

## **Masters World Cup 1999 Grindelwald**

The largest British team ever to leave these shores (and one or two other shores) gathered in Grindelwald for the 18th annual Masters World Cup, 12 racers in all. This put GB well ahead of other non-snow countries such as the Netherlands, Spain, Denmark, Australia and the Czech Republic and, for perhaps the first time, I got the feeling that we were welcomed as a serious nation.

From the word go there were problems with the event. A huge avalanche, bringing down not only snow but rocks, mud and trees, completely blocked both the railway and the road up to Grindelwald, and this meant people were having to be brought in and out by helicopter. At one stage the authorities in Interlaken would not accept any further Masters racers being taken up. We never quite found out why but Masters were paying £25 for the trip and were barred, while tourists were paying £50 and were welcomed (Master skiers, being Masters (of disguise), cunningly posed as tourists). However, on the Wednesday prior to the first race on Saturday, the whole event seemed to be off. Countries such as Norway, Sweden and Finland were contacted and told not to come. Norway immediately cancelled all flights, while Sweden and Finland replied that it was too late, they were already *en route*.

The authorities then relented and the event was back on. Norway having cancelled flights on Friday could not come until Sunday so the whole event was squashed together by two days. This meant that instead of one race every second day, we landed up by doing four races in five days, which for most people was too much.

Because of the avalanche danger in Grindelwald itself, the race circuit had to be significantly shortened. Instead of 15 and 16.6 km circuits, the 15 km race comprised two laps of 7.5 kms and the 30 km comprised three laps of 10 kms. Only later in the week, when the danger was said to have diminished, did they manage to cut a 15 km track, which was skied three times to make up the 50 (45) km race. This led to the major problem that the circuit was, for all but about 3 kms, almost completely flat. Although the organisers claimed that the two shorter circuits were fully in line with Masters criteria, most people simply did not believe them. Not only that, but it was all twists and turns; in icy conditions the sort of turns that grate the edges of the skis. A crap biathlete (one who spends significant time going round the penalty loop) would have been in his/her element.

There were other organisational problems: the one significant, short but reasonably steep, downhill was pronounced dangerous by several Team Captains. What made it difficult was not the hill itself but the fact that, at the bottom, it crossed a road which was not properly filled in and then proceeded over several hummocks. Despite complaints, the organisers refused to change it - there was too much snow to prepare a new track (!) and, worse, the argument was used that if people can't ski they should not take part in a World Championships. This latter is wholly unacceptable; it is a World Championships but also for skiers over 80 years old, and FIS rules quite clearly state that there should be no dangerous sections anywhere on a race circuit. The nadir was when, rather than Team Captains discussing whether the hill was dangerous, the organisers forced a vote on whether we were allowed to discuss it (the vote was lost but we discussed it anyway).

The next morning the hill claimed a broken arm, a broken hip, cracked ribs and a gashed head. And these were on four different people, not just one very unlucky one. Even faced with this, the organisers only reluctantly agreed to change it, making it wider and smoother. To give them credit, what they did was a good job, but by then it was too late. You might be getting bored already but let's continue for a moment with the complaints. The tracks in general were not particularly well prepared, especially for training before the racing started. They were too narrow in places, they had not been sufficiently well pisted to be flat for skating, they crossed roads with no control over the (albeit infrequent) traffic and they were not well marked. This led to a whole bunch of skiers being disqualified from the 45 km event for taking an unintentional short cut while the official had absented himself for no good reason. Finally, when they did eventually cut the longer, 15 km circuit, there was no real opportunity to ski it before we were due to race on it, although it was actually rather good and as enjoyable as a track can be during 45 kms.

It must be recognised that the organisers faced difficult conditions. They must at one stage have seriously feared for the event as a whole, and the avalanche danger was not overstated. But bad conditions should make organisers apologetic and accommodating of helpful suggestions, not arrogant. The bad conditions could not account, either, for why the “changing rooms” were in an abattoir.

Once the event got underway, racing was good and, with a large British team, pre-race anticipation and post-race analysis led to some interesting debates. Like many mainly flat courses, the track was physically quite difficult because there was nowhere to relax. The hills, especially for the afternoon skate events, were hard work. One factor not seen before in Masters events was the high number of “DNSs”. As Brian Adams correctly observed, those that did not turn up were probably the less committed and, consequently, less good, racers, i.e. those which the British skiers might have a chance of beating. This, for me at least, took something away from the event; for several British skiers the races were effectively time trials, and even good performances, such as Gerard Evans in the 45 kms, gained “only” last finisher.

In summary, it’s a shame that the five BMCCSA members racing in the Masters for the first time did not see masters racing at its best. The WMCCSA needs to learn from this experience and already a list of “lessons” has been drawn up, to which I have added and have sent in several others (see below).

### ***Race reports and Results – Men’s 15 km classic, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March, snow 0 °C, air +5 °C:***

With klister very much the order of the day, waxing for the classical event in the morning was uncontentious. This was Jim’s first entry into Masters skiing and it was a good one, 30.9 % being well up towards the high end of British masters, excluding those who do better. He did well to beat the Dane Arne Stornor (who has started cheating by taking up residence in Norway). This was also a good race for Chris C, not only improving from 58 % this time last year to 33 % but also taking some 7 minutes off last year’s time, while the winners were some 2 minutes slower. As for Tim, the performance was much the same as the last time he raced, 57 % versus 55 % in Folgaria.

The results show the fastest skier over the same distance, all British finishes and the winner in each category containing a Brit, together with the number of starters when known.

Fastest		E. Lauber	ITA	M01	41:31.2		
M01	15 <sup>th</sup>	T. East	GBR		1.05:12.3	(57.0 %)	
M04	1 <sup>st</sup>	E. Vaisanen	FIN		43:45.9		
	28 <sup>th</sup>	J. Davidson	GBR		57:18.2	(30.9 %)	(34 starters)
M06	1 <sup>st</sup>	J. Kucera	CZE		46:27.7		
	38 <sup>th</sup>	C. Chrystal	GBR		1.01:39.8	(32.7 %)	(47 starters)

In the freestyle race, several skiers improved on previous efforts, in very heavy, soft sugar snow. Gerard improved from 42 % and yours truly from 52 % in Folgaria two years ago, while Gareth (despite giving preference to the Grindelwald night life), improved from 61 % in Canmore in 1995. Brian was slightly worse than in Lake Placid, down from 22 %, while Alasdair, a better classical than freestyle skier, has no previous performance at this style or distance to compare with, the same being true for Chris R.

Bert had a disappointing race, illness slowing him down (shades of Bjorn Daehlie, see below) and this was his only race of the event. Bob, no doubt with a premonition of the key role he was to play in the relay, decided to pull out after one lap to save his energies. This race represented the first entry into Masters racing for Chris R, John and Norman. John was looking technically good but, as a fairly recent newcomer to skiing, perhaps needs a little more training behind him. Norman, despite being

disappointed by his own performance, was well up with other Brits in terms of percentage, and better was to come in the next race. At one stage, with strong vocal support from his new-found team mates, he was in danger of winning a British silver medal but, not wishing to show us others up, eventually settled for the gold.

***Men's 15 km Freestyle, Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March, snow temperature 0/-1 °C, air temperature +5 °C:***

Fastest		J. Engen	USA	M03	41:05.4		
M01	1 <sup>st</sup>	M. Reich	GER		41:44.1		
	15 <sup>th</sup>	G. Evans	GBR		56:23.3	(35.1 %)	(18 starters)
M02	1 <sup>st</sup>	B. Bieri	SUI		42:08.7		
	17 <sup>th</sup>	B. Scholten	NED		54:06.5	(28.4 %)	
	19 <sup>th</sup>	A. Pinney	GBR		59:04.5	(40.2 %)	(22 starters)
M03	26 <sup>th</sup>	B. Adams	GBR		50:25.2	(22.7 %)	
	34 <sup>th</sup>	A. Wilson	GBR		1.05:28.9	(59.4 %)	(35 starters)
M04	1 <sup>st</sup>	J. Bertoncini	FRA		42:51.2		
	33 <sup>rd</sup>	C. Richards	GBR		59:22.3	(38.5 %)	
	34 <sup>th</sup>	G. Buffet	GBR		1.04:52.4	(51.4 %)	(39 starters)
M06	1 <sup>st</sup>	M. Rauch	SUI		45:31.2		
	DNF	B. Frampton	GBR		-		
M07	1 <sup>st</sup>	N. Zbinden	SUI		46:27.5		
	34 <sup>th</sup>	J. Murray	USA		1.31:50.8	(97.7 %)	(35 starters)
M08	1 <sup>st</sup>	O. Steklov	RUS		49:46.7		
	20 <sup>th</sup>	N. Clark	GBR		1.14:08.0	(48.9 %)	

***Men's 30 km Classic, Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, snow temperature -1 °C, air temperature 3 °C:***

The very next day came the 30 kms, under much the same conditions as the previous day, although with the track lengthened from 7.5 to 10 kms. Alasdair improved considerably in this race relative to previous performances, he finished (which he'd not done in Folgaria having arrived only the night before that race), and he improved on his freestyle percentage and on all previous Masters percentages. Tim improved drastically on Folgaria, down from 78 % there, this being his best performance. Gerard also improved on his Folgaria results (67 %), as did Gareth (in training for the cross-Greenland race later in the season), relative to his 1995 performance.

This race represented Jim's exit from Master's racing for this year, having being called home to put his life on the line in the war in Kosovo (*surely sending them tents from the safety of his office. Ed.*). Although another solid performance from Jim, this time he was just pipped by Arne "storming" Stornor. His departure robbed us of some bizarre but amusing evening discussions and an excellent impersonation of Arne but, more importantly, it upset all of Brian's cunning plotting to ensure that he was on the winning relay team (see below).

A good battle developed between Chris C and yours truly, Chris on his second lap and me on my last. We continued together for a lap and, when he fell on a corner I thought that I would get away. But he falls so often that he's learnt to get up quickly (his words, not mine), and when he then caught me and pulled away, I thought that I'd had it. But either he slowed on the last lap or I'd put in a very quick first lap, and I was just ahead at the end. Nonetheless, it was a good performance by Chris, and he should be encouraged (Colette, are you reading this?) to continue next year in the M07 category.

Fastest		M. Milovanov	RUS	M01	1.28:38.2		
	15 <sup>th</sup>	G. Evans	GBR		2.01:26.2	(37.0 %)	
	16 <sup>th</sup>	T. East	GBR		2.20:32.1	(58.6 %)	(17 starters)
M02	1 <sup>st</sup>	B. Schneider	GER		1.31:10.2		
	18 <sup>th</sup>	A. Pinney	GBR		2.06:58.8	(39.3 %)	
M03	1 <sup>st</sup>	G. Englaro	ITA		1.32:50.7		
	26 <sup>th</sup>	A. Wilson	GBR		2.13:15.3	(43.5 %)	(28 starters)
M04	1 <sup>st</sup>	E. Vaisanen	FIN		1.31:14.9		
	28 <sup>th</sup>	J. Davidson	GBR		2.04:42.1	(36.7 %)	
	32 <sup>nd</sup>	G. Buffett	GBR		2.11:59.5	(46.3 %)	(37 starters)
M06	1 <sup>st</sup>	A. Deikin	RUS		1.39:55.6		
	39 <sup>th</sup>	C. Chrystal	GBR		2.13:56.1	(34.0 %)	(48 starters)

***Men's 30 km Freestyle, Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, snow temperature -1 °C, air temperature 3 °C:***

It was in this race last year that Brian set the British Masters performance record but this time he was somewhat down on that performance. It was, nonetheless, the best performance among the Brits at this event and an improvement on his 15 kms. Observers put this down as Chris R's best race, representing a good improvement in technique and the chance to put the disappointment of the Transjurassienne behind him. Somewhat surprisingly, the percentage does not show this, although his race time was less than twice the time in the 15 kms. Chris, I think, went home happy with this.

Fastest		D. Vedeneev	RUS	M01	1.22:11.7		
M03	1 <sup>st</sup>	S. Ryssine	RUS		1.24:08.9		
	25 <sup>th</sup>	B. Adams	GBR		1.41:19.4	(20.4 %)	(32 starters)
M04	1 <sup>st</sup>	M. Haeusler	GER		1.22:44.2		
	31 <sup>st</sup>	C. Richards	GBR		1.57:56.1	(42.5 %)	(34 starters)

***Men's 10 km Freestyle, Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, snow temperature -1 °C, air temperature 5 °C:***

John having decided not to start this race, Norman was on his own to represent BMCCSA in the M07-M08 categories and this was his best race of the event, improving his gold to a British silver medal.

Fastest		H. Walch	GER	M07	28:02.2		
M08	1 <sup>st</sup>	O. Steklov	RUS		30:16.0		
	19 <sup>th</sup>	N. Clark	GBR		41:03.9	(35.7 %)	(20 starters)

***Men's 4 x 7.5 km Relay, Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> March, snow temperature -1 °C, air temperature 0 °C:***

In British racing terms this was the highlight of the whole event. It also represented a first; the only time we've managed to get two teams to the start line. There was some debate as to whether to put forward the "best" team, i.e. having the best chance of finishing non-last (*shurely shum mishtake of antishipashun. Ed.*) or roughly even teams. The departure of Jim and Chris R, and Chris C saving his energy for the last race, made the even option the best one.

The tension mounted the night before, with some fairly pathetic attempts to psyche out the other team. The likely performance of Chris D, making his entry into the Masters, was somewhat unknown but, ultimately, everything seemed to depend on the performance of Bob (rocket Bob) Frampton on the anchor leg against Gareth. And Bob did not disappoint, putting in a storming performance to bring the older team home just (2 ½ minutes) in front of the junior team, which is nothing in 2 ½ hours. This

race took place in poor and declining conditions, just beginning to snow before the start but snowing heavily by the end. This probably explains why Chris D did not put up the fastest classical time.

But in the end it was academic. A combination of race brain switched on, missed or forgotten pre-race briefing, and poor track marking led to the junior team being disqualified for taking the wrong route. In his favour, at the Team Captain's meeting that evening, I got the impression that Sepp Schelbert, the FIS delegate, was genuinely sorry for having to disqualify us. But we (the junior team) couldn't even claim the moral victory. We had to settle for the fact that we were heroically the second British team while the older team were second from last British team. We'll be back next year.

Fastest		RUSSIA	M01	1.36:02.8	
	DSQ	A. Pinney	GBR	33:22.1	
		T. East		42:08.5	
		G. Evans		32:00.0 (est)	
		G. Buffet		36:50.0 (est)	2.24:20 (est)
M03	1 <sup>st</sup>	SWITZERLAND		1.42:11.7	
	8 <sup>th</sup>	A. Wilson	GBR	35:03.9	
		C. Donnelly		35:09.7	
		B. Adams		30:13.1	
		B. Frampton		41:19.2	2.21:45.9

***Men's 45 km Classical, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March, snow temperature ?? °C, air temperature -3 °C:***

The snow had continued overnight, changing the conditions from klister to stick wax (except for the advice from one wax company); the first time I've known this to happen in a Masters event. Nonetheless, there was a lot of nervous last minute waxing taking place, because the temperature was likely to go up during the race. Warmer waxes went on to cope with later in the race, covered by colder waxes to cope with the start, followed by random application of one followed by the other as we changed our minds.

The course was extended to 15 kms and turned into a really rather good one. Some of the extension was flat out and back loops, but a substantial uphill and corresponding downhill had also been added and the last few kilometres were all up and down loops. The first 2 ½ laps passed without difficulty, but many people complained about the last 5-6 kms on the last lap. Here everyone's wax just seemed to stop working or, at least, it stopped working in the tracks but iced up completely when out of the tracks or herringboning. While stopping to re-wax in Folgaria was by far the best option, here it was difficult to know what would have worked, so it was best not to stop.

This race represented Gerard's best race by far. There was some debate at the end as to whether his fastest time or Brian's best percentage represented the "winning" performance but I leave that to you, dear readers, to judge for yourselves. Gerard did, in an unguarded moment, own up to doing 10 plus hours training per week (which in British terms makes him a semi-professional), but it shows that all that training can pay off.

Three racers had problems: Tim, tired and slightly ill from the previous day's relay, did not start. Alasdair, with not quite the right wax, stopped on the first lap to re-wax but to no avail and pulled out, while Chris C, having taken the klister waxing advice of the night before (which might just have worked had conditions got warmer), was forced to stop and de-ice his skis on the last lap, this slowing his race time considerably. Chris D, having got into his stride, put in a sound performance to finish third best Brit and avenge my surprise faster time in the relay.

Fastest		M. Milovanov	RUS	M01	2.11:06.7	
	13 <sup>th</sup>	G. Evans	GBR		2.52:04.8	(31.2 %)

M02	1 <sup>st</sup>	B. Bieri	SUI	2.15:50.9	
	18 <sup>th</sup>	A. Pinney	GBR	3.11:38.6	(41.4 %)
M03	1 <sup>st</sup>	G. Englaro	ITA	2.17:25.8	
	19 <sup>th</sup>	B. Adams	GBR	2.53:31.8	(26.3 %)
	21 <sup>st</sup>	C. Donnelly	GBR	3.02:15.0	(32.6 %)
	DNF	A. Wilson	GBR		
M06	1 <sup>st</sup>	J. Kucera	CZE	2.28:01.5	
	17 <sup>th</sup>	C. Chrystal	GBR	3.31:55.0	(43.2 %)

***Men's 45 km Freestyle, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March, snow temperature ?? °C, air temperature ?? °C:***

Only two British skiers in the freestyle, again held in very soft, heavy snow. Perhaps tired by earlier exertions, this was not Gareth's or Norman's best race, leaving something to aim at in future years.

Fastest		N. Siegenthaler	SUI	M03	2.02:31.7	
M04	1 <sup>st</sup>	M. Haeusler	GER		2.04:43.3	
	33 <sup>rd</sup>	G. Buffet	GBR		3.37:17.5	(74.2 %)

***Men's 30 km Freestyle, Friday 5<sup>th</sup> March, snow temperature ?? °C, air temperature ?? °C:***

Fastest		H. Walch	GER	M07	1.29:12.8	
M08	1 <sup>st</sup>	V. Ruzanov	RUS		1.35:36.8	
	16 <sup>th</sup>	N. Clark	GBR		2.33:49.6	(60.9 %)

**Lessons from Grindelwald: From WMCCSA:**

- 1) Use of track setting machines: If the Jury decides that between competitions new tracks have to be set, this has to be accepted by the organisers and carried out. Refusal is not acceptable.
- 2) Course marking: Signs must be clearly visible and show the race distances (e.g. 50/30/20 kms). Signs showing distance must be the same colour as race bibs, and lanes "to finish" and "2<sup>nd</sup> lap" have to be marked clearly and in English, German and Russian.
- 3) Fencing off tracks: A fenced off track must be properly closed off, preventing skiers from passing.
- 4) Junctions: Course judges and clear course marking must be stationed at junctions. The FIS rule "every skier is responsible for his own race" should not fully apply for MWCs.
- 5) Lap counting: There shall be a lap counting judge out on the course, not only at the finish.
- 6) Food/drink supply: Enough food must be supplied for all racers up to and including the last finisher. Sufficient personnel shall be provided at on-course feeding stations to provide speedy delivery.
- 7) Race office: This shall be open all day and properly staffed. Results lists shall be available on the day of the race and the results system/programme must be improved to aid this.
- 8) Final day: Dismantling of the course and equipment shall not start until the arrival of the final racer.
- 9) Race official: Race officials/course judges shall stay in place until the last racer passes.

Suggested by BMCCSA: (in so far as is possible depending on local condition and weather but applicable in general principle)

- 1) Host organisers should be able to show that they have organised international or national level events successfully before bidding for the MWC.
- 2) The race tracks should be available and properly prepared (length, width, pisting, marking, etc.) on the first official day of training of the event.
- 3) Any changes to the race tracks during the event should be made at least 2 full days prior to racing on them, to give skiers the chance to try them first.
- 4) The role of the Team Captains meetings needs to be clarified. It is clear that team captains do not run the event, but they do represent the interests of racers and therefore should have the right to have their views accepted and acted on, when such views are reasonable.
- 5) A date should be fixed on which the whole Masters event is confirmed or cancelled (e.g. 3 days before the opening day). If on that day the event cannot be held, it should be cancelled definitively (it is always better to race than not to race, but an event which is reduced or compromised (the tracks at Grindelwald early in the event) might discourage people from taking part in future years).
- 6) Wherever possible, changing, showering and waxing facilities should be in permanent buildings, clean, properly heated, separated for men and women and maintained.