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Cresta Run

As Mark Twain said, “Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn’t do than by the ones you did do, so throw off the bowlines, sail away from safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, Dream, Discover.... and ride the Cresta!” Ok, he didn’t say the last bit but, he would have if he’d ever ridden the Cresta. My point is, it’s that time of year again to look forward and dream of success, the thrills and spills yet to come on the most exhilarating ride ever made.

The anticipation of sprinting towards Church Leap, diving onto your toboggan and then ‘hanging on’ around all the twisting and turning bends as you hurtle from St Moritz to hopefully reach the ‘charming village’ of Cellerina is enough to warm anybodies spirits..... it certainly raises mine. Then there are the young novices who have just volunteered, they’ve seen the videos but don’t really know what they have let themselves in for; they will do shortly and their lives will never quite be the same again once they have tasted the thrill of Cresta.

The new safety cameras and timing system put in place last season ensured that the run was as safe as it has ever been. However the new speed gun also raised a few puzzled looks as the fastest time recorded on any given day did not very often equate to the person who achieved the fastest speed.....hmmm, we’re still thinking about that one.

Training commences on Mon 13 Jan when novices from the Royal Navy, Army and RAF will begin to arrive, and the competition will begin to take shape from 18 Jan when the more experienced riders enter the fray. All 3 teams have indicated that they will have competitive teams but the Army are bound to be favorites having taken the title last year

Finally and particularly in this extremely challenging financial period, I must pay a substantial thank you to all of the Service’s very generous sponsors for their continued support which allows us to continue to take part in this amazing event

History:

The Cresta is an ice run, three quarters of a mile long, that winds its way from above the ‘Leaning Tower’ in St Moritz down a steep gully through ten testing corners, past the tiny hamlet of Cresta, to the village of Celerina. The total drop is 514 ft and the gradient varies from 1 in 2.8 to 1 in 8.7.

The first Run was completed in January 1885 and took nearly nine weeks to build. Only the three upper banks received detailed work . The Cresta Run is still built from scratch every year using the natural contours of the valley and earth banks to provide a framework on which to pile the snow. The Run from Junction is built first, the upper banks second.

The Cresta usually opens two or three days before Christmas and continues for nine weeks until the

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end of February. There are over thirty highly competitive races and riding takes place every morning of the week. It is a private club, but non-Members are welcome to come and ride.

The first rider to adopt the now traditional head-first position was Mr Cornish in the 1887 Grand National. He finished fourteenth after three erratic rides but established a trend and by the 1890 Grand National all competitors were riding head first. Mrs J.M Baguley was the last lady to ride the Cresta in a race on 13th January 1925. Ladies rode in practice after that date but were banned from riding on 6th January 1929. Mrs Marjory Pope, a senior Member of the Club, was one of the last ladies to ride in practice.

Toboggans have evolved dramatically from the original Swiss Schlitten, starting with the introduction of the 'America' by Mr L.P. Child in 1887. This form of skeleton toboggan with metal runners was further refined by Mr Arden Bott in 1902, who added the sliding seat. This helped the rider move his weight backwards or forwards on the toboggan. Nowadays the best riders' toboggans have no sliding seats.

The Cresta has two starting points: Top and Junction. The current record from Top is 50.09 seconds, held by James Sunley. This means an average speed of over 53 m.p.h. ending at Finish at a speed close to 80 m.p.h. Riders from Junction begin opposite the Clubhouse, about one-third down the Run from Top. The current record from Junction, held by Johannes Badrutt, is 41.02 seconds.

Beginners start from Junction and are encouraged to go down in a time of between 65 and 75 seconds. Riders brake using the rakes on their boots and if they are out of control they are certain to go out at Shuttlecock, the most famous corner of the Run. Fallers at Shuttlecock automatically become members of the Shuttlecock Club and are entitled to wear a Shuttlecock tie.

Although a private club, the SMTC, with its world-wide membership, has always enjoyed a strong partnership.