



British Skibike Racing Team

SKI-BOB ASSOCIATION OF GREAT BRITAIN

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Affiliated to: Federation Internationale de Skibob

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British Skibike Racing Report 2003

The 2003 season started with added expectation for two reasons: first was the invaluable sponsorship that the team had managed to secure during the off-season and the second was the large number of novice racers selected for the team. New racers are vital for the survival of the sport within Great Britain as they bring with them fresh enthusiasm, new ideas and above all increased competition amongst team members. Novice racers seek to prove themselves worthy of their places in the team and, using established members of the team as benchmarks, they push themselves to see what level of expertise they can achieve in the sport. Furthermore, they relish the sense of national pride when competing for the GB Team and when attending official ceremonies, prize givings and various hospitality events. The SAGB's MARSH Trophy, awarded to the best novice racer during each season, would prove to be a hard fought battle!

Without any form of government funding, the GB team has continued in its tradition, dating back to the 60's, of competing annually on the World Cup circuit and at the World Championships. This has been achieved at great personal financial cost to the racers themselves but also through the generous support of our official team sponsors. The GB Team would like to thank all those involved from the varying companies who have made this season such a success; your help affords our young and promising British athletes greater focus, allowing them to concentrate on the racing itself and not on distracting elements such as team logistics, equipment, clothing and insurance. The team's results surpassed our expectations for the season and this can only be put down to the hard work of our sponsors behind the scenes coupled with the commitment of racers to their training programmes.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS – ACHENKIRCH AUSTRIA 12-16 FEB 2003

The "Kleiner" World Championships has been split from the main World Championships for many years because there are too many competitors for one ski resort. It is always a friendly family event often with both parents and their children racing, however, it is serious competition for the athletes taking part who are divided into age groups from 8 years old to 75! This year 136 competitors from 8 Countries assembled in Austria at Munster near Innsbruck for the opening ceremony, a march through the village with a band playing and flags flying. The British Team led the way into the arena where we were treated to some local culture in the form of highly decorated "woodland spirits" and lots of welcoming speeches followed by gluwien and impressive fireworks.

The racing took place at Achenkirch, a good drive up the valley. We were lucky to have a lot of snow and sunny weather but we were only to discover that the new natural snow, although well prepared with the piste machines, was not able to bind in well with the hard layer of artificial snow that was the base. The result for the last competitors after more than a hundred racers had carved up the course was to have enormous troughs in each gate which made each of the courses more like a bobsleigh run. None of this was a problem for India Muirhead, the first Junior we have had racing in the British Team for many years, because she was one of the first to race. Although already her second season on a skibike, this was the first time she had ever competed and she improved enormously with each race.

The team members had all gone to the French Alps earlier in the season for selection and training which greatly improved their technique and now was the time to demonstrate it. The first race was a Super GS 1600 metres long with two difficult steep sections. India who was instructed not to go too fast and make sure she completed the course, was delighted to find that she had beaten one of the British senior men novice team members, Darren Walker, who had similar instructions to take it steadily! So started some healthy competition within the British Team with Darren soon overtaking both India and his fellow Scottish team-mate Kenny Park but he could not match the experience of Kevin Rochfort and Richard Platt. India had a close encounter with the safety netting in the second race, the GS, but was none the worse for it. The final race was the Slalom which had to be a very long course because of the profile of the mountain – the FISB debated hard about only having one run because it was so long, 1050 metres with 49 gates, and with so many competitors and such difficult snow conditions there were doubts expressed about completing two runs in daylight. In the end we decided on the traditional two runs and managed to finish in time. Kenny beat Darren in the first run but that was reversed in the second when Darren had a storming performance knocking



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more than 7 seconds off his first time to produce a better combined time. The best British results in "Alte klasse 1" of the three races overall were from Kevin Rochfort who came 10th in his class of 28 competitors. Full race results are attached.

The final prize giving party was marked the startling performance of Kenny Park who won the Gold medal in the yodelling competition!

NESSELWANG GERMANY 22-23 FEB 2003 – WORLD CUP/FISB A/BRITISH NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The entire team were united for the first time for a week's training at Nesselwang before the race meeting the coming weekend. The snow conditions and weather were perfect throughout the week. Carving technique was practised and improved, the experienced racers providing advice along the way, and as much time as possible was spent on slalom technique as we managed to secure to ourselves a section of the piste to put out some poles out on. Slalom is by far the most technical of the race disciplines, requiring less raw aggression and more control, and it is here that the margin between the British racers and the world's best racers is at its greatest. The slalom is also given the heaviest weighting in the FISB points that are used to calculate the Combination standings and starting orders, so they become even more important.

The final days' training was marred by Tom Rogers' spectacular crash whilst performing a speed test. Racers often throw themselves straight down the fall line of the mountain in their tuck position to simulate what they will feel during the faster races. This prepares them for the speeds they will reach, the undulations and airtime they will experience and above all the ability to read the piste ahead of them at race speed in order to negotiate the course set. Fortunately, Tom's injuries were superficial and with some German stitches in his forehead he was able to race the next day, although understandably not at full throttle!

The first days racing was part of the World Cup circuit, consisting of a Giant Slalom in the morning and two runs at a Slalom in the afternoon (a combined time being taken from the two runs' times). The World Cup races attract all the top racers (at Nesselwang there were 62 competitors from 12 different nations competing) because it is only at these races that World Cup points are awarded. They are only open to the Elite Mens and Womens classes and the results of these races determine the division of the annual prize monies amongst the racers, with points being awarded for 15th place upwards. One of the goals set by the GB Team this season was to finish in the top fifteen and to collect a rare World Cup point. It has been a few years since a British racer has managed this and so Nic Platt should be very proud of his achievement. His 15th place in the Slalom combination was outstanding, possibly the outstanding result of the season, and to come at such an early stage in the season was surprising. Due to the lack of financial support, our athletes do not spend nearly as much time training as the other nations or nearly as much as they would like to, and this is why our technique often lets us down in the Slalom. Nic's result should therefore be regarded as a significant personal achievement but also as a sign of an improving team who, with a longer and more substantial training programme, could achieve unparalleled success. Certainly the UK SPORT goal of becoming one of the top 5 skibiking nations is realistically achievable.

The next day (Sun 23rd Feb) was the FISB A race in which a total of 98 competitors from 13 nations took part. FISB A races are open to all classes of racer, from the youngest Junior (10yrs) to the oldest Senior (70+ yrs). There was a Super-G in the morning and a Giant Slalom in the afternoon and the results of these races were also to count as the British and German National Championships results. The event was kindly hosted by the Bavarian Skibob Club, together with the help of the Ski Club of Nesselwang, and the SAGB would like to thank them for all their hard work in organising four separate races over the space of a weekend (!) and for what proved to be a most social of race meetings.

Nic Platt was crowned British Champion for the second year running with two good runs, the most notable being the Giant Slalom in which he managed to establish a whole three seconds between himself and second place. Runner-up was his twin, Tim, who just managed to see off the challenge of Harry Dearden. Harry tangled with a gate six gates from the finish of the Giant Slalom to ruin his chances for second place but he has the consolation of becoming Welsh Champion for the second year running and third time of his career! Darren Walker produced a great race in the Giant Slalom as well, claiming second place



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in the Seniors, only to be beaten by the wily old veteran Ric Platt, the British Team Captain. His expertise and leadership have been instrumental in keeping the British Team together over the years and it is easy to see why he is so valued by the FISB race committee. He has officially retired from racing but the British Championships always seem to tempt him back and long may it continue. His 'protégé', India Muirhead, wins the Beckett Cup and is British Junior Champion, despite the lack of competition, and we look forward to seeing her racing progress as she undoubtedly has great promise.

WORLD ELITE CHAMPIONSHIPS 2003 – 26TH FEB – 2ND MARCH WISŁA, POLAND

Poland was altogether different. The snow was extremely hard in the mornings but very soft by the end of the afternoons, which made it difficult to prepare for the following day's races. The locals said that it was surprisingly warm for the time of year but then again they were not negotiating the cold easterly wind in just a race suit at the crack of dawn! Furthermore, the lifts systems were somewhat archaic and it was either an uncompromising t-bar or a horse and sleigh. Wisła was also hosting a World Cup ski jumping competition during this week and much to the excitement of the locals, the Wisła -born Polish champion won the event. Needless to say all this added to the atmosphere and made the World Championships in Wisła such a success.

It all started with two different Super-Gs, followed by a Giant Slalom the next day and then two Slaloms to finish. There were a total of 58 competitors from 9 nations taking part. The best Czechs took the honours in the faster events but it was the Slalom that ultimately decided who was to be crowned overall World Champion. Markus Moser's astonishingly fast two Slalom times allowed him to make up a considerable time deficit from the earlier races and go on to win, adding to the Austrian's already significant medals tally. It seems no one can match him in the Slalom and this further highlights the need for British racers to spend significant time focusing on this discipline if progress in the World rankings is to continue. Whereas Moser is lucky enough to be able to train all year round as he is both sponsored as an individual and also receives annual support from the Austrian government, the British Team have to settle for what time they themselves can afford financially. It would be interesting for just once to level the playing fields.

Nic Platt looked as though he were to continue his good form of the season until his fall near the finish of the first Super-G, which allowed Harry Dearden to claim top spot amongst the British and B-nations racers with his 22nd place in the Super-G combination. Harry produced two solid times and managed to gain a significant lead in the overall Combination standings. Tim Platt was the best of the British and B-nations in the Giant Slalom, finishing in 21st place, followed very closely by Nic Platt in 22nd place, and after the two runs of the Slalom, Nic Platt was first amongst the British and B-nation racers with his 19th place in the Slalom combination. So after all the racing had finished, it was left to the FISB to calculate the Combination results, taking in to account all the individual results according to their weightings, and as Nic Platt, Harry Dearden and Tim Platt had each taken the honours in the three different disciplines, it was to be an extremely tight decision. It finished in Harry Dearden's favour, with a margin of only a few FISB points, and his 15th place in the Combination meant that he was also B-nations Champion.

AWARDS

Congratulations to **India Muirhead** on winning the **Marsh Trophy** as best novice racer.

Congratulations to **Nic Platt** on winning the **Championship Trophy**; British Champion for the second year running.

Congratulations to **Richard Platt** on winning the **Seniors' Cup**.

Congratulations to **India Muirhead** on winning the **Beckett Cup**; for the best placed Junior at the World Championships.

AFTERWORD

The British Team would again especially like to thank our sponsors for their investment in our athletes: thanks to John Chantry and the design team @ Positive Altitude Ltd for keeping us stylish and warm, to Susie Donaldson @ Binatone Telecom Plc for keeping the team talking to each other, to Alan @ Rud Chains Ltd and Martin @ The Roof Box Company for preventing the team from slipping off course, to Dave @ Pocket Ski Sling Co. for inventing an easy way of carrying our racing skis up the



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mountains, to Jon Denton @ World Ski and Travel Ltd for providing first-class affordable racing insurance and also to Terry Bartlett @ Ski Bartlett for his expert advice and specialist racing equipment. You have all been instrumental in our progress this season and together we can look forward to the promising future of the sport in the UK.

We would also like to thank Brendan West (the SAGB's webmaster and PR officer) for setting up our own new website (www.skibikeracing.co.uk), entirely dedicated to the British Skibike racing. This has allowed us to afford our sponsors web space, to set up web links with them and it also provides a cost effective way of publishing the GB Team results, racing photographs, racer profiles and future training schedules. The racing side of the SAGB will benefit greatly from this for many seasons to come.

We are of course hugely indebted to the SAGB, whose continued affiliation to the FISB allows our athletes to compete each year, and to our President, Chairman and Executive Committee, whose time and effort put in to running the sport is both essential and irreplaceable. Their passion for the sport is still as strong as ever and long may it continue.

To our travelling support – thank you for putting up with the athletes adrenalin-fused mood swings, for being walking talking clothes hooks, for waving your flags with fervour and for always having a smile on your faces at the finish line whatever the weather. And our thanks to Shirley for recording all the race times down and for being the only one of us who ever really knows what's going on!

And last but not least, a big thank you to all the members of the SAGB who continue to support skibiking (skibobbing) in the UK.

Tim Platt
Racing Secretary
Skibob Association of Great Britain

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