

Published: 23 Jan 2006 – harbus.org
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URL: <http://www.harbus.org/2006/HBS-Does-The-Cresta-3460/>

HBS Does The Cresta Run

The infamous Harvard competitive spirit never fades. In fact, six quasi-Baker Scholars competed in the craziest sport on the planet over the winter break: the Cresta Run. The Cresta Run is a mile ice run, similar to a bobsled track, on which riders equipped with special 80 lb. toboggans achieve speeds of up to 80mp. Riders assume a headfirst position with their chins about an inch above the ice. To complicate things, a very shallow bank called the “Shuttlecock” increases the chance of crashing out of the run, as our riders discovered. This run has been operated by the St. Moritz Tobogganing Club since 1885.

Early on, scared by the enthusiastic description by club member Olivier Rio (OG), Fabrice Bienfait (OI) preferred to mutilate himself in circumstances that remain obscure, and happily showed up in St. Moritz with a broken wrist. He nonetheless impressed club member Dr. Jean Noel Prade (Harvard School of Education 1998) by pretending the accident had happened while riding the Cresta. Consequently Dr. Prade and Fabrice spent every morning together and Fabrice became an expert in riding theories, bar drinks, and French “humour.”

The first practice day (which began at 7:00 a.m.) was punctuated with multiple accidents. It started with a vision of horror when Olivier Rio put on a lemon-yellow speed suit. This was followed by a presentation about the rules and safety of the sport. The instructor, Arnold von Bohlen und Halbach pulled an X-ray montage of a full human body to show what kind of injuries can happen. There was more metal than bone in it. “Vee have all first aid equipment in the club for light injuries, der iz a stand-by ambulance in Klinik Gutt for more zeerious things, der iz an stand-by ambulance for very zeerious things in Samedan, and for very zeerious things that really cannot wait, der iz the helicopter,” said the German instructor.

“At this stage I really wanted to kill Olivier. I mean, even more than usual, you know” commented Nico Iacuzzi (OD).

On his first ride, Mans Larsson (OH) managed to fall out of the run once, and again on his way to the pick-up point. Jonathan Krautmann (OJ) also tested the resistance of his helmet and bailed out at the Shuttlecock. Ventura Pobre (OI) woke up the Engadin Valley with Spanish screams and grunts never heard before as he was approaching the speed of light. Nico Iacuzzi, posting 99 seconds, is believed to have stopped on the way down, the only explanation for such a long time. A more prudent Oliver Corlette (OC) completed the run unharmed. “This is great,” the wise Australian carefully reflected after a pause.

Finally things came together and with the help of their instructor, timing improved tremendously. Although Oliver Corlette had many thoughts on his mind, such as his loved-one back at HBS, he carried the group record with 58 seconds.

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The second day Krautmann decided to bail out, this time figuratively, and did not join the riders. Various factors influenced the rest of the riders. Ventura Pobre conducted a vodka “degustation” in the early morning in order develop a skill called “tunnel vision.” Furthermore, term grades had been disclosed the night before. Finallxf the “Kamikaze” position, a technique which gives up control for more speed. Consequently, the performance of the riders was pathetic.

Corlette, the record holder, never reached the finish line on any of his attempts, bulldozing his way into the straw and the dummy bags. He was quickly joined by Mans Larsson and Nico Iacuzzi, illustrating the famous “herd behavior” of Harvard graduates. On another try Larsson provided excitement to the spectators as he nearly flew off, but, at the tip of the turn, he changed his mind and violently steered inside the bank to such an extent he hit the inside wall of the turn, squeezing his arm between his 80 lb. toboggan and the ice wall.

Only Ventura Pobre had the pleasure of riding his toboggan all the way down on both attempts “Clearly, the difficult part is to stand on the toboggan once it has reached sufficient speed after paddling,” concluded the President of the Harvard Surf Club.

For more pictures and movies of the adventure, contact Olivier Rio.

- See more at: <http://www.harbus.org/2006/HBS-Does-The-Cresta-3460/#sthash.VBJJgBex.dpuf>