One of August’s hottest weekends, over 1,800 participants gathered in a charming Quebec port city to put their summer training to the test.

Located less than an hour west of Montreal, Triathlon Valleyfield offered a buffet of race options: youth, try-a-tri, Olympic, sprint, team, duathlon, 5 km and 10 km runs. Speed, flat terrain and fierce competition marked all categories.

The francophone town of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, population 41,000, is a level-island nestled in the St. Lawrence River with panoramic views of the Saint Francis Bay and the Beauharnois Canal. In 2002, organizers saw the city’s potential as a race venue and started with 350 participants. Twelve years later, it’s one of the province’s most popular triathlons.

Over two days, triathletes as young as five years joined elite and amateur participants. The wide diversity of skill allowed beginners to be inspired (and maybe slightly intimidated) by more experienced athletes competing in this year’s Quebec Provincial Championship. Phillipe Reynolds of Chambly, Que. was the top male in the Olympic distance (2:00:21); with top female honours going to Marie-Claude Boucher of Coteau-Du-Lac, Que. (2:12:34).

Transition was set in Delpha-Sauvé Park, a wide green space framed by boats in the canal and kayakers cruising the bay. Participants set up their gear in secured areas shaded by pine trees. With temperatures nearing 30 C, family members, dogs and other supporters sat in bleachers enjoying the cool breeze off the water.

At the swim’s start, organizers stood on a raised platform and, using a megaphone to be heard above the blaring tunes, reviewed the rules in French. Locals passed on key information to anglophones. Wetsuits were optional with the water a welcoming 20.5 C. To avoid overcrowding, start waves went off in longer intervals. Finally, an enthusiastic “bonne chance” bid the triathletes well and they stepped down into the bay’s clear waters before the in-water start.

The swim route was well marked with neon orange buoys and kayakers keeping swimmers on track. The bay’s trademark fountain served as a signpost as swimmers negotiated the route.

The bike and run course looped between the canal and the commercial drive in the shadow of the city’s clock tower. The run course included a portion along the lake, past cafés in the port, over a bridge and through the park. Water and shower stations provided cooling relief while cowbells and calls of “Ne vous découragez pas” ("Don’t give up") urged racers on.
Over 200 volunteers helped make the event happen. Organizers say the community’s commitment is essential to the race’s success.

“The triathlon is part of Salaberry-de-Valleyfield’s active lifestyle campaign called ‘Bouge ta ville’ or ‘Move your City’ with events and education to support citizens to adopt active lifestyles,” said Lise Dubé, president and race director.

As part the city’s efforts to get more people racing, officials donated new bicycles and helmets and hosted local students in a June super sprint triathlon. A total of 645 grade four students joined. Many of those same students were on the sidelines in August watching Quebec champions finish.

Under clear skies, finishers enjoyed post-race treats among the sponsor tents and festive music. The sun blazed on well after the competition ended, and racers sat with their backs against tree trunks, smiles all around while taking breaks to chug cold chocolate milk. No translation was needed – it was clear that summer training paid off. In all languages, victory tastes sweet.