

Published: 20 Jan 1975 - sportsillustrated
Author: William O. Johnson
URL: <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1089446/4/index.htm>

Every Man Has A Mad Streak

Switzerland's Cresta Run is a dangerous toy for a band of daredevils who shoot its icy course, chase each event with buckets of champagne and cheerily note that.

The Cresta Run is a serpentine chute made of ice, perhaps four feet wide, and it is one of the most dangerous toys in the world. It winds down the mountainside at [St. Moritz, Switzerland](#). It is a classic, one-of-a-kind creation: the walls are two feet high all the way to the bottom except for a couple of particularly tricky turns where they are banked much higher to prevent the riders from flying out of the chute too often. The course has a vertical drop of 514 feet over about three-quarters of a mile.

Cresta riders make the run lying belly-whopper on a short, heavy sled called either a toboggan, a wagon or, for some arcane reason, a skeleton. The sled consists of a flat, padded surface about 3 feet long which slides so that the rider can shift his weight forward and backward and, beneath it, a set of rolled steel runners. Buff up the runners a bit with emery cloth and the contraption takes off, accelerating all the way. The men who are good at the game average more than 49 mph for the entire run, hitting almost 85 mph near the bottom.

The Cresta has developed a cult of its own over the decades, a loyal legion of commoners and millionaires, with a sprinkling of royalty—men who have tested its mystical drops and curves and competed for its myriad cups and trophies since it was first built in 1884. The Cresta cult is known as the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club, an exclusive organization with headquarters at the Kulm Hotel in [St. Moritz](#). And the club exists only because the Cresta Run exists.

When the second Lord Brabazon of Tara was alive, there was no man more dedicated to the traditions and continuity of the Cresta. His father, a member of Parliament, had been a good rider before him and president of the club from 1939 to 1954. He himself had been a young Cresta daredevil. His son has been closely involved. So when the second Lord Brabazon died at 63 last Dec. 11 a link was broken. There was mourning among all riders, for the old man's enthusiasm and intense affection for this strange sport would not be matched for a long time to come.

In the last year of his life Lord Brabazon was a tallish, stooped fellow with thick spectacles, a splendid aristocratic overbite and a dignified mien. He was given to a double-breasted blue blazer with silver buttons bearing the image of a Cresta rider. He and Lady Brabazon had spent most of each January and February at the Kulm for the past several decades so that they could enjoy the high season of the Cresta. This was enormously important to Lord Brabazon, though it had been years since he himself had ridden the chute.

"You see," he said, "all my friends are here during high season. If I were to come at Christmas, I would not know a single bloody soul. The blokes would all be *strangers*. My parents began coming

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to [St. Moritz](#) in 1911 and I suppose I have been here every winter since—counting out the wars, of course." Lord Brabazon paused and gazed across the vast lobby of the Kulm. "Yes, counting out the wars," he said thoughtfully. "Before the war I was considered rather a promising young rider of the Cresta. I came back to appear again in 1951—14 years, mind you, after my last run. It was only for enjoyment then, not a hope in hell of winning anything. People missed so much due to the war." He sipped a cup of tea. "I haven't been down the run in 10 years now and I'll never go again, never."

When asked why, Lord Brabazon looked gently astonished that anyone would consider such a question necessary. "Because it frightens me terribly." He looked searchingly through his heavy spectacles, as if to be certain that he was understood. Then he spoke slowly, choosing his words with care: "When the exhilaration is worth the fright, then you must do it, you must ride the Cresta. But when the exhilaration is not worth the fright, then you must give it up. That is merely sensible, isn't it?"

Robert C. Ennis of West Roxbury, Mass. is 44 years old, a foreign-car dealer. He is the best, currently, of the half a dozen or so American businessmen who regularly run the Cresta and has won two trophies there. "Americans seem to stay away from the Cresta," he says. "They think it's silly. Also frightening. I'm afraid, too, but I like to use my intellect to overcome my instincts, and finishing a fast Cresta run is just the grandest feeling in the world—you wind up grinning like a fool. The G forces are awful and the illusion of speed is greater than driving a [Ferrari](#) at 200 mph. It blows off the whole year's dust that first time you run the Cresta each winter. We see each other here for a month or six weeks a year, no more, and we become great friends—for life, I suppose. The high season at the Cresta is an unforgettable time. There is absolutely nothing like it in the world."

It is high season at the Cresta now, and once more in the cold, golden [St. Moritz](#) mornings the riders assemble at Top, smoking cigarettes and speaking in a mix of English, French, German as they wait their turns in the little wooden warming hut with the cupola roof. As always, Cresta riders are a motley crowd, fairly tough-looking. Some have not yet shaved for the day and they are usually just out of bed, so there is some yawning, a little snorting, hawking and spitting. They are wearing the prescribed armor and equipment for their runs—crash helmets and goggles, heavy leather elbow pads and thick knee cushions, metal-plated knuckle pads over leather gloves, big clumsy brogans with the essential Cresta "rakes" bolted to the toes. The rest of their clothing is disreputable—soiled jump suits, old ski jackets, baggy ski pants, Levi's, moth-bitten sweaters, patched knickers. There is, as always, a raffish hint of the seedy daredevil in their appearance, a touch of the carnival motorcycle stuntman, the Roller Derby rowdy, even winterized Knievels. This appearance is deceptive, for riders of the Cresta are, if nothing else, men of respectability. Many are very rich, well educated; some are extremely well-born.

An alarm bell rings and a rider rises from his bench in the warming hut and strides outside. It is lovely at Top in the morning. Behind him, a church steeple looms in the bright sky. Off to his right, another spire rises over the roofs of [St. Moritz](#). And directly below lies the Cresta Run.

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The course is crystalline and very hard after the night's freeze. The rider's name is spoken over the loudspeaker from the Cresta Clubhouse down the hill; his time has come. He lowers his goggles, stoops over his toboggan and grips its sides. He takes a deep breath, exhales, then suddenly breaks into a series of quick digging steps, pushing the toboggan toward the steep drop beyond the start line. Just before he passes the electronic timer-sensors, the rider flings himself belly down on his wagon with a great grunt. He dips instantly down the run. His head and shoulders vanish, his feet tilt up, and he plunges over the brink onto the Cresta. Only an eerie rumbling can be heard as the wagon picks up momentum on the boiler-plate ice. This strange metallic thunder fades as the toboggan streaks down...down past all the dips and curves that have been long ago honored with names as familiar to a rider as his children's...Church Leap, Curzon Turn and Brabazon Turn, Rise, Battledore, the dread Shuttlecock, Stream Corner...down into Bulpetts, Scylla, Charybdis.

Retired Air Vice-Marshal R.A. Ramsay Rae (C.B., O.B.E.) is secretary of the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club (SMTC), and it is his job to manage all affairs of the Cresta Run. "Ronnie," as he is called, is a big burly man, bluff and hearty in manner, unfailingly outgoing. It is Ronnie Rae's voice one hears booming out all along the Cresta over the clubhouse public-address system, offering a genial and sometimes thrilling play-by-play critique of each run: "...there is Burgerstein coming right down the center of the track...oh, a very nice run...yes, he has taken a very clean line...oh, a little bit of swing at Brabazon...he's going into Shuttlecock now...yes, he's high on the wall, very high...oh, but it's a beautiful Shuttlecock...a lovely Shuttlecock." There is no hint of hysteria or hype in the PA reports of the secretary. For example, if a chap rides too high at the dangerously sharp Shuttlecock turn and flies out of the course—tumbling toboggan over teakettle into the snow and hay pile there—Ronnie Rae will say with just a trace of sharpness in his voice, "Oh, oh, some trouble there at Shuttlecock." There will be a moment of pained silence while all wait to learn if the rider can rise. (Shuttlecock causes more casualties than any spot on the Cresta; two years ago a rider was killed there.) Then when the victim stands, the secretary will say calmly, "Uh, no problem...he's up and brushing himself off. Good lad." When a run is completed, a rider's time is registered in an electronic instant at Ronnie Rae's elbow and the crowd of spectators waits eagerly for Rae's first words. "*Hello, hello, hello!*" the secretary may say. "Nino Bibbia has got himself a 56.30!" Lord Brabazon spoke of Ronnie Rae's announcing style: "We all listen very carefully to hear the number of hellos," he said. "Two hellos means a fine run, you see. And of course three hellos is something rather out of the ordinary."

The new president of the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club is a sandy-haired, amiable [London](#) banker named Roger G. Gibbs. He was nominated to the position in 1973 and was unanimously elected when two other candidates, Sir Dudley Cunliff-Owen, Bt., the former president, and Prince Constantin of [Liechtenstein](#), withdrew their names on the theory that it would be unseemly for a noble institution like the SMTC to hold a contested election. Though low-key in both demeanor and delivery, Roger Gibbs speaks with candor and enthusiasm about the Cresta and its riders, "I think every man on the Cresta has a mad streak," he says. "We have had all types—royalty, of course, the

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Duke of Kent, a prince from [Iran](#), Tino, of course, of [Liechtenstein](#). The first Lord Brabazon, you know, went down in his 80th year. He wanted to go from Top, but the committee barred him from that and made him go from Junction. He arrived at the bottom very much out of breath. A doctor was waiting, but Lord Brabazon was fine, of course, and when he caught his breath he and the doctor had a glass or two of champagne.

"The bloody Cresta fever catches us all. Waiting in that little hut at Top with cold feet and a hot toddy is like the fountain of youth for some. Stuffy bankers let themselves go on the Cresta. It's escapism, all right. But the Cresta brings in a fantastic lot of business to [St. Moritz](#). It attracts many kinds of people. Birds and the older generation like to paddle over to see the Cresta riders. It is a healthy outlet in many ways, you know."

The first Cresta Run was built at [St. Moritz](#) in 1884 by one Major W.H. Bulpetts. It was put up as an answer to a similar toboggan slide for tourists in nearby [Davos](#), which in the 1870s had become [St. Moritz](#)' major rival in the [Engadine](#) Valley. Early Cresta riders used toboggans that were like an extra-long luge and were ridden in a sitting position. A wagon that is almost identical to the one still used today was introduced in 1892. The sliding seat, an important addition to Cresta technique, was invented in 1901 by a celebrated rider named John A. Bott. In 1928 and 1948, when the Winter Olympics were held in [St. Moritz](#), the Cresta was a bona fide Olympic event in both Games. The Run itself used to cross the main St. Moritz-Celerina road, a situation that involved a lot of bell ringing and signaling each time a rider prepared to go so that two gates could be lowered across the road. "Clearly, this was a poor arrangement," says SMTC Annual Report No. 53, "and it was a great relief when the present road bridge was built by the civil authorities at no cost to the club. Most riders were a bit windy about the crossing and the rough surface caused a slight check in speed." The bridge over the Cresta came in 1932. The other significant structural improvement occurred in 1929 when a new finish area was built. "This was a very great help," it is noted in the annual report, "as the old finish was much too short and required a heavy dressing of sawdust to enable a rider to pull up sufficiently to avoid a big leap in the air at the top of it. The sawdust covered one's clothes and spoilt the polish on the runners, but was absolutely indispensable."

The cost for reconstructing the Cresta each season, a mere $\text{€}300$ in 1900, now runs between $\text{€}12,000$ and $\text{€}14,000$. Over the years the Cresta has fallen on very hard times. Roger Gibbs says, "The Cresta has been permanently broke, you know, and with the rampant inflation of recent years, we have been fighting like tigers to stand still. What with a large number of auctions and charity balls to raise money, we are continuing to make a go of it."

The membership of the SMTC is by no means exclusively aristocratic or even particularly wealthy. Indeed, two of the very best riders are local [St. Moritz](#) merchants—Nino Bibbia, a grizzled old mountain man who runs a grocery, and Paul Felder, who owns a clock shop. As Lord Brabazon asserted in no uncertain terms, "The Cresta is the classic example of democracy and Nino Bibbia is the classic example of how well it works, you see. He's Nino to me, and I'm Derek to him. I buy my

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Böndnerfleisch at Bibbia's market, yet he is one of the only people in the world I kiss on both cheeks when we meet. Now, there is a slight social element involved in being elected to membership in the Cresta. I don't mean from a class point of view, of course not. But we must maintain certain standards. For example, there is an awkward situation now—a bloke who is a bloody fine runner, but who is cordially disliked by many members. He is known to be involved in a somewhat shady business. We don't want him and, despite his obvious skill as a rider, we are putting off his membership. But if a man's technical qualifications as a rider are equal and no one says he's a bloody bore or another kind of bounder, if he's a good drinker and a good bloke, then he'll be in, won't he? There is room for all kinds—we need occasional clowns, you know, to keep it all alive, all going, and one fellow who is not a very good rider but in a very loud way is good fun will be elected quite without trouble."

Lord Brabazon could become intense in his discussion of the Cresta's enlightened ways, but that was understandable, since he had been profoundly involved in it for so long. He was president from 1963-1968, and his son ("He showed promise as a rider, but he is a responsible fellow and perhaps that was his problem in running the Cresta") is honorary assistant treasurer. "This is really an English club, you know," said Lord Brabazon. "Oh, we've had an American president and a Canadian, but perhaps it is as the Germans say: 'The English are the only people who know how to run a proper club.' Of course, I believe that's true. For example, we were considering the membership of Adolf von Ribbentrop. Now that is an unfortunate name for any bloke, God knows that. He was the son of [Hitler's](#) foreign minister, who no doubt rang up the Führer and said, I have a son, sir, and I'm naming him after you, sir!' Well, the Swiss members here didn't like it, not a bit, bringing in a bloke with that name. But we British said, 'Oh, come now, it's not his bloody fault that he has that name. Let's elect him, he's a good enough fellow, and you must admit that going through life with a name like that is not a good start for anyone, now is it?' Yes, I would agree that the English certainly do know how to run a proper club perhaps better than anyone."

It was Lord Brabazon's father who coined the oft-repeated motto/caveat: *The Cresta keeps its secrets*. There really is an aura of mystery to the run and men who have ridden it for years are hard put to explain its strange ways.

Harry Hays Morgan, 75, a former [U.S.](#) diplomat who has lived in [Europe](#) for decades, is one of the most venerable of Cresta riders. Morgan began making runs in 1924, was SMTC president for six years in the '30s and is, as he says, "the only living founding member of the Shuttlecock Club." That dubious society numbers several hundred members who have one single thing in common—they all have flipped off the course at the notorious Shuttlecock curve. Morgan also donated the Morgan Cup, which has long been considered one of Cresta's "classic" awards.

"There is no understanding the Cresta," Morgan says. "You just can't know from one season to the next how it should be run. You never even know what kind of chap will be the greatest rider in any given season. Some bookkeeper may become just fantastic. There is no predictability in the Cresta."

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The kind of men who have fathomed the Cresta's secrets vary greatly over the years. The most consistent winner in the history of the run is the [St. Moritz](#) grocer, Nino Bibbia, who has ridden the Cresta thousands of times and each season has an opportunity to learn its every new ripple, every cold lump, every nook where blowing snow may gather to slow down the unwary runner. Nino, now 52, has won more than 300 different cups and trophies, and when Ronnie Rae commentates a Bibbia run he invariably refers to him as "The Grand Old Man of the Cresta." Nino's advantage, of course, is that he is able to ride the run continuously under all conditions from the moment it opens in December until the last moment of high season at the end of February. Lord Brabazon said, "Nino runs the Cresta at least two or three times more than anyone else. His knowledge is bloody colossal. Yet even the cracks like Nino have to find out the run again anew every year. The Cresta looks the same every year, but it is not the same, and the fact of a mere meter at a turn may make the difference. Nino understands all of these little nuances, you see."

Another great rider of recent years is a polished, well-spoken fellow named Bruno Bischofberger, a Swiss art dealer with galleries in [St. Moritz](#), [Zurich](#) and [New York](#). In 1972 Bischofberger won all five classic Cresta races—the Curzon Cup and the Heaton Gold Cup (run from the Junction start at the clubhouse), the Grand National, the Morgan Cup and the Brabazon Trophy—plus seven other races. It was an incredible display of courage and consistency by a man whose occupation—and his preoccupation—is with the often arcane, always eclectic world of contemporary art. He deals mainly in the work of new American masters—Rauschenberg, Lichtenstein, Johns, Warhol. Though no man can win constantly on the Cresta without a monumental reserve of gambler's guts and an intrinsic disdain for danger, Bischofberger brought more technological change and creativity to the venerable sport than anyone had for years. "I had lots of luck in 1972," he says, "and don't think for a moment you can win here without luck. You're talking about hundredths of a second, you know. But I did have some new ideas. One had to do with the rakes on the boots. Everyone has to use them to control the wagon on curves—by pressing the metal runners on your toes against the ice. All these runners used to be sharp and, of course, they slowed you down when you pressed them against the ice for a curve because they cut into the surface. I made mine shiny and polished so they glided on the ice rather than cut it. It saved maybe one-tenth to one-fifth of a second per run, depending on conditions. I also developed what they call the 'Kamikaze Posture.' It simply means putting your hands back along your sides instead of keeping your elbows out with your hands on the toboggan runners. It cut down on air resistance. They said I was crazy to try it, that the wagon would go out of control, but on the relatively straight runs below Shuttlecock the Kamikaze Posture worked just fine. The other thing I did that helped some was I stuck my arm out full length ahead of the wagon as I came to the finish sensors. This maybe saved one one-hundredth of a second. I beat a man by precisely that margin once in a fairly important race when I stuck my arm out and he didn't."

Bischofberger was not running last season. Mostly he was standing around the clubhouse in a stunning ankle-length wolfskin coat. He had injured his chest, and the pain was too much to ride the

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Cresta. "There are certain typical injuries caused by accidents here," he said. "Cracked ribs are very common and very painful. You can only lie on your back, and every cough or sneeze leaves you in agony for many minutes. I have had 54 falls at Shuttlecock in my Cresta career. One season I went out 20 times. All of us suffer from Cresta Elbow, which is caused by the strong pull and the violent jiggling on your elbow muscles during the run. Broken collarbones and arms and dislocated shoulders are routine. Almost everyone has broken his finger at one time or another. You simply make the mistake of putting it too far down on the wagon runner and you get it under the toboggan. Everyone who has done much riding here has a gnarled finger or two. Riding the Cresta is my favorite sport, but the best may be past for me. I have come to be a little afraid, I think."

Another superb rider who was having a fairly good season last year, although not quite up to his potential, was a strapping 28-year-old British army captain named J.W.A. Woodall. His impressive size—about 6'2", around 200 pounds—makes him an ideal Cresta contestant, for weight is an advantage. Woodall was sitting in the Sunny Bar of the Kulm, the traditional gathering place for riders after races. He was sipping champagne and there was a good-looking blonde by his side. Though he looks like a great rosy-cheeked bear, J.W.A. Woodall is an articulate and sensitive young man, and his description of his brief but very successful career on the Cresta (he began scarcely two years ago) was quite eloquent. "Last year it was like floating when I rode my wagon; it was a free-flying experience. I felt like a beach boy, a surfer searching for the right wave and finding it nearly every time I rode. I was working with my toboggan then, it was like a love affair. A toboggan is an art form, you know, and I was slightly in love with my toboggan last year. When the season was ended, I went to the maker of these wagons and I said, I feel the runners are not perfectly bowed and it is a little crooked. We must make it beautiful so it will run for all the cups this year.' The maker agreed that it could become a beautiful toboggan, so I confirmed that the work would be done in July. But then, when I arrived to get my toboggan this season, the maker had done nothing but give it a fresh coat of paint. I took it from him and took it to a garage and tried to twist the runners right, but they were too soft.

"Oh, what a mistake it was to try and change that lovely skeleton. I have not done well this year. Today in the race I knew I could do well and that I should do well and that most people thought that I could win and that I should win. But, you see, I knew, in fact, that I could not win. It was a definite sort of knowledge—something I had only felt at roulette before. Well, you know, riding the Cresta is like programming a computer, you add more knowledge with each experience. I have simply not had enough. The local blokes all knew today that they could ride forward on the turns below, but my experience wasn't enough to save me the split seconds I needed."

Woodall was asked how he was able to manage time off from his army duties to compete in [St. Moritz](#) during the full six or eight weeks of the Cresta's high season. He seemed surprised at the question. He said, "The Cresta is good military training, because if one is in the military it is wise to frighten oneself from time to time—a matter of being prepared, you know."

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The occasion was the awarding of the Morgan Cup in the Sunny Bar. Harry Hays Morgan was about to give his great silver tub to the 1974 season winner, Paul Felder, the clock-shop operator from [St. Moritz](#). Morgan began his peroration by saying, "Mr. President, my lords and ladies and gentlemen...." As he spoke, the waiters began to pour champagne into the huge bowl of the trophy. Cork after cork popped as speech after speech went on. Lord Brabazon grinned proudly, as if he were the father of everyone in the bar. At last someone called for "a firework in honor of the winners," and a ruddy-faced chap named Johnny O'Brien rose and said, "Everyone on your feet now, we want a tremendous firework." Then he proceeded to lead the cheer:

"BOOM! Ssssssssss BOOOOM! Aaaaaaaaah."

Lord Brabazon leaned over and explained, "You see, it's just like a real bloody firework display. First an explosion. Then the whistle as another firework is launched. Then another explosion. Then the crowd sounds its appreciation...aaaaahhhh."

When Paul Felder rose to take the champagne-filled cup from the table, there were cries around the bar of "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" Lord Brabazon explained that this referred to Felder being in the clock business. Felder hefted the huge champagne-filled trophy and drank. The grand silver vat was passed among the top-ranked finishers in the race and each took great gulps. Someone said the cup held the contents of 28 bottles of champagne and that the winner had to pay for all of it. There was much laughter, many jokes and more cries of "Cuckoo!" as champion Paul Felder moved from group to group for the champagne toasts.

The Cresta is not just for the daring men who belong to the SMTC. Indeed, for \$40, any person—any male person, that is—is quite free to take five rides from the Junction starting point. Women are flatly and unashamedly excluded, because, as Lord Brabazon explained, "They once did the Cresta—and very well, too—but a woman was hurt many years ago, I believe, and damaged her child-bearing capacities beyond repair. The club decided it was bloody well time to put a stop to women on the Cresta." Though most members of the club loudly proclaim the general equality of women, there is one prominent sign in the dressing room for Cresta riders. It says: "Where Women Cease from Troubling and the Wicked Are at Rest...The SMTC."

Many tourists in [St. Moritz](#) take advantage of the run for a never-to-be-forgotten thrill. One of the most celebrated novices to try the Cresta was the erstwhile swashbuckler [Errol Flynn](#) who, it is claimed, made a special trip to [Switzerland](#) for the sole purpose of proving the genuineness of his manhood by mastering the run. Never has there been more snickering done at the expense of a single ego. [Flynn](#) arrived to make the run from the Junction one morning around 1950 (nobody recalls the *exact* year; Ronnie Rae figures it was "soon after [Flynn](#) conquered [Burma](#) singlehanded"). It is said that the actor turned ashen when he saw the pitch of the run and realized that he would have to lie on his belly and careen down it.

There is only one way for a man to keep himself from zinging down the Cresta out of control: by

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the simple but strenuous method of pressing his toe rakes ever harder against the ice. If a man has enormously strong legs, he can press hard enough to bring the wagon to a full stop on the course.

[Errol Flynn](#), it turned out, was blessed with precisely such strong legs. Those who were there said that he began by barely moving down the chute, then dug in his rakes until he went even slower. At Shuttlecock, instead of risking a mad and dramatic flying tumble out of the course, he came to a complete stop. It was at this point—the stories vary a bit—that he either lit a cigarette or swigged some champagne with a beautiful woman, who appeared as if by magic. Later he continued his steady progress down the run. The record from Junction to Finish is 43.45 seconds, and a respectable time for a beginner would be perhaps 70 seconds or 80. Some people take more than 100 seconds and are not ashamed. [Errol Flynn](#) took 180 seconds to reach the bottom. This is the slowest time ever recorded on the Cresta except for a fellow named Swanson from [Boston](#) who took a little longer. As the story goes, [Flynn](#) was so mortified by his performance that he left the course, climbed into a waiting [Rolls-Royce](#), perhaps containing the same mysterious woman and her champagne, and left [Switzerland](#), never again to return and risk reminders of the worst belly flop of his career.

Of course, many people distinguish themselves on the Cresta. [Canada's](#) Prime Minister Trudeau ran it in a most impressive 65-plus seconds. Former [U.S.](#) ski team downhiller [Billy Kidd](#) did it in a fine 51-plus. Dr. Bud Little of [Helena, Mont.](#), a vice-president of the [Fédération Internationale de Ski](#), tried the Cresta a couple of years ago and managed to run over his finger and fracture it just before he flew out of the run at Shuttlecock. Still, his spill there allows him the right to buy (for \$5) a special Shuttlecock necktie, which he wears frequently.

I rode the Cresta last year, as did [Jerry Cooke](#), SI's director of photography. [Cooke](#) made a strong toe-rake run in precisely 141.16 seconds.

My own experience on the Cresta was both disappointing and exhilarating. The first impression of a Cresta ride is the proximity of the ice to one's face—eight inches or so away—when one lies upon the toboggan. There is also an immediate realization as the wagon begins to move from its dead-stop start at Junction that this thing is very hard to slow down and virtually impossible to stop once it begins. There is a sense of helplessness—plus a realization that all ahead is unknown, that no experience one has had before is of any use in guessing what will happen or how to react to it. The Cresta is unique—and God knows all its secrets were absolutely locked away as far as I was concerned.

I dug in the toe rakes with a vengeance, yet the wagon's speed continued to build. The icy floor flashed by my chin and the rumble of the wagon on boiler plate began to rise in a crescendo. The first turn is fairly gentle, but just beyond lies Shuttlecock and all its horror. As I approached it I saw the high bank of ice—six or eight feet high—and I saw how one could climb it in a trice and rise flying over the brink into the snow.

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URL: <http://sportsillustrated.cnn.com/vault/article/magazine/MAG1089446/4/index.htm>

Then I heard another sound building above the wagon's clatter. It was a horrible noise I had never heard before. What in the world could it be? It was me, yelling with fear. But, no. My toe rakes were strong and I went around the corner safe and deep in the rut, far below the wall where the good Cresta runners ride. The run went on; I thundered under a bridge or two, caught glimpses of people in brown coats watching me. My legs could no longer hold the rakes against the ice and the wagon began gaining speed. And then, at last, there was a flashing final dip and I sped past two red flags. The run turned steeply upward and it was all over. I rose weak-kneed with a rush of joy and tottered like a man rescued from a burning house toward the attendants, who watched me with bored expressions.