

feature : Wild women on wheels

>> BY GUY NECOLOGIST

On a cold Saturday on a taped out track, Haul Ass Hanna jostles elbows at high speed with Cement Kiss, keeping her teammates closely packed so that no skaters can pass. Five metres behind her are two women hell-bent on doing exactly that: Chokahontas, the opposing team's Jammer, gets a point for every time she skates by one of Haul's girls, but right now Haul's attention is on helping Phoenix the Burninator, her own team's Jammer, catch up and score. Distracted, one of the skaters makes a choppy crossover on the sharp left, the woman behind her losing control, spanking the rink's unforgiving surface with the length of her thigh. The Jammers skip over, skate past, and the fallen roller girl is up on her stoppers and pounding to catch up and get back in the game.

Skater-run leagues of tattooed and attitude-enhanced women aged 20 to 40 in a high-speed combination of extreme sport and martial art

This is Roller Derby. Specifically, Women's Flat Track Roller Derby as it's been reborn in the last four years; skater-run leagues of tattooed and attitude-enhanced women aged 20 to 40 in a high-speed combination of extreme sport and martial art. Accompanying the revival is the ironic retro-camp of burlesque theatre. What began as an endurance race for four-wheeled rollerskaters in the 1950s and evolved into a women's-prison-movie-on-wheels in the 1970s is back – with a flirtatious, girl-power vengeance. And it is everywhere, with overnight leagues in every major city in North America and ad-hoc teams in any small town with a high-school gym and a first-aid kit.

Skate fast, turn left, watch out.

Here's how it works: The two teams skate tightly together in a pack, led by their Pivots – pace-setters who function like quarterbacks and keep their eye on the clock – the refs, the score, and the Jammers. The pack gets a head start, with the Jammers fifteen feet and a blown whistle behind them. Only the Jammers can score, by passing the Blockers, who, to put it mildly, are not going to make it easy. Grabbing, hitting and tripping result in penalties, but ramming collisions are pretty much the norm.

The first Jammer to pass the pack becomes the Lead Jammer, and only she can call off the jam before the two-minute clock is up. She might do that if one of her players is injured or if the other Jammer starts racking up points.

The whistle blows, and skaters slide down to their kneepads, laughing from adrenaline, tighten helmets, pound back water, and adjust fishnet stockings for the next jam a short 30 seconds away.

As this is a regular practice session, the women will switch teams and switch positions between bouts, getting to know one another's styles and forging camaraderie. Winks and high-fives are passed back and forth, as are supportive comments on the last jam. On the sidelines, coach Colonel Lingus points out techniques to the new recruits, the 'fresh meat', who range from experienced athletes to women who may have never been on roller skates before in their lives.

By day these women are bankers, nurses, programmers, moms and graphic designers. But three nights a week they don their tough, sexy alter-egos (Betty Bumpers, Dixi Deathray, Concrete Candi), flashing raised welts and fist-sized bruises as trophies of the track. "I have never felt so close to so many woman while at the same time wanting to knock them all over" says Rocksalt Ruckus. Phoenix, a veterinary assistant, adds, "When I skate I feel like I'm flying. I can't imagine my life without derby and my girls now."

The veteran skaters of The Victoria Rollergirls started two years ago, under a series of shifting team names and re-organizations. Most recently known as "The Miss Fits," the three-dozen-strong Victoria Rollergirls have made the commitment to transition to a regular league with four full teams, a manager, major sponsorships, and a gruelling recruiting, training, draft, and competition schedule – all in the next nine months. Rather than focus on one traveling franchise, the league is building deep local roots and creating opportunities for South Island women to get as much exposure to the sport and track time as possible.

Team Captain Chokahontas speaks to the ambitious plan: "We wanted to create an approachable local sport with balanced teams and a wide variety of skill levels. That means the lowest-ranking team in the league this season will have the first draft picks for next season. This is about pushing each other as hard as we can, and you can't do that if there's no hope of getting better or if you're getting benched all the time. It is really competitive and it is really aggressive, but it's also supposed to be fun. That means it has to be fair.

"Our primary goal is to promote excitement and support throughout Victoria with something we're all extremely passionate about. Our secondary goal ... red-hot girl-on-girl action!"



Fernwood hits the *Financial Times*

Whoever would have thought that news of our humble little neighbourhood would travel all the way to the United Kingdom? Well, it has. To see Fernwood featured in the *Financial Times* head to:

www.ft.com/cms/s/0/5229fd36-da8d-11dc-9bb9-0000779fd2ac.html



Dean Fortin
Victoria City Councillor

Working for strong, healthy and sustainable communities.

dfortin@victoria.ca

Shift is happening... **SHIFT**
NATURAL FASHION

Hemp, Bamboo, Recycled and Organic
-The Evolution of Sustainable Fashion-

574b Lower Johnson St - 385-7443
Website NOW ONLINE: www.shiftfashion.ca



Photos: Véronique da Silva

It's Friday night, and the Rollergirls are in full gear at the Victoria Film Festival launch to promote the following night's screening of the documentary *Hell on Wheels*. The girls roll down the ramp between the theatre aisles, whooping like banshees and camping it up, all the while tongue planted firmly in cheek. At the Festival Gala, derby uniforms dominate the event – and the dance floor – to the bemused “what was I thinking” looks of Festival organizers. Amidst the usual Victoria culture vultures, the Victoria Rollergirls seem like Amazons; confident, bawdy, invincible.

At the Saturday night screening, after much roaring and screaming as the women see themselves on the big screen in a recruiting promo, is *Hell on Wheels*; the soap opera struggles of a handful of women rebooting roller derby in Texas. The dynamics of finances, injury, relationships, organizational stress, and publicity are all too familiar to the derby-savvy audience. Outside the theatre is the merchandise table, where sales of tee shirts, raffle tickets and pin-up calendars of team members all contribute to offsetting the staggering cost of rink rental which is over \$13,000 a year.

True to form, on their way out the Victoria Rollergirls can't resist one final rule-breaking skate down the curving ramp of the Capitol 6 theatre, screaming a battle cry all the way. 📍

Photos above: The wild women on wheels practice weekly right here in Fernwood at the Fernwood Community Centre.

Getting Started

- > Information: Point your browser to www.victoriarollergirls.com for rules, schedules, and how to get involved as a skater, referee, or supporter.
- > Gear: Just under \$200 for skates, helmet, knee and elbow pads, wrist and mouth guards. To start with, odds are a rollergirl will lend you her skates at practice to get the feel of it. You'll be twelve again in seconds.
- > Costume: Knee-sock obsession and fishnet addiction seem to be the norm. Could be financially ruinous.
- > Fees: \$40 a month towards your share of rink rental.
- > Insurance: \$60 a year, and lets you travel worry-free to other bouts.
- > Time: At least 3 practices a week to start, two hours at a time. Also plan for team meetings, off-track workouts, social time and plenty of fundraising hours.
- > Experience: None necessary. You'll be taught how to skate, how to fall safely and get back up, how to play the game, and how to win it. The Victoria Rollergirls are actively recruiting for skaters, referees, scorekeepers, and helpers.

FERNWOOD REAL ESTATE



JEROME PEACOCK
Industry. Integrity. Intelligence.

Visit JeromePeacock.com
to read my promise to you.



PEMBERTON HOLMES
ESTABLISHED 1887

150-805 Cloverdale • PH: 250-384-8124



Denise Savoie
Member of Parliament for Victoria

CONSTITUENCY OFFICE:
970 Blanshard Street
Victoria, BC V8W 2H3

TELEPHONE: 363-3600
E-MAIL: Savoie.d@parl.gc.ca
ON THE WEB: www.denisesavoie.ca

Your voice in Ottawa

Serving Our Community



1020 Hillside Avenue
250 360.2023
rob.fleming.mla@leg.bc.ca

Rob Fleming, MLA
Victoria - Hillside