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THE CRESTA RUN

ONE OF THE FASTEST AND MOST EXCITING SPORTS IN THE WORLD

By Lord Brabazon of Tara

Winter sports are a holiday peculiar in every sense of the word from most, for the reason that values are different from what you are accustomed to and that, once amongst the snow, your life is concentrated on sliding, be it horizontal on skates, or down slopes at various angles on skis, or descending prepared surfaces on luges or toboggans. St. Moritz was the original Winter Sports resort. It was discovered for its remarkable climate by the English who at one time, before the wonderful railway was built, undertook long journeys by diligence or coach to get there. The climate, though not always living up to perfection, when correct, is past belief; the thermometer shows freezing, the while the sun beats down on you with a heat which is almost tropical. Hotels of every sort, scenes of great luxury abound, and every wish is provided for. I sometimes hear complaints that it is the place for the expert, not the beginner. Nothing is farther from the truth. It may be that you will find the greatest experts in the world at every winter sport there, at times, but I assure you they are the exceptions.

Like all things, the Cresta has grown up over fifty years from very small beginnings, when one found one's own way almost, down a little valley near St. Moritz, to the now somewhat artificial pure ice run you find there today. It is indeed a peculiar sport in that it does not occur anywhere else in the world. There are bob runs in many places and also luge runs, but the Cresta is unique and has become extremely specialised. In fact you go down the run on an apparatus called a "skeleton" which, unless it was operating on pure ice, would not be at all efficient, as the runners are of steel, and "bull nosed". Not the sort of thing that would go through snow or slush easily.

If you are at St. Moritz and young, I advise you to have a crack at it, as, once you have tasted its joys, it calls you back year after year for the reason that it gives you a certain sense of satisfaction and thrill, such that you will get from no other sport; and those who ride do so because they love riding, and not for any other reason — never because of the plaudits of the crowds, for there is no crowd, as it takes place early in the morning before St. Moritz is awake. The only people there, looking on, are the Engadiners, who are placed to pick you up if you have a spill, and to watch that the run is in no way damaged.

Some people ask me whether I think it is very dangerous. The answer is yes and no. It all depends on how you intend to ride. When you first present yourself you will be suitably equipped for the descent. The kit may not be ornamental as it consists, first of all, of crash helmet, then pads of leather for your elbows and knees and a metal guard for your hands, and finally a pair of boots fitted with rakes on the toes projecting in front, of somewhat formidable appearance. Garbed like this you will be posed properly on a skeleton (or toboggan), and will be allowed to descend. Definite instructions are given to you and they are that you trail your feet hard on the ice the whole way down, and if you do this, I will give you my sacred word that you will arrive at the bottom safely, even if you close your eyes the whole way down.

That, I am sure, will reassure those who wish to try the sport. But do let me impress upon you that only those who try and learn from the beginning are appreciated and helped on the run. The smart Alecs who think they know all about it from the start are much frowned upon. Therefore do not be afraid of starting. You do no harm to the run by raking with your feet. It is solid ice, not snow, and you will make little impression on it; although raking will have a very definite slowing up action on your descent the whole time your feet are on the ice.

Slowly you will find that you do not need to dig your toes in all the time and then you will discover you are taking many, many more seconds than the experts and you will realise that there is a subtle art to be acquired as to how to take the corners, or, as they are called, banks, properly. Usually the technique is to get on them early and come off early, concentrating on avoiding skid, as any skid at the tail of a bank delays you very much. You should be poured off the bank truly and sweetly to accumulate speed.

Don't ever be too sure

The only time the Cresta is dangerous is when you think yourself better than you are and when you try to do a speed which is beyond your skill. The beginner is never in peril until he thinks himself an expert. I am not promising that the acquisition of skill on the Cresta can be acquired quickly. It is difficult for the reason that everything happens so quickly and the whole run is sometimes very alarming: consequently you have to go down many times before you become used to it. When you are more or less accustomed to it all, you can commence to impose your will upon the toboggan rather than letting the toboggan do what it likes with you, which it has a way of doing. I have seen only three riders become first class in one season, and then only very rarely and generally they were gifted with a sense of balance and familiarity with high speeds.

I will not describe in this article, for I have done it elsewhere, the exact technique for going down safely and fast. There are plenty of pamphlets written about the right technique, but what I want to do in this article is to impress upon you that here is one of the fastest and most exciting sports in the world. There is the track and there are you, completely dressed up and with a toboggan. It is not necessary to be athletic, you do not need to be particularly strong and you do not need to have a heart strong enough to run a mile in under four minutes. All you have to do is to harness gravity so as to produce the best speed down the run. It sounds easy, but it requires a good deal of concentration and know-how. It all takes time. I have said it before and say it again, that there is no short cut to becoming good that does not lead to the hospital.

Cresta "shop" is one of the most extraordinary in the world and I suppose only understood actually by riders, but it binds together people of all nationalities who go down this famous run into a band of brothers with a common interest which makes them friends for life.

This question of nationality is worth a word. Of riders I suppose 70 per cent are British, about 20 per cent American and the remaining 10 per cent are from various countries. America has gone hand in hand with us from the start and has had some wonderful riders. A Frenchman has won the great Grand National from the top and an Italian is also in the very highest class and a Canadian was our Champion.

After many years of experience I can say without fear of contradiction that those who ride the Cresta are a grand bunch of men of all nationalities. Come along and join us down the most famous slide in the world; you will never regret it.

(By courtesy of "St. Moritz Courier".)

EXPO 1964

The Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways (458 Strand, Trafalgar Square, London W.C.2, Telephone WHITEhall 9851) have given the following news:

Contrary to previous information referring to a reduction granted by French Railways to visitors of EXPO '64; we have been informed that such a concession will *not* be available.

As far as traffic from Great Britain to Lausanne is concerned, a fare reduction (single ticket for return) will only be allowed on the Swiss portion.

The Secretariat of the Swiss Abroad in Berne have informed us that the organisers of the EXPO will extend a special welcome to the Swiss from abroad. On presentation of their consular registration card admittance will be half price (Fr.3.— instead of Fr.6.—).

Before leaving their country of residence they should obtain a voucher from their Embassy or Consulate, on production of which they will be granted a free personal and private three minute telephone call abroad. This facility will be strictly reserved to Swiss citizens only. (One call per family.)

WORLD AND OLYMPIC CHAMPIONS AS SKI INSTRUCTORS

It may well be that guests attending one of the one hundred and twenty Swiss Ski Schools are initiated into the art of ski-ing by well-known ski champions. During the winter season 1962/63, the Swiss Ski Instructors gave no fewer than 1,400,000 half-day classes in the good-humoured spirit for which they are known. Among them are many world Olympic and Swiss champions. For instance, we might mention world champion Rudolf Rominger who teaches in St. Moritz, or world champion David Zogg and Squaw Valley Olympic winner Roger Staub in Arosa while the Swiss champions Adolf Odermatt, Heinz and Otto von Allmen, Bruno Torjani, Elias Julen and Alphons Supersaxo belong to the teaching staff of the Ski Schools in Engelberg, Wengen, Gstaad, Zermatt and Saas-Fee.

[S.N.T.O.]

THE PURPOSE AND AIM OF THE SWISS SKI SCHOOLS

Towards the end of the 'twenties, the organizers of winter sports in various Swiss mountain resorts, brought into existence the SKI SCHOOLS. In 1933, the ski-instruction of this country was organized on a basis which included the whole of Switzerland and, one year later, it was grouped in a federated society. The importance of this "collective" instruction grows amazingly from winter to winter. Only the second world war caused a temporary restraint to its development. In the last ten years, however, the ski-schools have made an immense move forward. The total number of half-day lessons given in the ski-schools has risen from 48,500 to 1,390,000. This fact has largely contributed to the development of this sport. In our day, with the populations of towns in continued growth, and the alarming predominance of sedentary occupations, the ski-sport constitutes a valuable factor of compensation. To encourage this sport by means of sensible instruction, at reasonable cost, and to extend its practice as much as possible, is the principal aim of the ski-schools. The first condition necessary for the accomplishment of this task is a careful training of the instructors who are to take over the classes, and this, from many points of view, demands higher qualifications than are needed for individual instruction.

Thanks to the intelligent and purposeful aim of the ski-instruction in the last years it has been possible to acquire in the shortest time the technical knowledge necessary for easy tours and not too difficult descents. The ski-schools are in a position to give appropriate instruction to adults, children and high class skiers; and their monitors are ready to place all their qualities at the disposal of the students. Each guest has the opportunity to control his ski-ing capacities in tests which take place regularly.

Based on the principle of a carefully conceived class system, and by giving their pupils thoroughly-proved, methodical directions, the ski-schools strive to afford their pupils a ski-ing method as simple as possible. This practical way of learning contributes to the healthy development of children as well as to the recreation and relaxation of the overworked adults. Each sunny ski-school day spent in the class of an efficient and understanding master is an unforgettable gift for young and old.

Christian Rubi.

SWISS JEWELLERS WIN COVETED FOREIGN AWARDS

This year twenty-four winners of the Diamond International Awards included two Swiss watchmaker-jewellers: Meister Ltd. of Zurich and Gilbert Albert in Geneva. In addition, three Swiss firms, viz. Patek Philippe in Geneva, Meister in Zurich and Gubelin in Lucerne, which had already won at least three prizes in previous competitions, have been nominated members of the Diamonds International Academy.

[O.S.E.C.]