

Fiona in Focus

Lentilly Prepared



In June, I entered a lentil recipe contest and was thrilled to learn that I was one of five finalists selected to participate in a lentil cook-off in Pullman, Washington. The cook-off, which took place Aug. 20, was part of the town's Lentilfest celebrations, which - wait for it - also included a race, the Tase T Lentil 5K run! I couldn't have been more excited. Competing in two events on the same day would be like my own special duathlon.

For two weeks I practised my recipe - a roasted red pepper, chipotle and honey lentil hummus. I tasted it with

chips, vegetables, pita and discovered that, served over pasta, it made an excellent protein-packed pre-race meal. Keen to totally immerse myself in the experience, I even

designed my own "Lentilly Prepared" T-shirt and apron. I was ready!

Upon arriving in Pullman on Friday (aug. 19) afternoon I met the other finalists. Robin, Suzanne and Deanna, like me, were participating in their first cook-off. Rounding out the group was an award-winning chef named Chris who had driven 29 hours from El Paso to compete. His recipe sounded so amazing that his victory was pretty much a given.

After shopping for our ingredients, the finalists toured the kitchen facilities where we would be preparing our dishes. Then we visited the festival site and took turns of stirring the world's largest bowl of lentil chili.



With temps in the low 40s on Saturday morning, I was looking forward to a cool run. I had somehow failed to notice that the course featured what could only be described as a small mountain, which just kept going and going and going. Halfway up the hill my goal of breaking 21:30 rudely kicked to the curve and replaced by a desperate desire to simply make it to the top without keeling over. Reminding myself that at some point the course had to descend, I

began counting my steps, hoping that by engaging my brain my legs and lungs would somehow be distracted from the pain and suffering. And then, after what seemed like 15 minutes, the road leveled off. My breathing returned to something resembling normal and the course started to descend. I was finally able to appreciate the cool temperature and

almost enjoyed the second half of the race. While my time was almost two minutes slower than I'd hoped for, I was thrilled to win Masters and finish among the top five women. One event down, one to go.

Before heading to the kitchen to prepare our dishes, the cook-off finalists took part in the annual Lentilfest parade that involved riding through town on an old fire engine and waving to the crowds. After the parade, we had two hours to create our masterpieces, which were then packed up and transported to the festival site for judging. One by one we were introduced to the celebrity panel who sampled our culinary efforts and scribbled their impressions in a notebook. We then waited anxiously while they compared notes and reached their decision. Ten long minutes later we reconvened in front of the stage and the winners were announced in reverse order. As expected, the chef took first prize and pocketed a cool \$2,000. To my amazement, my humble hummus won second place and I was awarded a check for \$1,000. I was beyond excited. I had survived my first cook-off and



my first special duathlon. At times it had been 'lentilly' challenging, but it was an amazing experience and provided a unique chance to bond with creative, interesting people who love to cook. The hilly landscape in the Palouse region is beautiful, the people are friendly and the weather is ideal. What more could you ask for? I'm already looking for my next run/cook-off Duathlon.