

SUGAR AND SPICE, BUT NOT VERY NICE

Story by Lisa Walls

This particular Wednesday evening the Rat City Rollergirls are practicing out in the hinterlands of Bellevue, at a rink nestled behind a bunch of strip malls. I'm early. I sit in my little car, wedged between two SUVs, waiting for practice to start. I know it's time when I sight three women—one resembling a bright bird with her pink-striped black hair—enter the rink.

As the league assembles in the waiting area, giving the daytime customers a chance to clear out, I ask for my contact, Danielle Heckman. The group gives me blank looks. I try again. "Dee Troit?" I ask.

"Yes!" says Edie Brickwall. "Welcome to roller derby!"

Like drag queens, each Rat City Rollergirl has a (sometimes naughty) stage name. Throughout the evening I meet Burnette Down, La Petite Morte (Mortie for short), Dirty Little Secret, Elektra (recently featured in an Aleve commercial), and Betty Ford Galaxy. For those ignorant to the double entendre in Mortie's name, "The Big O" is emblazoned across the back of her warm-up jacket.



"Drew Blood"



"La Petite Morte"

PHOTO CREDIT: MICHAEL COYOTE

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“Betty Ford Galaxy”

I sit with Betty Ford Galaxy as she prepares to bout, watching her wrap the tops of her feet with silver duct tape. She starts with her big toes, which need an extra layer. In November of 2004 she broke her leg during a practice against the Socket Wenches. “I love every minute of it and even though I broke my leg I’d do it again in a second,” she said.

She skates with the Throttle Rockets. The derivation of the team’s name came from another passion most of the women on the team shared—motorcycles. Betty, who’s been clean and sober for years, was candid about why she loves roller derby. “To stay sober I need things to keep me busy. I used to do demolition derby and stock car racing in Monroe. I used to take Zoloft, for anxiety. After skating for two years I didn’t need the drug anymore. And my butt lifted. I think all the derby girls will tell you that.”

“You have to go up a size, but in a good way,” piped Elektra.

“We have J Lo butts,” said Dee Troit.

Dee sat out this night’s practice bout. She’d tweaked her knee during an earlier practice and wanted to ensure its health for the league’s “Big Gay Bout” at Qwest Events Center. She was my tour guide for the night, explaining the rules of the game.

When the action begins, the women are a tangle of arms and legs as they work their way around the track. The whirring of the skates’ wheels is the only constant in the ever-shifting pack. The skaters jostle and vie for position as they speed in a counter-clockwise oval. Players aren’t allowed to grab at each other, unless it’s a jammer reaching out

to a teammate to slingshot her way through the pack. Unnecessary roughness during play, such as tripping, is a major penalty, gaining the player time in the penalty box. I watch as Burnette Down gives a skater a firm bump with her hip. The skater flies out of bounds and sprawls on the floor as her trajectory ends. The pack continues its orbit.

These women are hardy, and love the edginess of the sport. Sassy Chassis, owner of Gorditos in Greenwood—and at 45 the eldest skater in the league, said, “We get to beat the snot out of each other.”

That delight permeates the league. These girls are out to have fun—they skate several times a week, both in practice bouts and with their own teams. (Their significant others, whether male or female, are dubbed “derby widows.”)

“Before practice I’m tired and sometimes I don’t want to go. But when you skate you forget everything else,” said Burnette Down.

Watch these women once and you’ll be going back for more. I know I will.

Lisa Walls is a freelance writer and editor. She lives on Capitol Hill with her dog, Sable.

Think You’ve Got The Ball Bearings To Be A Roller girl?

The next open tryout for the Rat City Roller girls is in November.

You must be at least 21 and have health insurance (for good reason). To buy equipment for the sport, try Fast Girl Skates in Wallingford.

Check out their web site:
fastgirlskates.com.

To learn more about the roller derby game rules and upcoming bouts, go to: ratcityrollergirls.com.

The team merch, for sale both online and at Fast Girl Skates, is phenomenally cute.

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“Dee Troit” (left) and “Edie Brickwall”