

Goldstein battled record-breaking heat while riding in the June 2024 Trans Am Bike Nonstop, an ultra-distance race whose route spans 10 states: Bikers must compete alone, without the aid of assistants.

Canadian-Israeli Cyclist Gets Good Mileage

By Jennifer Lovy

Leah Goldstein is not a quitter, and never has been, despite a lifetime of challenges that might cause others to settle into a more traditional, less daunting lifestyle. The Canadian-born, Israeli-raised Goldstein, has instead made a career of succeeding against all odds.

A star athlete, she won the 1989 World Bantamweight Kickboxing Championship when she was just 17. For nine years, she served in the Israel Defense Forces as the first female elite commando instructor and worked as an undercover Israeli police officer.

In 2021, the ultra-endurance cyclist became the first woman in the event's 39-year history to win the Race Across America (RAAM), completing the grueling 3,000-plus-mile race from California to New Jersey in 11 days, three hours, and three minutes.

Her bicycle paths have not always been smooth. She broke her hand during a race in Pennsylvania in 2004. A year later, after winning several races, she crashed during the Cascade Classic, which hospitalized her for more than two months. It seemed then that her career could be over.

But, as she has time and again, Goldstein bounced back. With an unrelent-

ing work ethic, she has continued to move forward at warp speed and, now, at age 55, Goldstein has no plans to slow down.

During the 2021 Race Across America, Goldstein endured a heat wave so intense that most participants dropped out. Sleep deprivation caused her to hallucinate and to fall asleep on the bike. Saddle sores, sunburn and other ailments left her riding in constant pain. She says she's learned to "be comfortable being uncomfortable."

With a mile left in the race, a dehydrated and depleted Goldstein struggled to stay on her bike. Lori Friend Moger, her pit crew chief and close friend, says, "It was torture for her" and "scary as hell." As her heart rate rose to a dangerously high 200 beats per minute, Goldstein stopped frequently, taking breaks to lie in ditches along the route.

Yet Goldstein endured, walking her bike across the finish line and beating her closest competitor by 17 hours.

A "Pollyannaish" view

Moger, who holds a master's degree in sports psychology, describes her friend as "Pollyannaish," remarkably upbeat and optimistic: "She doesn't

have doubts like the rest of us. That is the secret sauce to people who do extraordinary things. We're trained to be realists, and Leah has not harnessed herself in that."

Goldstein's philosophy and track record have made her a sought-after motivational speaker.

Her credentials and philosophy are manifest in her book, co-authored with Moger: "No Limits: The Powerful True Story of Leah Goldstein—World Champion Kickboxer, Ultra Endurance Cyclist, Israeli Undercover Police Officer," published in 2016.

"While most people would be afraid to take on a race like this, I was scared not to," she writes. "I feared that if I stopped racing, I would lose part of myself. That thing that pumps me full of adrenaline and makes me feel alive would be lost, and I'd never be the same. Competition was like my best friend, and I wasn't ready to lose it."

Goldstein credits her family as a source of inspiration and dedicates the book to her maternal grandmother Frieda, who always told her never to use the words "I wish."

Her parents Simcha and Ahoova were equally influential. Her mother lived in northern China, and her father

came from the Soviet Union. Her mom moved to Israel to escape communism and her dad left because of anti-Semitism. They met and married there and relocated to Vancouver after her dad, a sailor, docked in the city, saw financial opportunities. Goldstein was born two months later. Her parents' examples instilled in her the mindset of never giving up.

In June, Goldstein was among the 49 cyclists who participated in the 4,200-mile Trans Am Bike Race, across 10 states from Oregon to Virginia.

Unlike competitors in the Race Across America, Trans Am participants have no pit crew to aid them. Instead, they are responsible for their own navigation and transporting all their supplies. She placed third overall and was the first woman to cross the finish line. During the ride she faced mechanical issues and navigational challenges, including being chased by dogs and a bear.

Goldstein, as a motivational speaker, draws on her vast life experiences, often sharing her mantra: "You shouldn't stop living when you're still alive."

"We're so focused on age," Goldstein says. "I think I am more of a role model



Enlisting in the Israeli army, Canadian-born Leah Goldstein (at right with fellow soldier) was fast-tracked through specialized basic training and held the rank of sergeant when she graduated. She went on to become a teacher of Krav Maga, a grueling hand-to-hand combat system developed specifically for Israel Defense Forces troops and military security.

now because others look at me and say even at this age, she can still do what she does. I get a lot of messages from people saying, 'I was thinking of running a marathon or going back to



Israeli army officer, disciplined martial arts trainer, champion kickboxer and cyclist, and inspiring motivational speaker, Goldstein is a force of nature who offered a brutally honest assessment of her exploits in her autobiography "No Limits."

school, and you've inspired me.' If I can keep motivating people to do the things they've been thinking about for years, then yay to them, yay to me, all the power to all of us." 