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# The Cresta Run

**Running the Cresta requires guts, skill, and a good pair of plus fours**

[IMAGES]

Every year Switzerland's glitziest town plays host to those who come ready for the run, the Cresta Run. The St Moritz Tobogganing Club (SMTC) is over 125 years old, and only those with suitable dash and a dollop of vim seek out the thrill of the ultimate downhill ride.

The Cresta Run, indeed, all winter sports in the Alps, have their origins in a bet made in September 1864 by Johannes Badrutt, the proprietor of the Engadiner Kulm hotel in St Moritz, to four English guests.

The hamlet had an average of 322 days sunshine a year, a dry, invigorating climate and mineral springs renowned for their curative properties, and was a popular summer destination for Britons seeking the thrill of mountaineering or suffering from tuberculosis.

At the end of the summer Badrutt attempted to convince his guests that winter in the Alps was just as attractive as summer. If they returned in December they could stay as long as they liked at his expense and if he were wrong he would reimburse their travel expenses.

The Englishmen had a glorious time in the sunshine, skating on the lake, wallowing in the baths and tobogganing on schittli; they returned home to spread the word that winter in the Alps was an experience not to be missed. Thus the Alpine winter season was born and with it an enduring Anglo-Swiss relationship.

## **PRECURSOR OF THE CRESTA: RACING THE STREETS OF ST MORITZ**

Until skiing started in the 1890s, tobogganing was the principal entertainment and newly established winter resorts reverberated to the hoots and yells of Brits of both sexes racing one another down the busy, winding streets of towns such as St Moritz, Davos, Aros and Chamonix.

Clubs and committees were formed and races organised on the icy downhill roads. At one time, there were more than 40 "village" pistes across the French, Swiss and Italian Alps, the most challenging being the steep 3.2 kilometre post-road from Davos to Klosters.

In 1883, John Addington Symonds, the British author and poet, founded the Davos Toboggan Club and organised the first international races.

These took place over a week of balls and dinners, with seven nations represented among the 21 competitors. This led to the Symonds International Challenge Cup and, a little later, the Freeman's Trophy for women competitors, named after Edith Freeman who rode her toboggan, The Behemoth, with total disregard for her own or anyone else's safety.