

Masters World Championships 2012 – Oberweisenthal

We have not one but two articles on the 2012 MWC: the first from multi-time MWC competitor Brian Adams and the other from MWC new-comer Dagmar Junghanns. It might be interesting to compare and contrast how an experienced Masters racer saw things when compared to someone who is not, but you can only do this by reading both articles. So get on with it, will you?

We apologise that no photos were available of Alistair Brown, Chris Donnelly, Steve Smigiel or Patrick o'Connor. All photos here are © Alistair Brown.

Masters World Championships 2012 – Oberwiesenthal

Brian Adams

Maybe it was the prospect of the former Eastern Bloc location that was unappealing. Perhaps it was the low height of the venue and the possibility that wet snow or no-snow conditions might prevail. Whatever the reason, it was one of the smallest BMCCSA teams of recent years that travelled to Oberwiesenthal in Germany's Erzgebirge. Six of us (me, Wendy McRae, Alastair Brown, Steve Hesketh, Dagmar Junghanns and Chris Donnelly) were staying at the Hotel Panorama, and assembled over the first day and a half. The others (Anne Ford and Chris Richards) had alternative accommodation. As is often the case, the BMCCSA team was a bit bigger than the GB team, Steve Smigiel and Patrick o'Connor, both skiing for USA, completed the British Masters team. The Panorama proved to be ideal: comfortable; eat-as-much-as-you-like meals with no qualms about making up sandwiches for lunch; decent waxing facilities; and only 5 minutes walking distance from the bus stop, the race office and the bowling alley where the opening and closing ceremonies were held. Adam did a great job in selecting it. The friendliness of the staff was immediately apparent, and so were the posters proclaiming a "Night of the Nations" and the compulsory fun which had, no doubt, been planned to go along with it. Rather worryingly, in a burst of enthusiasm the hotel management seemed to be planning TWO such nights. But more of this later.

The next day was the first official day of training and we caught the shuttle bus up to the race venue at the Fichtelberg, a high saddle right on the Czech border. A cold winter had produced plenty of snow, but recent mild weather meant that it was slushy and extremely dirty, brown in colour and full of gunge and twigs. But the worst part was the course profile. From the start it was narrow and went down, down, down through a succession of tight corners. One was so tight that you had to come to a complete stop, face the other direction, and start again. There was a pleasant undulating section then a downhill stretch through an area of felled ground before a long uphill took you to the feeding station at the 7.5 km point. Then another long fast downhill to 8.5 km, from which point it was almost entirely uphill to the end of the 15 km loop. While the total climb was well within the standard, and none of the steep climbs were very long, most of the climbing was packed into the final 6 kms and it was going to be mentally demanding racing.

The following morning, Wendy, Alastair, Chris, Steve and Dagmar had another ski around the 15 km loop. Meanwhile, I went to the Team Captains' meeting, then found a shop which promised to re-glue the NNN sole unit back onto my Alpina ski boots by 6 o'clock. The Opening Ceremony kicked off at 5 o'clock and started brightly, with a brass band marching round the hall and some flag-throwing youngsters. Then Michelle-McManus-sized local talent Conny Vegas stepped up to the mike to deliver the first rendition of the official World Masters song "Stay in the Tracks". At this point Steve and I had the convenient excuse of driving down to the town to collect my ski boot, and when we returned we were delighted to have missed all the speeches!

For the first race, 30 km classic, it looked like dirt pick-up would be a problem, so I'd mixed a lot of silver klister into my Rode universal. However, as I was to discover several kilometres into my race, the course preparation team had done an excellent job and the tracks were surprisingly clean. I'm not quite sure how they achieved this (perhaps they skimmed the top 150-200 mm of snow from the surface and took it away from the course. Whatever, for the rest of the week the tracks were pretty clean), but it rather rendered the silver klister redundant and I was short of grip. That's my excuse, but to be honest, the main reason for my worst MWC result since 1997 was not doing the hard training this winter. When I went wide on a corner, old rival Libor Koubek (CZE) came past. I stayed in contact for 6 kms, then he put on a spurt and I never saw him again. In the women's 15 kms, Wendy lost touch with everyone very quickly on the long downhill after the start, but managed to catch one skier on the climbs and so avoided the dreaded British Gold Medal.

Men's M01-M06 30 km classic technique, Saturday 3rd March

Fastest	Pavel Trubetckoi	RUS	M01	1.15:52.1		
1)	Alexander Usatov	RUS	M05	1.21:06.0		
51)	Brian Adams	GBR	M05	1.49:50.8	35.4 %	57 starters

Men's M07-M09 15 km classic technique, Saturday 3rd March

Fastest	Pekka Virtakoivu	FIN	M07	44:11.4		
1)	Nikolay Rochev	RUS	M08	46:32.7		
45)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M08	1.12:35.1	55.9 %	46 starters



Happy just to get round the corner? Brian seems to be

Women's F01-F06 15 km classic technique, Saturday 3rd March

Fastest	Sirkka Ehrnroth	FIN	M06	46:31.4		
16)	Wendy McRae	GBR	M06	1.27:11.0	87.4 %	17 starters

Most of Team GBR had elected to ski their first race in the freestyle technique. Our waxing shed, which we shared with the Danes, was a hive of activity after dinner. Forecast temperatures around -1 to +1 °C and high humidity meant yellow wax, bold structure and fairy dust.

In the morning Wendy and I skied the tourist loipe which began from the front of the hotel. This wound its way up the north side of the Fichtelberg to a corner near the 10 km point of the race loop, where we could watch the competitors as they neared the top of the second long hill. Apart from a few places close to the finish, the race tracks were largely inaccessible for spectators. Nor was it permitted to ski from our corner to any other point of the course. At the Team Captains' Meeting there had been dire warnings of the consequences of skiing along tracks while races were in progress. Warnings which the law-abiding nations heeded but others (and you can guess who they were) ignored.

Over the course of a couple of hours we watched skiers of all ages come past, and it struck me how some people with excellent technique were miles behind others with inferior technique. Is technique over-rated? It certainly looks like physical conditioning is far more important. So that's something we in the "no-snow" or "not-much-snow" nations can do something about ...

Iran was represented at the MWC for the first time, and Steve set his sights on beating their M04 skier. Unfortunately, this particular Iranian not only had excellent technique but looked extremely well-conditioned into the bargain! Steve had been suffering from a combination of jetlag and a cold but managed a cheery comment as he came past, otherwise we would have missed him. Alastair, looking well-balanced and controlled, was easier to spot, as he was the only skier with short sleeves.

Later, Chris Donnelly churned past, clearly trying very hard, but he was some way off his best performance on this occasion. So too was Chris Richards, although his 27.9% was still the best GBR percentage of the day. By the time the M08s were coming through, Wendy and I had taken shelter in a nearby wooden hut, and we weren't able to ~~hurl any abuse~~ give any encouragement to Steve Smigiel. Sorry Steve. In the women's categories, Dagmar looked sprightly as she tackled the steep climb just after the corner. Anne, also in her first Masters, looked solid too. In a whistle-stop visit, she arrived on the eve of the first race, found a hotel, raced once, and departed before I'd had the chance to ask her whether she'd enjoyed the experience. Hope you did Anne.

Men's M01-M06 30 km free technique, Sunday 4th March

Fastest	Bruno Joller	SUI	M01	1.11:26.7		
1)	Dmitri Shestopalov	RUS	M02	1.15:09.1		
19)	Alistair Brown	GBR	M02	1.55:30.6	53.7 %	20 starters
1)	Alexander Abramov	RUS	M04	1.14:38.7		
37)	Steve Hesketh	GBR	M04	1.48:02.4	44.7 %	42 starters
1)	Guido Masiero	ITA	M06	1.21:27.6		
51)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M06	1.56:48.8	43.4 %	60 starters

Men's M07-M09 15 km free technique, Sunday 4th March

Fastest	Sakari Matikainen	FIN	M07	46:12.3		
45)	Chris Richards	GBR	M07	59:04.4	27.9 %	57 starters
1)	Andre Grob	FRA	M08	47:14.0		
32)	Steve Smiegel	USA	M08	1.01:08.5	29.5 %	37 starters

Women's F01-F06 15 km freestyle technique, Sunday 4th March

Fastest	Regina Lingl	GER	F01	45:43.6		
1)	Barbara Hasch	GER	F04	48:06.5		
14)	Dagmar Junghanns	GBR	F04	1.10:48.9	47.2 %	15 starters
1)	Sirpa Paakkonen	FIN	F05	51:22.9		
14)	Anne Ford	GBR	F05	1.18:45.7	53.3 %	14 starters

Weather conditions for the big "everyone skis 10 kms today" day were perfect. The 10 km loop was just the same as the 15 km with the nicest bits cut out. Dagmar had an excellent race, and her 26.8% was the best percentage of the GBR skiers at this year's competition. She reported that violet klister wasn't bombproof but it worked okay if you concentrated on technique, which is exactly like it should be! In the afternoon freestyle race, Alistair was suffering from a pulled muscle in his foot and didn't start. Steve had prepared his skis with a block of mystery wax which Chris identified as Toko Jetstream. He said that his skis were as fast as he could handle on the downhills, and that he destroyed a lot of the opposition on the climbs. I also found the downhills extremely fast and was all over the place for first 4 kms. I hope Alastair has deleted that photo he took as I passed under the bridge. The climbs were very hard work, soft and sugary, and you had to try to ski on the shady side of the tracks. Chris Donnelly's 41.0 % was a slight improvement of his performance in the 30 km, while another reliable performance from Chris Richards put him well up with the M07 pack again.



Finishing her first, and last, race, of this year's event, at least, Anne Ford

For Wendy, it was the same story as her earlier race; losing touch with the pack on the fast downhill after the start, then having very few people around to act as targets for the long climbs at the end. Wendy has promised to take up alpine skiing in an effort to improve her downhill confidence and cornering technique.

Men's M07-M09 10 km classic technique, Monday 5th March

Fastest	Pekka Virtakoivu	FIN	M07	30:53.3		
1)	Nikolay Rochev	RUS	M08	32:41.9		
43)	Patrick O'Connor	USA	M08	51:06.0	57.2 %	48 starters

Women's F01-F06 10 km classic technique, Monday 5th March

Fastest	Sirkka Ehnroth	FIN	F06	32:16.6		
1)	Kerstin Drexler	GER	F04	35:04.9		
14)	Dagmar Junghanns	GBR	F04	44:29.2	26.8 %	15 starters



Out on his own but heading for Britain's best performance on Day 2 – Chris Richards

Men's M01-M06 10 km free technique, Monday 5th March

Fastest	Bruno Joller	M01	SUI	25:04.5		
1)	Dmitri Shestopalov	RUS	M02	25:22.5		
1)	Terje Breivik	NOR	M04	25:44.3		
42)	Steve Hesketh	GBR	M04	36:26.0	41.6 %	47 starters
1)	Gianfranco Polvara	ITA	M05	26:47.1		
52)	Brian Adams	GBR	M05	34:35.1	29.1 %	58 starters
1)	Guido Masiero	ITA	M06	27:33.3		
54)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M06	38:50.9	41.0 %	62 starters

Men's M07-M09 10 km free technique, Monday 5th March

Fastest	Leonid Kopysov	RUS	M07	29:19.9		
54)	Chris Richards	GBR	M07	37:16.6	27.1 %	71 starters
1)	Andre Grob	FRA	M08	29:52.7		
32)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M08	38:46.3	29.5 %	40 starters

Women's F01-F06 10 km free technique, Monday 5th March

Fastest	Regina Lindl	GER	F01	28:50.8		
1)	Catherine Wulschleger	GER	F06	33:16.6		
16)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F06	52:45.4	58.5 %	17 starters



Wendy having the same story, says our on-the-spot reporter

For the “Night of the Nations”, the Panorama had engaged the service of guitarist Nils Wiegel to lead the evening’s fun. From what we could hear from the safety of the restaurant, he could play a wee bit. However, the buffet format conveniently allowed most of the guests to dither over their dinners and not have to brave the lobby where they might be accosted and asked to perform a rousing national song or such like. I don’t blame the Panorama for trying, but most guests just wanted to talk about the race and didn’t need any organised entertainment. Two days later, the “Night of the Nations” Round 2 was scheduled to feature, tan-ta-rah, CONNY VEGAS! We wondered what would happen.

Tuesday was the rest day, and Chris D kindly drove myself, Steve and Dagmar to Dresden for a spot of sightseeing. The countryside was very attractive, prosperous-looking and clean in that uncluttered Germanic way. Clearly things have moved on a lot since the old DDR days, thanks to massive injection of Ost-tax from the old West German states.

With everyone in different age categories, we couldn't muster a team for the relay races on Wednesday. Alistair and the two Chris's departed homeward leaving a depleted core of myself, Steve, Wendy and Dagmar to contest the long races on Thursday and Friday.

Sadly, after the lack of enthusiasm for the Night of the Nations, the Panorama cancelled Round 2 and the scheduled appearance by Conny Vegas. It was the wise thing to do – you can't compete with biathlon world championship highlights on the TV. Furthermore, the weather was changing and a lot of people were preoccupied with waxing concerns for the following day's classic races. All week snow had been promised, and on Wednesday night the first few flakes finally arrived. But would it fall in sufficient quantity to change the conditions from klister to hard wax? Would it still be hard wax after several hundred early starters had skied the tracks? Three hours before the race it was still a 50/50 call – perhaps hard wax over klister? But the snow continued to fall, and as start time approached, hard wax looked more and more likely. This was confirmed by advice from Ragnhild Bolstad, Norwegian multiple Masters champion in the F04 category. "Use Swix VR55", she told us, so we did. Meanwhile she prepared her "zero" (= "hairy") waxless skis.



Dagmar enjoys a well-earned drink of something at the end of one of her races

It was a tough race. Windy and blowing snow throughout, with the temperature about -1 °C. The tracks become very wiggly and shallow. Without zero skis, VR55 was probably about the best you could do. Dagmar really enjoyed the challenge and finished her race buzzing with enthusiasm. Meanwhile, at the sharp end of the same category, Ragnhild had a 5-minute margin over the silver medallist. It was a cold spectate for Wendy and I, stamping our feet to the euro-beat to keep warm. Even Conny's exhortations, to "stay in the tracks for – e - ver" seemed to mock the skiers. All very well if there *are* tracks, but by the time Steve finished the tracks had disappeared completely! However, at least he finished. Thirteen skiers in the M04 category didn't even fancy *starting* their race.

Men's M01-M06 45 km classic technique, Thursday 8th March

Fastest	Christian Baldauf	AUT	M03	2.06:58.0		
1)	Peter Milz	GER	M04	2.11:06.9		
26)	Steve Hesketh	GBR	M04	3.24:41.2	56.1 %	29 starters

Men's M07-M09 30 km classic technique, Thursday 8th March

Fastest	Pekka Virtakoivu	FIN	M07	1.32:11.4		
1)	Claus Weiss	GER	M08	1.41:56.0		
30)	Patrick O'Connor	USA	M08	2.36:01.5	63.1 %	34 starters

Women's F01-F06 30 km classic technique, Thursday 8th March

Fastest	Sirkka Ehrnroth	FIN	F06	1.39:23.8		
1)	Ragnhild Bolstad	NOR	F04	1.42:03.7		
9)	Dagmar Junghanns	GBR	F04	2.20:47.9	38.0 %	13 starters

It was a shame for the classic skiers that the best classic conditions of the week should occur on the day of the long freestyle race. Sunny, blue skies. A lovely, blue-extra day. I was feeling good and skied the first two laps well, even the fast corners which I had failed to master in my first two races. But at about 36 kms, I felt a hunger pang and stupidly ignored it. By 40 kms the wheels had come off. I was dizzy, wobbly, and skiing in slow motion. One by one, all the M05s I'd worked so hard to overtake came steaming past and I could do absolutely nothing about it. Horrible, horrible, horrible.

Men's M01-M06 45 km free technique, Friday 9th March

Fastest	Bruno DeBortolis	ITA	M01	1.49:25.9		
1)	Sergey Ivanov	RUS	M05	1.54:42.9		
38)	Brian Adams	GBR	M05	2.30:07.9	30.9 %	52 starters



Steve Hesketh early in the event. This shows how soft the snow was

Men's M07-M09 30 km free technique, Friday 9th March

Fastest	Alexandr Podshipyakin	RUS	M07	1.23:30.1		
1)	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M08	1.24:43.7		
29)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M08	1.51:55.5	32.1 %	33 starters

Overall, the GBR performances this year were a little disappointing. While this was one of the strongest MWCs I've been to for depth of competition, the best skiers usually attend every year so that doesn't really explain the poor percentages. Perhaps we are, as rollerskiers and infrequent snow skiers, better adapted to courses with lots of shorter climbs and recoveries rather than just a couple of very big ones.

So to the Closing Ceremony and Banquet, and not for the first time, no places had been reserved for GBR. Fortunately we found seats next to some charming Canadians in Row 26. The menu looked great: a choice of six appetisers including little rabbit pies, several main courses and a selection of cakes and puddings. However, the serving arrangements were a disaster. The dignitaries and officials in Rows 1-6 had table service. The athletes, 500+ of whom had skied a long way that day, had to endure 1½ hours of speeches at distortion levels and Conny Vegas belting out "Stay in the tracks for – e - ver" before the announcement "Rows 7 to 15 come to the buffet". It was predictable what would happen; from every row there was a mad stampede and people just hoovered up whatever they could in the quantities they thought they needed to fill their stomachs: cheesecake floating in soup, little rabbit pies smothered in lemon mousse dessert. I waited, for blooming e - ver, in the slowest-moving queue and eventually got myself a mound of red cabbage, some very gooey dumplings and a slab of roast beef that might have been tender 90 minutes previously. Pudding? Forget it. All long gone pal.

Let me say this straight out: the MWC is a great event. However, one of its ongoing frustrations is that no venue ever ticks all the "satisfactory" boxes. Lessons learned from previous events always get forgotten. Thus it was with Oberwiesenthal. The accommodation, race organisation and the marshalling was very good, although the warm-up track and the ski-testing areas were ridiculously small. The courses weren't ideal but at least the loops were well-marked from Day 1, unlike some other venues. The changing arrangements were cramped and there was no secure storage for warm-up/warm-down gear. The feeding stations were well-placed and had copious quantities of liquids, but everyone reported that solids were hard to find. The catering tent was small and the choice of food limited. The shuttle bus service was reliable though overcrowded at times, and when we asked for a queuing system to be introduced (as it was, successfully, in Sovereign Lake last year) the organisers just shrugged their shoulders and said that it was up to the competitors to organise themselves in an orderly fashion. That said, at least the drivers allowed ski-poles inside the bus this year. Etc., etc.

I found Oberwiesenthal to be a very attractive location. The snow-holding record is good, there is a network of tourist loipes which go to the top of the Fichtelberg and on across the border into the Czech Republic. The downhill pistes start right in the town centre. There are plenty of interesting local attractions to visit. Prices were very reasonable and the local people extremely friendly. Certainly worth considering for a skiing holiday in the future.



One last look at Oberwiesenthal

Just before we pass on to Dagmar's article on the MWC, have you ever faced the horror of the budget airline? If so, perhaps this is for you

A prayer – for all weary travellers

Oh Lord,
or Willie Walsh*
as you prefer to be called,
I pray that this ski bag and all of its contents,
are below your very reasonable maximum weight limit but,
if it is not, then I pray that your angels
will descend from Heaven and lift it gently
off the scales,
so as to fool everybody.
Amen are down in the baggage handling area
waiting to handle it
and return it, ashes to ashes, dust to dust or,
more relevantly,
carbon fibre to carbon fibre shards.
And I pray that you smite them
before they have a chance
to smite it.
Oh yes, and lots of love and kisses.
I've been [insert your name here]
and it's been a pleasure talking to you.
Goodbye.

* Delete and replace by Stelios, Michael O'Leary, ..., as appropriate.

The 2012 Masters Cross Country Championships – my first!

Dagmar Junghanns

What a cliché – waiting on the start line of my first race I was overwhelmed by a shiver of excitement and couldn't help stupidly grinning. Five years after first thinking about going to the Masters I had finally made it. After months of training and a lovely lot of skiing this winter, including an unexpected placing at the Pustertaler Ski Marathon (what me?!) I was as prepared as I could be, albeit without knowing what I had actually let myself in for.

Oberwiesental was a particularly special location for my first Masters as my German father came from the surrounding Erzgebirge mountain area. Travelling there was enlivened by meeting Andreas, a local skier on his way to mountain rescue work at the downhill resort – he's an English teacher and historian so was an eloquent guide to the area and its history of mining, forestry and intricate woodcrafts. These are much in evidence in the many gift shops in Oberwiesental selling wooden toys and decorations, many in the form of carved arches representing mine entrances – a motif represented in metal decorations around every town and village, as the following photo shows.



Twenty-six nations came to the Masters, with medal hauls dominated by the enormous Russian team, followed by the Germans, Finns and Norwegians. The British team peaked at 8 although travel arrangements and injuries whittled us down through the week, so only Wendy and Brian stayed right through to the closing banquet. Steve and I were first-timers: some of the others seemed to have started Masters races the day after they turned 30 and it was great to call on their experience (as well as racing-type kit I don't have). As a raw beginner I had much to learn, mostly the 3 Rs: resting, rilling and race-starting. Oh, and what it feels like to be British.

The day before the races began we had a recce of the track, marvelling at the wetness and corniness of the snow. Like much of central Europe, Oberwiesental had had a lot of snow earlier this winter, but evidently none for some weeks – although there was enough to ski on, it was filthy grotty stuff and alternated between wet corn and frozen corn, with the skiing correspondingly frustratingly heavy to alarmingly fast. The course profile was down then up. On paper it looked quite tame but on the ground it was a long way down followed by an awful lot of up, accentuating the poor snow conditions. Not too technical, though, thank goodness.



The type definition of wet corn snow

I had chosen to skate the 15 kms, and classic the 10 kms and 30 kms: this meant I got the skate (my love-hate technique) out of the way first, and could attack the two classics. I certainly enjoyed them more and my results were better than the skate: I even managed to avoid a British medal in the long race.

Back to the 3 Rs: Resting – normally on a ski holiday, I want to do AS MUCH SKIING AS POSSIBLE but not this time. Between races days we ventured out on just a few gentle ski jaunts and spent much more time lying around watching Marit Bjoergen pulverise the opposition in the “proper” World Cup racing. Actually, this was really valuable – good pictures to have in my mind. Resting also included enthusiastic sampling of the German “kaffee und kuchen” culture. Well, when in Rome

Actually cake is a deeper part of my own culture as my German grandfather was a baker in this very region and my father used to make me some of the local specialities. Sadly, we didn't have enough time to try them all.



Guess who?

We had more cake in Dresden which we visited on the official rest day. A fascinating city buzzing with energy. Rebuilding the old part of the city after the devastation of World War II seems only to have started in earnest after German reunification, and there is still a lot of work in progress and to do. Two who shall remain nameless took their immersion culture very seriously.



Rilling. I wish I had done it before the 15 km skate race (actually I mean I wish I had got Chris to do it for me, like he did for the subsequent classic races). Air and snow were pretty warm, and my skis stuck. Most disheartening to be passed on the downhill as well as on the flats and ups. At least I now know what I want for next year's Christmas present – but have you seen the price of a riller!

This was just one of many things I learnt about waxing – I had thought I was quite good at it but know now that I still have a way to go. The 30 km classic was the ultimate test: the only new snow for weeks arrived bang on time: falling before and throughout the race with temperatures around freezing and wet snow blowing into the tracks. Thankfully Brian (acting team captain) was doing the skate race the following day and so could ably fulfil his wax technician responsibilities, even going so far as to lend me a B&Q paint scraper for de-icing in the race (I did use it).

Race starts. Those of you that have seen me roller ski "racing" will know that my usual technique is to make a slow start and find my own pace. I realised just how flawed that is when I did reverse moonwalks in the first two races – skiing forward whilst sliding back alarmingly fast through the field. And once they had gone that was it. So, for my 3rd race, the 30 km classic, I was determined to hold my own at the start (visualising Marit Bjoergen) – amazingly this succeeded and it made a huge difference to know that I had people behind me.

Being British. Notwithstanding the skiing issues, there are some advantages. No-one expects anything of your performance, and they are happy to help you. In the waxing frenzy before the 30 km classic a very friendly Norwegian woman advised us in a way she probably would not have with Russians or Finns (she went on to win my group's race on her Zero Skis). Also I am sure that my years of Waymarking helped me "enjoy" the grim conditions – poor visibility, iffy grip, skis behaving like eels on tracks disappearing under blowing snow I loved that race!

Back at home I feel tired and wiser. I'm already planning next winter to include Asiago.

