

GUNNAR HAGEN 2010

By Debbie Kolp, xcskigirl04@yahoo.com

Winter is not dead yet in the El Nino-beset Pacific Northwest, but she graciously waited until this year's 30k classic Gunnar Hagen was almost over before roaring back in with a much-needed snowstorm. The days before the race were warm and spring-like, and the snow pack was wet and dense. The night before, the clouds drifted away and temperatures dropped well below freezing, leaving a well-groomed track on race morning that was rock solid and rocket fast. Wax selection was relatively easy: violet/viola or universal klister, maybe with a little orange or red kicker under the foot, worked for almost everyone. With the harsh abrasiveness of the icy snow, keeping the klister on the skis was the biggest challenge—one racer commented that he felt like he was just double poling on his skating skis!— and later finishers welcomed the new falling snow, which added a little bit of grip and was pretty besides.

A total of 115 racers showed up for the main event on Sunday. Forty-five men toed the line for the 30k, and Owen Hanley from Yakima ended up taking home first prize, finishing in 1:14:07. Last year's winner Brad Bauer was close behind, in 1:16:21, followed by Kent Murdoch in 1:16:44, Vesa Suomalainen in 1:17:35, Jeff Hashimoto in 1:17:49, and Rune Harkestad in 1:20:04. (Hey, except for Owen, that looks just like the masters' top finisher line-up in last week's SuperTour!) This year's top five finishers were all faster than last year's winning time, a clear measure of the speed of this year's track. In the women's 30k, senior Linnea Rooke led the field of 14, finishing in 1:30:30, followed by Inge Scheve in 1:35:38, Ginny Price in 1:41:59, and Devlin Page in 1:44:01.

In the 10k, 35 men competed, and junior Max Christman from Seattle ended up victorious, finishing in 25:26. Brian Dumais, old enough to be Max's father and fighting a cold, was second in 27:57, followed by five more juniors. J2 Andi Zontek from Wenatchee was the winner of the 20-skier women's 10k in 33:09, with Kira Peterson from Walla Walla second in 34:13, Aurora Bowers from Walla Walla third in 35:01, and Lisa Newton fourth in 36:23.

We also had an excellent turnout for the kids' races on Saturday! More than 40 kids, along with parents and friends and race volunteers and spectators, made the stadium area bright and festive and fun. Race directors Jeff Hashimoto and Tim Melbourne offered three distances to cover a range of ages from tiny wobbly tots to smooth-skiing nearly-teenagers, and Race Secretary Carey Gazis juggled registration, race starting and timing for all three races. Plenty of adults were available to help with course monitoring, cheering, and post-race treat dispersal, and everyone went home happy.

A great big thank you goes out to our sponsors. Master of ceremonies Ginny Price had the fun of doling out all kinds of great things from a giant box of awesome prizes, courtesy of our wonderfully generous sponsor, Second Ascent, along with highly coveted ski tuning certificates from Nordic Ultratune and technique books by Einar Svensson. Big thanks also to Nuun and Honey Stingers, for keeping us hydrated and fed out on the course.

Many thanks to everyone who made the weekend a huge success. Race Director Jim Lindsey, Race Secretary Spider Burbank, Chief of Course Ozzie Nordheim, Chief Timers Angie Grieg, Caleb Spiegel-Ostrom and Keith Ritland, and Kitchen Directors Kare and Aase Gjolmesli and Randi Valdok organized a host of fantastic volunteers who made sure every single racer got parked, got registered, had a fast and fun course to ski on, met a friendly face at the turnarounds and intersections, had plenty of warm and attentive care at the aid station, and was fed all kinds of delicious food afterward. Thank you also to Robert Lind, for his care and efforts in grooming the course to race-ready perfection, to the Nordic Ski Patrol, who monitored the tricky corners and kept everyone safe, and to the Toko wax reps, who were generous with their advice.

And of course, many thanks especially to all of the skiers who came from all over the state to participate—it wouldn't be a race if you all didn't come!

Next up: the all-women Jente Loppet, 5k and 10k freestyle, on February 13, and the Ozbaldy, 10k and 50k free-style, on March 7.