

'In tartiflette we trust' is inscribed on Jan Zajackowski's (GFI Brokers) helmet. Could this have helped inspire him to be the overall winner of both the ski and snowboard races?

Andrea Fieschi



Pounding the City gates

Each spring, adrenalin-fuelled skiers from London's Square Mile go to the mountains of Courmayeur to race and revel. **Neil English** joins them.



Simon Jacot (left) gets soaked in a champagne embrace with GFI team's Tills Hufnagle (Goldman Sachs) and Joanna Amzallag (Air France)

USUALLY it's all about the intense competition in the Giant Slalom.

But celebration was in the mountain air last March to mark the 10th anniversary of the City Ski Championships. The normally single-minded efforts on the GS course were (almost) overshadowed by the side event - the passionately contested team battle on the dual-slam slope, and the sideshows. (One included impromptu pole-dancing in a mountain restaurant, another a member of the Ski Club of Great Britain team in party mood, who stripped from ski gear to 'undies' and dived into the pool of a four-star hotel she wasn't staying at!)

Still, the enchanting Italian resort of Courmayeur hosted the 170-strong band of revelling competitors, representing all corners of London's 'Square Mile' and welcomed us, as always, with that endearing brand of Aostan charm and hospitality.

It was after the Ski Club of Great Britain scored a memorable victory over the formidable Lloyds 2 team in the final of the new, mixed-sex, dual parallel-slam, sponsored by the management consultancy, Accenture, that a late lunch was organised by the legendary 'Lloyds' boys'.

The splendid marquee-style buffet luncheons set up at the bases of Friday's dual-slam and Saturday's giant-slam courses, were sponsored by the asset management firm, GAM, and catered by the Maison Vieille (Heston Blumenthal's "favourite" mountain restaurant). So much delicious food was on offer that it came as no surprise that the late lunch at the Maison Vieille proper was more liquid than solid.

About two hours in, the restaurant turned into a scene not far removed from the film *Coyote Ugly* when a ceiling-support pole above a hot stove was spotted. Vintage performances were put in by two 'Lloyds' boys,' Antony Barrow and Alessandro Guerrini Maraldi, followed up by some slightly more athletic stunts by the former Team GB skiing Olympian, Graham Bell, and Nicky Holford, a writer who was a key member of the Ski Club's team.

Nobody was left sitting at the table. They were all gyrating on top of it, applauding the side show on the pole along with guests from other tables cheering from the upper level.

The last cable car had gone, and in the darkness, the ski patrol escorted the revellers off the mountain and back to the resort.

But the pre-dinner cameos were far from done. As some city racers were being dropped off at the Grand Hotel Royal e Golf, Holford spotted the outdoor heated swimming pool. Clearly thinking this was a public pool, she deftly stripped from ski kit and thermals down to her underwear, burst through a fire escape door, and dived into the water to raucous encouragement from her team-mates and other onlookers. A smartly dressed bell-boy quickly (and gallantly) brought her a towel to protect her modesty and escorted her back to her pile of friends and clothes.

Despite Antony Barrow's full embrace of the liquid (pole) lunch followed by a standard 'Lloyds boys' dinner (which alone can render some people incapacitated for days) the 50+ year-old racer put in an astonishing performance the following morning on the GS course to win not only

the Masters' category, but a highly deserved 'knighthood' spontaneously awarded by City Ski's founder Amin Momen of Momentum Ski, complete with sword tapping on shoulders, at the prize-giving dinner which follows the G.H Mumm Champagne reception in the Hotel Pavillon.

There were many deserving prize-winners, but a few certainly worthy of note included Jan Zajackowski of the GFI Group brokers, who won the GS Super FIS Male category, then promptly put on his snowboard to win the GS Snowboard category too!

Formerly unknown to the Championships, Till Hufnagel, of Goldman Sachs, was the Fastest Male (non FIS), Fastest Banker, and, to complete his City Ski debut hat-trick, also scooped the Fastest Male on the Radar

Trap course sponsored by Columbia clothing. By coincidence, the fastest male in the first ever City Ski Championships 10 years ago was Zack Kembar - also from Goldman Sachs.

Kate Mullins of the law firm Simmonds & Simmonds was pick of the girls in the GS, racing to an impressive Fastest Female victory (non FIS).

Having once again flown the Atlantic from his home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming to entertain on and off the ski slopes, Tommy Moe was on his usual good form, although the former Olympic Gold downhiller was beaten on the GS course by Britain's own Graham Bell. And despite having Moe and the best-selling crime writer, Peter James, on my Mail on Sunday four-man squad, we were narrowly beaten in the first round of the knockout dual slalom by Lloyd's Ski Club. (Apart from being a gutsy and skilful skier, few people can compete with Peter when it comes to story-telling over a glass of fine wine on the fearsome après-ski course!)

The 2010 City Ski Championships will be in Courmayeur over the weekend of March 18-21, and places are already filling. The advice from Momentum Ski HQ is "register your team as soon as possible".

The 1996 World Champion Formula 1 driver, Damon Hill (49), is committed to making a return to City Ski this year: in 2008 he was voted 'Most Improved Skier', and dubbed Damon 'DownHill' by the city faithful.

Racers will have the opportunity of bidding to have Hill in their team and bid at a silent auction for one of two pairs of hand-made Swiss Lorme skis signed by him, and designed in his F1 black-and-white helmet colours.



The City Ski Championships

Andreas Fieschi



Now President of the British Racing Drivers' Club, Hill has donated two VIP tickets for the 2010 British Grand Prix as prizes.

To get into the draw at the Championships' gala dinner on Saturday March 20, those interested should pledge £50 to the Halow Project, a charity for which Damon is a patron. Pledges can be made by calling Momentum Ski on 020

7371 9111 or by emailing halow@momentumski.com. All pledges and auction funds go to the charity, which helps young people with learning difficulties.

Other well-known faces confirmed for 2010 include the three-Michelin-star chef Heston Blumenthal, Colin Jackson and the ever-popular commentator Matt Chilton.

Warren Smith will be taking over the Friday race-technique camps from Konrad Bartelski, who has stepped down after a long good-service record at the Championships (and a well-earned City Ski cuckoo clock). Smith will be accompanied by some of the coaches from the Warren Smith Ski Academy in Verbier, Switzerland, and they'll provide biomechanical equipment as well as video analysis and advice. Another first to kick off the second decade of the City Ski Championships will be Dr Craig McLean, the founder of Putney Chiropractic in south west London. Craig has helped many athletes - from Olympic runners and skiers to recreational people from all sports - recover from injury. An expert skier himself, Dr McLean has an intimate understanding of ski injuries, and he'll be giving free advice and practical assistance. □

The City Ski Championships are organised by Momentum Ski (momentumski.com), specialists in a variety of tailor-made events and ski weekends across the Alps.

Loredana or Mapi on 020 7371 9111, race@momentumski.com, cityskichampionships.com can assist with all enquiries and bookings. 2010 City Ski package prices start from £495 per person to include scheduled flights, private transfer, three nights B&B and the full weekend race programme.



SKI Freshtracks is running a 'Technique Turnaround' week to Courmayeur from 7 - 14 February. Call 020 8410 2022 or go to skifreshtracks.co.uk for details.



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