



Martin Bond

Heston: Gourmet Goat! And, right: Ready for a blue run?

Fast tuck!

Heston Blumenthal gets a taste of glory as he battles it out with the City's top skiers in his first City Ski Championships – also the first to be held in Crans-Montana - and serves up this entertaining report.

This is not looking good. I'm a chef, not a ski racer, and the conditions are – shall we say - challenging. Not exactly porridge – but I hope they won't make me ski like a snail. According to our celebrated commentator, Matt Chilton, of Ski Sunday fame, the great Alberto Tomba won his 50th and final race on the very course I am about to attack. Maybe I should say which is about to attack me.

I'm in a team of four called the Gourmet Goats (I wonder why?) racing in the Accenture Dual Slalom. The team includes Amin Momen, the boss of Momentum Ski, which organises the whole Ski Festival, including the main skiing events. Also in our team: Giles Broom from Bloomberg and Henry Druce, editor of the Daily Mail ski magazine. We're up against a team called IG Index: Will Armitage, Gwenael Moy, Rachel Clark and John Lunnqvist, something of a snowboarding whizz by all accounts!

Amin and I met by chance in Ischgl, Austria five or six years ago, and skied together with a few of his ski-writer friends. At the time I hadn't skied for about 20 years (so busy was I trying to build up the Blumenthal brand) and I was decidedly rusty. But that didn't diminish my sudden realisation that I absolutely

loved skiing and couldn't believe it had been so long since I'd experienced that wonderful adrenalin rush and *joie de vivre* that, as all skiers know, is the reason we do it.

It takes years to become a chef, and the same goes for ski racing. But skiing means dedicating yourself to hours and hours of practice on the slopes from an early age. My early age is history - no chance now for me to reach skiing super-stardom! So what am I doing outwardly smiling (more of a rictus smile really, I suspect) but inwardly trembling at the top of a very steep GS course in a Swiss resort I've never even been to before.

I blame Amin. He's been trying to persuade me to turn up for this gig for a year or two now. And now I have. And I wish I hadn't.

Needless to say, it doesn't go to plan. I am one of the first of maybe 20 skiers who wipe out on the course. Some just sit down and stop... Others – like me! - have more spectacular falls. I just hope Roger Moore isn't looking. He's apparently out on the balcony of his chalet, watching

some of the races. I don't think he's going to recommend me for the skiing sequences in the next Bond movie! I also feel rather guilty because I've let Konrad Bartelski down. He's just given me some very helpful tips about the course and my technique before the race, and I've still managed to get it wrong.

Later – after my crash – Matt Chilton makes me feel better by telling me: "The finish pitch was steep and, with the soft conditions, a racing rut formed quickly, adding to the degree of difficulty. Thank goodness the World Cup was in town a

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few weeks earlier. Without the FIS deep water-injection techniques, our amateur racers could have found themselves cutting grass with their edges. It's pretty brutal, but it's providing a thrilling spectacle."



The City Ski Championships

Now he tells me!

The eventual winners are the Lloyd's of London team - Chris Oliveira, Anthony Barrow, and Filippo and Alessandro Guerrini Maraldi.

I have a chance to redeem myself the next day, when more than 200 people line up on the Piste Nationale for the showcase giant slalom race. The FIS course, where Didier Cuche and Lindsey Vonn won recently, would again prove seriously testing, but at least I am on my own – scary – but not responsible for letting down team-mates. This is very much a solo venture for everyone. No sous chefs!

Someone called Antoine Deneriaz makes it look easy - but then he was France's downhill gold medallist at the 2006 Turin Winter Olympics! He's also an ambassador for Zai skis. Maybe I should have tried a pair - I might have done better. Antoine's nearest rival is Chris Oliveira from Lloyd's of London. He's apparently a regular at the Championships but a rare early night on Friday set him up for an exceptional performance in the professional FIS class. He'd also been a member of the winning Lloyd's Masters team in the previous day's dual slalom. Me? This time I get down in one piece. Not bothered about my time. Just thankful to make it to the bottom without disgracing myself again! It's been great fun. Honestly. In spite of my wipe-out. Amin and I are still friends. Konrad has forgiven me. Will I be back next year? You bet.

Heston Blumenthal was talking to Arnie Wilson

Minty Clinch reports

In the individual competitions, the top prizes went to Till Hufnagel from Goldman Sachs in the men's category and Alex Hendy from Peel Hunt in the women's. Other racers fared less well, providing the BBC's Matt Chilton with plenty of ammunition for some tongue-in-cheek commentary. With wine flowing freely in the Savill's Alpine Homes paddock area at the finish, the cheering for spills and thrills increased as the race progressed.

When the lifts closed on Friday and Saturday, the crowds gathered in Zero-Dix at the base of the mountain to listen and dance in the open air to The Feeling and 29 Fingers. The more cerebrally-minded attended the Financial Times Alpine Business Forum - a first for 2012. Caroline Daniel, editor of FT Weekend, hosted the Friday seminar, triggering lively debate between her panellists – The Ski Club's president, BBC Security correspondent Frank Gardner, comedian Marcus Brigstocke and Israeli financier, Edouard Cukierman. After a Swiss raclette dinner at the Hotel Etrier, Brigstocke returned

After dinner, Matt Chilton masterminded the distribution of prizes in a wide range of categories. Sporting stars Colin Jackson and Konrad Bartelski and heads of Swiss tourist organizations in London, Valais and Crans-Montana who'd worked hard to make the event a success, came on-stage to present the appropriate awards to appreciative applause.

All too soon it was over to Ram Raid, a trio on a mission to get everyone dancing at the closing party. As Amin Momen segued into his air guitar routine, the cries for encores multiplied and the band played on – and on - far into the night. 

Now here's how you're supposed to do it!
Chris Oliveira from the Lloyd's team in fine form.



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to the stage with fellow stand ups Rufus Hound and Nick Doody, for Comedy Club fun. Graham Bell, Ski Sunday presenter and ex-Olympic downhill racer, graciously submitted to a sustained attack from Hound that had the large crowd in stitches.

By the time 300 people sat down for Saturday's gala dinner, many were in the mood to pay generous prices for tickets to premium sporting and cultural fixtures in the charity auction. In total, the auction raised £22,000 for *Help for Heroes*.

Next year? Same time, same place:

March 14-17, 2013.

To reserve your team's place, call Amin on +44 (0)20 7371 9111, or email him at amin@momentumski.com

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CITY SKI CHAMPIONSHIPS
Crans-Montana, 14-17 March 2013

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