

REPORT ON THE BRITISH SCHOOLGIRLS' RACES HELD IN JANUARY 2012 IN FLAINE, FRANCE

“What a difference a year makes “ !, last year the schoolgirls arrived in Flaine to a resort of dry clear roads, sunshine and very little snow. So little, in fact, that we could not use one of the drag lifts. This year the snow arrived with a vengeance just before Christmas and kept on coming!

Saturday 28th of January saw the resort full of happy, chatty, smiling schoolgirls, some embarking from minibuses, full to the brim with the vast piles of luggage that seem to be essential, not to mention the large ski and boot bags. While those girls who had arrived the previous day were waiting outside the ESF ski school ready to meet their trainer for the day.

The Welcome desk had been set up in the foyer of Residence de la Foret, a Pierre et Vacances residence where many of the schools were staying. Here the girls received their navy blue T-shirts with the BSR logo printed in a very bright pink, kindly provided by Meritz of Chichester. Ski Bartlett had provided some fantastic bright ski ties, MTGY provided pens and lip salve , while the Beauty Store provided hair care products. The welcome packs also contained leaflets and offers from other sponsors MPI, MTGY, SCGB, Basecamp, and BASI.

Sunday was a very cold day and again even more girls congregated outside the ESF to meet their trainers for the day, we were exceptionally lucky to have some ex-french team racers taking the training. After some ‘warm up’ skiing the girls practiced a mixture of giant slalom and slalom techniques, stopping for a quick lunch. Two of the restaurants, The White Pub and Le Pre kindly offer a special lunch time menu. Many schools brought extra girls and it was after the training session that their final team was selected.

The Team Captains meeting was held at 5pm in the magnificent Sylvie Bouiseass Auditorium in Flaine Foret. For the first time the draw was done electronically which saved a lot of time and suspense for the teams. This was followed by a racers briefing, at least 80% of the girls are not experienced racers so need to be taught exactly how to go round the poles and what to do if they miss a gate or fall. At the same time the teachers and parents who have kindly volunteered as gate judges are given a briefing. Lectures over, teachers, parents and children congregated in the lovely foyer where a reception was held kindly sponsored by MPI insurance, MTGY (Mind the Gap Year) and Nimrod Capital.

Monday 30th started off cold and overcast, the Club des Sports helpers were out on the Calcite piste very early preparing the first run of Giant Slalom, they were closely followed by some brave organisers who were giving out bibs in torch light. The tows opened at 8am and girls were able to inspect the course with their trainers a couple of times before the actual race started. There were some very good times on the first run and it was just amazing to see the standard of the girls this year compared to a few years ago. Definitely no sign of a snow plough turn now. Imogen Taylor, a young Ladies Ski Club member, was one of our fore-runners and came down in a slightly quicker time than the young French lad before her. The lad asked

us on more than one occasion to check the times! Emily Evans of Kandahar came down in the fastest time followed by Honor Clissold of Richmond . There was time for the gate keeper and officials to have a break and a sandwich while the second run was set up. The Club des Sport, plus some coaches once again did a wonderful job preparing the race piste for the girls. Again this went well, with Emily and Charlotte in the same positions.

The parallel slalom, the most exciting and fiercely contested race of the event, was set up quickly and the race was able to start just after 2pm. Snow had started to fall and it was very difficult to see the start so instead of the usual flag waving, the start and finish officials had to communicate by radio. The teams are seeded on the results of the first run of Giant Slalom so the early rounds went quickly with not too many surprises. As the quarter finals and semi-finals approached things were getting much closer and to speed up things the racers were towed up to the start behind a skidoo. There were many screams and laughs but for some this was the most exciting part of the event! The final was closely fought battle between Kandahar and Strathallan with the latter winning by a short head. Spectators were extremely grateful to Michael Pettifer of MPI/MTGY who very kindly provided hot wine and hot chocolate during this final race. Snow was falling quite heavily during the races and we were very grateful to the Club des sport and ESF who provided a pergola to cover the score board and more importantly the boilers.

We awoke very early on Tuesday 31st to heavy snow falling, but at least it was slightly warmer. Again the helpers from the Club des Sports had been out very early preparing for the slalom race. This was held again on Calcite piste, which is much less intimidating than the Stade for those new to racing, and also an easy walk for those spectators not wishing to put on skis. Race bibs were again distributed in the dark but course inspection was slightly delayed because of the conditions. The first race started just after 9am and again the standard of racing was very good. Heavy snow fell consistently during the first race and pisteurs had to work very hard to keep the race track safe, with instructors and coaches sliding the course after every few racers. Emily Evans was fastest in the first run followed by Charlotte

Beautiful powdery snow was still falling as the men prepared the course for the second run and again everyone worked really hard to keep it safe for the racers. This final race was won by Charlotte by a very small margin but enough to beat Emily to win the Slalom overall.

The Ladies Ski Club organise these races, which are now in their 53rd year, but they could not take place without so much help from so many people, we have about 18 volunteers involved in the organising team, some on snow, Chief of Race, start or finish Referees, , chief of gates, etc and off snow organising accommodation, transport, receptions etc. We are very grateful to the teachers and parents who volunteer to act as gate judges, not an easy task in itself, but standing in the cold and, this year, falling snow, it is not much fun. We hope that the hot drinks provided during the race and lunches make up a little for the discomfort. The Club des Sports of Flaine, under the leadership of Christian Sauvage, does a wonderful job organising the races year after year and we are very grateful to Christian, Sebastien, Stephan, the two Rolands and many others for all their help.

The Auditorium was again the venue for the Tuesday evening prize-giving, this takes place in front of a large audience and the prize table set out with all the wonderful cups and medals is a sight to see. Michael Pettifer, our major sponsor, greeted everyone and explained about his new 'Gap year' insurance scheme and announced his new website. He then introduced Anne Taylor who thanked all the other sponsors and gave a short history of the event explaining how many British racers had been introduced to racing at the event. She also mentioned our most famous 'old girl' and Olympian, Chemmy Allcott who had suffered a horrific accident the previous year but was making a wonderful recovery, now starting in 'Dancing on Ice' and hopefully back to race training by the end of the season. Music during the prize-giving was provided by Sebastien from the Club des Sports and the prizes were handed out by Diana Lees-Jones who was a past president of the Ladies ski club and also the Race Organiser for many years, who brought the races from Villar to Flaine. All the winners received medals and vouchers kindly donated by Snow and Rock, Filarinskis and Ski Bartlett.

Apart from the usual Cups we had some special prizes, two clubs have sponsored the event from the start, D.H.O (Downhill only club) and The Kandahar and both give a week's race training to a girl showing potential, who has not previously trained with a club. BASI (The British Association of Ski Instructors) offer a prize of a BASI level I course, while Base CampGroup offered a discount on their gap year courses. This year we had a new prize given by Incline Sports of a Beyond X cat suit made to the lucky winners own design. Two special prizes were given to two young girls who, obviously not terribly happy, finished all four runs without mishap.

Following the prize-giving there was a prize draw where everyone has a chance of a prize no matter where they came in the races! This was again followed by a reception generously hosted by MPI-MTGY and Nimrod Capital. During the prizegiving, due to the bad weather, the large scalelectric car race track had been moved from the open air ice driving track and set up in the middle of the foyer. This did not detract too much from the happy atmosphere.

Well the races are over for another year and the next races will be held, again in Flaine, on the 27th and 28th January 2013. Full details will be on the ladies ski club website in early September. www.ladiesskiclub.org or from Anne Taylor bsr@ladiesskiclub.org