



Tommy Moe:
Back for the big one

The snow must go on

Neil English previews the 10th City Ski Championships – and looks back at the event last March when the credit crunch was still just a darkening cloud on the horizon

Panache: The French GFI racers made a mockery of many of their rivals in catsuits



Speed merchants:
Alain Baxter and
Damon Hill



MARCUS Brigstocke was pointing to individuals in the 240-strong audience and asking where they were from. “Scotland”, came a shout from the back. To everybody’s surprise, the comedian was uncharacteristically kind, and received raucous applause for his retort: “I have nothing bad to say about Glaswegians... where else can a terrorist stagger from a blazing Range Rover and instantly get head-butted? Respect!”

So what does a stand-up comic have to do with skiing?

Surrey-born Brigstocke may be more at home in his Radio 4 studio, but on the slopes of Courmayeur in Italy’s beautiful Aosta Valley region last March, he looked equally comfortable getting his winter fix on his beloved snowboard. He wasn’t here to entertain. He was here to ride.

Soon we were all to face the daunting prospect of throwing ourselves down a World Cup-graded GS course against teams from Square Mile institutions that range in ski ability from top class racers seeking FIS points to near novices just praying for survival. The course is challenging on skis but much more so on a snowboard, especially in deep ruts. Marcus, 35, did well to complete two runs safely, but he’ll fare better this coming March because, for the 10th anniversary of this premium Alpine event, its co-founder and organiser, Amin Momen, is planning a separate Super Giant Slalom course for snowboarders only. “Boarders have grown in numbers which is great to see”, he says. “Now I can give them their own course which doesn’t entail carving so sharply round rutted gates and they can really go for it.”

Marcus may have been here to ride, but the four fresh-faced ‘cheeky boys’, as I dubbed them, from the financial brokers GFI, made clear their intention to entertain, and, oh... win prizes too. The former ski instructors, or race-club members from the Portes du Soleil area, were show-stoppingly good on skis, not to mention the dance floor.

But they did wind up more than a few by flamboyantly flaunting their Frenchness. When you’re new boys in town, it takes ‘big baguettes’ to mix it with some of the hard-core City Ski faithful, like the Lloyds of London boys, Accenture, RBS and GAM, but GFI showed respect to nobody. They took it to another, albeit lower, level, by stripping off salopettes and racing down the GS course in French flag patterned boxer shorts, giving everyone an Eifel! To make it worse, these demon skiers beat some of the most serious competitors, clad in skin tight, one-piece race suits, and picked up a beret-full of prizes too.

The Accenture-sponsored Dual Slalom on the Friday has become as fiercely competitive as Saturday’s blue riband GS, making it more of a ‘Duel’ Slalom. And City Ski’s other sponsors, including G.H Mumm Champagne, Links of London, Snow+Rock, Cheviot, GAM, CityJet, Michelob and Columbia clothing offer lavish prizes to the victors. Next March, the drinks evening at which the GS race bib-numbers are handed out will take place up the mountain after Friday’s Dual Slalom, giving competitors an exclusive taste of genuine après ski above Courmayeur, directly at the base of the slopes in Carlo’s convivial

Christiania bar and restaurant at Plan Checrouit. And a private cable car will take everyone back down to the resort in time for supper.

Last March, the GFI team, wearing garlic string necklaces, competed brilliantly, knocking out prominent Square Mile companies on the piste, and in a riveting final heat, narrowly beat the courageous ‘Lloyds Boys’. The GFI boss, Simon Dides, not only won ‘Third Fastest Male’ in the GS, but pulled off an audacious airborne twister as he crossed the Dual Slalom winning line. This prompted the former world-champion hurdler Colin Jackson – all smiles, as usual – to dub the GFI team the “Harlem Globetrotters of City Ski”.

In the relatively short time he’s had on skis, Jackson always performs valiantly – both on the slopes and at the Poppies night-club on Saturday night after the prize giving, with more than a nod to his 2005 Strictly Come Dancing achievements. He showed similar commitment in the GS, and though crashing twice, he still got up and recorded a time. Jackson, now 41, has set himself a goal of breaking the one-minute barrier next time.

Although Lloyds’ noses were a tad out of joint after their narrow defeat in the Dual Slalom, their never-say-die spirit earned them redemption, with Anthony Barrow’s tenacious GS performance scooping the age 50+ prize and Filippo Guerrini-Maraldi claiming the 40+ category. Accenture rampaged over the GS, taking the Fastest and Second Fastest Male prizes, courtesy of Peter Beardshaw, and Andrea Gangheri, along with the Fastest Female Team prize, and the world famous consulting firm’s Jayne Goodenough lived up to her name, winning the Fastest Female Speed Skiing trophy.

Also comfortable with all things speed, the 1996 Formula 1 world-champion, Damon Hill will be making it a hat-trick of appearances at Courmayeur in March. According to the British ski legend Konrad Bartelski, who conducts free pre-race training clinics for all (sponsored by Snow+Rock) Hill, now 48, is the most rapidly improving and competitive skier he’s seen since this event started nine years ago. This ‘improvement’ was certainly enough to beat both Amin Momen and me in the GS – a moment not lost on the BBC’s commentator Matt Chilton and his razor-sharp wit. It turns out that Hill has been having private tuition in Verbier from Warren Smith, that impressive British exponent of modern technique. Smith is committed to competing in the 10th anniversary championships in March, and is considering allowing me to join his team (in spite of my disappointing run against Damon Hill!). Warren may well be doing race-technique clinics alongside Bartelski too.

All the 2008 results and prize winners are listed on www.citychampionships.com/results - but I must mention the Ski Club of Great Britain’s Betony Garner picking up the Third Fastest Female prize in GS, and Air France’s brave skiing novice Naomi Dulpher, who collected the ‘Most Challenged Skier’ prize, just breaking the five minute barrier - not that much quicker than the flight time from London City to Geneva! Contrast that with City >>>



Laura Westmacott: Fastest woman FIS racer

‘They stripped off salopettes and raced down the GS course in French flag-patterned boxer shorts, giving everyone an Eifel! To make it worse, these demon skiers beat some of the most serious competitors, clad in skin tight, one-piece, race suits, and picked up a beret-full of prizes too.’



Party host: Giacomo Calosi

Neil English and many competitors stayed at one of Courmayeur's most popular hotels – the three-star Bouton d'Or. He was a guest of the tailor-made holiday and event specialists Momentum Ski 020 7371 9111. For more information about the 2009 City Ski Championships (March 19-22) or to register a team, call 020 7863 8813 or visit www.citychampionships.com

Ski's most popular and dominant hero, Einar Johansen, who yet again posted the outright best GS time for the seventh consecutive year, with a scorching 48.99 seconds – even quicker than a yard of Michelob down a 'Lloyds' boy's' throat!

Next March sees the welcome return of Tommy Moe, the 1994 Olympic Downhill gold medallist, who was 'master of ceremonies' at three consecutive City Ski Championships from 2003 to 2005. Says Amin Momen: "Tommy is coming specially for our 10th anniversary all the way from his home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. He was really popular with all the participants in the past and they will have another chance to race against him or at least just measure and compare their time against a gold-medal champion and see the difference. Tommy is an après-ski gold medallist too – that's what I call champion. The ability to party hard and still race!"

The glittering line-up will also include members of the British Ski Team and, for the first time, a selection of the amazing sit-ski athletes representing the British Disabled Ski Team. Wait until you see these guys and girls come through the gates - and be prepared to be astonished.

Momen says he's delighted so many regulars are returning for the big 10th anniversary, despite the hard times in the financial and business sectors. "It means a great deal that these businesses are coming back when times are clearly harder for everyone. I believe it's partly

to do with the broad spectrum of companies we attract, from consultants and insurance companies to banks. And also that skiers and boarders are so passionate about the thrills they experience on the snow. Even if sacrifices have to be made elsewhere, their resilience will show through."

It was Marcus Brigstocke who had the last word at the prize-giving gala dinner in the four star Hotel Pavillon. Deciding that a few words of peg-downing jest were in order, he grabbed the microphone, and took immediate aim, on behalf of the whole room, at the enthusiastic celebrations of the GFI team. He pointed out that earlier that day, the French Rugby team had been trounced by the Welsh, who recorded a Six Nations Grand Slam as a result, delighting many, including Colin Jackson, a Welshman. And Brigstocke added: "When it comes to sport, there is great rivalry between Britain and France. However it has to be said, nobody in Britain was remotely bothered about the 2012 Summer Olympics, until that is, we realised the French wanted it so badly!"
Touché. □



Einar Johansen: Seven wins in a row