there are sprint, or half,” she said. It was also a change from the others she’d done in the past in one other way: the swim wasn’t in a pool.

“The open water is a jump up for those who usually do the pool,” said Phillips. Hensel’s swimming instructor recommended that she start at the side of the group, to avoid being crushed in the swimming crowd. “It’s not as scary as I thought,” she said of the open water swim. “It didn’t seem like many people.”

For Hensel, one big draw of this particular triathlon is the location. “I live right by the bike route, and I do it all the time,” she said. “And Elk Lake? You can’t get a much better run than that.”

Phillips noted that in the first years of the event, runners actually ran along the Pat Bay Highway, a route which left them exposed to the blistering sun on the way back to the finish line. Happily for competitors, the run around the lake is now pleasantly shaded for most of the route.

The bike route, which leaves Elk Lake and heads up Old West Saanich Road to West Saanich Road, turning around just south of Mills Road and heading back again, is a scenic highlight for many competitors. “I forget I’m racing,” said Hensel. “I tend to start looking around. Old West Saanich Road, it’s the prettiest part; it’s the hardest, but it’s one of my favorites.”

Hensel used to be a competitive kickboxer, but after an injury, lost focus. “I’m hyperactive, and my husband got me a bike,” she said. “I thought, maybe I’ll do a triathlon.” She went to Panorama Recreation Centre to clean up her swimming skills with lessons, and, after eight months, was ready to tackle her first tri.

“The first one, I loved it. It was a sprint [750 metre swim, 20 kilometre ride, five kilometre run], and I was disappointed it was so short,” she said.

Hensel, although she regularly trains, has no desire to make a leap into the elite athlete category; however, she would like to place in her age category. “The elite [athletes] are so phenomenal,” she said, adding that her goals, instead, focus more on herself than other competitors. “All you can do is be better than you were before.”

Besides the triathlon, the event also has a duathlon [5 kilometre run, 40 kilometre ride, 10 kilometre run], for those who prefer not to swim. The event runs on Saturday, August 3, with athletes taking off at 7:30 a.m. Those interested in participating can visit www.victoriatriathlon.com.

news@peninsulanewsreview.com