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Boys on the run

Every year the City descends on Courmayeur for a weekend of serious competition and partying. **Nicky Holford** joins the fray



March 2004. All is quiet in Bar Roma, Courmayeur, but there is a definite charge in the air. The sophisticated watering hole, favoured by chic weekenders from Milan, is about to be invaded by 240 London bankers, lawyers, fund managers, traders and insurance brokers. For this is day one of the fifth annual City Ski Championships, to be followed by three days of eating, drinking and networking. Oh yes. And skiing.

The championship is an annual, predominately male event that oozes testosterone and bravado. It's fuelled by alcohol and bad jokes and there's a lot at stake, not least a reputation for extreme behaviour to uphold - extreme skiing, extreme partying and extremely little sleep. It's easy to

spot the city skiers as they roll into the bar decked out in the top brands of ski wear. They are in the mood, egged on by colleagues and rivals. No one will be slinking off early to bed.

The championships - organised by Simon Jacot de Boinod, a former City man, and Amin Momen of Momentum Travel - always kicks off on a Thursday night at Bar Roma and by midnight, well-toned, nimble-footed barmen are weaving between the fund managers and venture capitalists, lifting trays of tequila shots and vodka and Red Bull over their heads. As one of the few female competitors, I find myself having to down a couple of tequila shots in a row - for which I am awarded the title of "top totty". I take it as a compliment, given that the other titles are

"available totty" or "full-on totty". This not a time to be worrying about political correctness.

But while on the surface all seems jolly and hedonistic, behind the scenes strategies are being feverishly worked upon. For make no mistake: this is deadly serious. "We're here to win," says Antony Barrow, president of the Lloyd's Ski Club. "You get the competition between the teams [each made up of four skiers] and from the individuals within the team." To add spice, competitors also compete against professional racers such as Tommy Moe, the American Olympic gold medalist, and British downhill skiers Konrad Bartelski and Graham Bell, as well as vying for a number of coveted

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