

Masters World Championships 2007 – The adventures of the Start-sponsored BMCCSA team's exploits in Rovaniemi, Finland

I suppose that after so many good if not excellent MWCs in recent years (Brusson 2006 – excellent, Krasnogorsk 2005 – excellent, Lillehammer 2004 – good, Seefeld 2003 – excellent, and so on), we were bound to get one not quite so good event at some time or another. But when I voted, about two and a half years ago, to come to Rovaniemi, I had no idea that it would be this event. Some National Directors, at that time, had reservations but I simply chose to ignore them. After all, how could Rovaniemi, on the Arctic Circle and therefore with guaranteed snow, fail? It turned out that perhaps these doubters were right!

Things started to go wrong about 18 months before, when it became clear that, in direct breach of their contract with the World Masters, Rovaniemi were not going to offer low-season accommodation prices as they are required to do. There then followed some tough negotiations, during which there was a suggestion that the whole event be cancelled, with the result that somewhat cheaper accommodation was offered, but not (I believe) at full low-season rates. This episode, though, seemed to typify the whole event, i.e. that it was intended to maximise the profits for Rovaniemi, largely at the expense of the competitors.

There was not any one thing which made this a poor event; rather, it was a series of fairly small things which, when all put together, made this probably the second worst Masters event I have ever attended, after the debacle that was Grindelwald back in 1999. But at least Grindelwald had the excuse of an avalanche to cope with. Anyway, these problems will become clear as we go through the story, so let's get on with it, starting on Wednesday 28th February.

Brian Adams, Fiona Crossley and I arrived in Rovaniemi that Wednesday evening and checked into our two rooms at the Sport Academy, very handily placed for the tracks and about 3 kms skiing from the stadium. It appeared that there was plenty of snow, even if they'd had little around Christmas and into the New Year. Our rooms were comfortable enough but the 'blokes' room, with four beds in it, was rather cramped, giving the impression that they'd squeezed a fourth bed into what would otherwise have been a perfectly acceptable three man room in order to maximise profit.

Anyway, on Thursday morning we enjoyed a good breakfast, an air temperature of -6 °C (climbing to about -2 °C later in the day) and very light snow. Thus it was that we set out to find the race track. A very early wrong choice of track took us down about one kilometre to a dead end near the river bridge, and we had to climb back up to the beginning again. The correct choice of track then took us, within a very short distance, onto the race track itself (at about the 12 km point), and this led us down into the stadium. Here we encountered the next problem; the tracks were only minimally signed and, consequently, very difficult to find and, in several places, they were not cut for classic skiing. Again, a breach of contract, because organisers are required, from the first official day of the competition, to have the tracks fully marked and prepared to as near to race condition as possible (i.e. at least one classic track). As it happened, we found some of the race track but it was in such bad condition that we didn't believe that we were on it, and then we took a wrong turn. Most importantly, the snow (for about 3-4 kilometres) was only a couple of inches deep, with no base at all (i.e. when we dug through it, we were into the earth), and it was this which led to all the later track preparation problems.

There was a rumour going around that this section of the track didn't exist at all until January, when they started cutting the shrubbery to make it. I guess they imagined that they would then have received a lot of snow, after which preparation would have been easy. But when they found, in mid-February, that they had just 10 centimetres, they had no contingency plan for this. Had it been almost any other venue, I'm sure that they would either have been making snow and laying it on this fairly short section, or bringing snow in from other places. And it is a shame that they didn't because, as it turned out, this was the only really badly-prepared part of the whole course – the rest was perfectly good.

As it was, we landed up, finally, discovering most of the race track which, for the men at least, was made up of one 10 kilometre loop (that described above), which was fairly flat and uneventful but with one steep, long climb which was followed by a rapid downhill 180° right hand bend which, I felt, was right on the limit of what is acceptable in a Masters event, and then one further steep but shorter climb followed by a

fast descent back into the stadium. The 5 km loop started with a short, steep climb out of the stadium over a bridge (these bridges sometimes look easy but they aren't), then started climbing more steeply up three further hills, the first one the longest at maybe 100 metres, the next two shorter, before continuing to climb more gently but continually to the high point, after which it started to fall again, round a series of relatively easy bends (although if one messed them up, it was straight into the adjacent trees) and on down to the stadium again. We, however, stopped at the 12 km point where we had joined the track initially. Altogether, nothing really to worry about (except for the sharp downhill right hand bend) and, had it been better prepared, it would actually have been a pretty good circuit, which we explored again in the afternoon but still failed to definitively find the race track.

Back at the Sports Institute, we were able to see both its good and its bad points. On the plus side, it had the best waxing room any of us had ever seen; plenty of teams allocated to individual tables, extraction hoods and bin bags at the end of each profile, so that scrapings went straight into the bag. It also had a good sauna and swimming pool, which proved useful later on in the week for recovery. On the down side, though, much of the food was very gloopy. Sometimes just thick and gloopy but, in some things and to add variety, gloopy with thicker lumps of gloop added (perhaps this comes from using too much potato flour). Probably okay when it was first cooked at 5 p.m., somewhat less good when we were eating it at 6:30 p.m. And, with the Russians in residence, even the gloopy gloop didn't always last long. But at least, in general, there was plenty of it and, at any other event, we would have been very happy.

There was further track exploration to be done the following day, Friday, which had started with a temperature around -1 °C to 0 °C, making grip wax choice a bit tricky. As always in such circumstances, klisters was too sticky and anything from the stick wax line was either too sticky and iced up or wasn't sticky enough. But we survived and weren't, in fact, duly concerned. But, as on the day before, the tracks remained difficult to find for certain (although, as it turned out, we did follow much of it) and no classic tracks had been cut in places. Ironically, all of the tourist tracks (which we also followed, sometimes by mistake) were perfectly well prepared).

Most of the rest of the British team arrived on Friday, Alasdair Wilson having flight delays but Mike Bangle and newcomer Peter McManners arriving without incident from their respective homes in Finland. Mike brought with him the bags of goodies which were the waxes from our sponsors Start. And they had certainly done us proud – high quality Molybdenum Fluor stick waxes (including one which was to prove very useful, with a range of +1 °C to +3 °C), klisters and a complete range of 'normal' high fluoro glide waxes and 'conventional' HF powders. I say 'normal' and 'conventional' because we'd have been more than happy with these alone, but Start had also supplied us with absolutely top-of-the-range nano-HF waxes and nano powders which, apparently, had proved hugely successful at the World Championships in Japan, and this included the brand new fluor liquid finish, which wasn't even yet available. We weren't actually able to try this out in the races but Brian tried it in training – it takes only three drops of liquid per ski, and is then rubbed in with the finger (more than three drops apparently makes the skis slower!).

Another minor annoyance in the afternoon, though. The website clearly said that Shilpa bags (not allowed to talk about goody bags anymore) were available from the stadium so we skied down to collect them. There we found a sign on the door saying that they could only be picked up in town. So we had to ski back up and walk the couple of kilometres into the centre of town.

On Saturday I had to attend the Team Captains' meeting so wasn't able to ski myself. There were a few general mutterings about the organisation and the track marking but, it seemed, I was the only one willing to speak up, which was to cause problems later in the week. When I tell you that it took them 40 minutes to try to explain the tracks to us, though, that just illustrates how they managed to turn a very simple exercise into a hugely and unnecessarily complicated one. And the Chief of Race is supposedly a highly-respected FIS Technical Delegate! Yet another minor irritation – there were no buses to take people directly into town (e.g. for prize giving ceremonies or Team Captains' meetings), so people had to divert to the stadium and pick up another bus, although it was unclear whether the bus down from our place tied in with the bus from the stadium into town. So on most days I had to walk part of the way and then walk all the way back again (*orrrrrr. Ed*).

That evening, as is normal at such events, we had to go and stand around for hours freezing our bollocks off at the opening ceremony, while Fiona heroically carried our flag. And, boy, was it cold – even in our new high tech BMCCSA jackets and fleeces (which look very smart), hands and feet began to freeze before the end. Two further minor disappointments? The WMA contract requires that the hosts provide some sort of minimal refreshment at the opening ceremony – ours provided nothing. And there was no immediate sign of buses to take us back to Sports Institute so we had to walk – the gloop certainly tasted nice that evening.



-15 °C and do we care? Yes, we do. From L to R: Alasdair, Mike (in Onion Jack hat), Brian, Adam, Fiona and our host for the night

And then, finally, we came to the racing, starting on Sunday with the Men's 30 km and 15 km free, this event attracting most of the British Men's team. After being so warm on the previous days, it had remained cold over night and even got colder, so that it was -17 °C when we arrived at the start. This was lower than predicted and we'd used the Start Nano wax from -5 °C down to -15 °C so decided to take the bus down to the start rather than skiing. It also meant that warming up by running was preferred to skiing, the warm-up track being far too small for the number of people wanting to use it anyway.

Three of us, Brian, myself and newcomer Peter McManners, were all starting in the M04 category (the first time, I think, that we have ever had as many people in one category – unless you know better), and I had high hopes for this race. But, from the gun, these high hopes proved to be false, as almost everyone simply disappeared into the distance at high speed. At least, in Brusson, I'd managed to stick with a few people until quite a long way into the race but, in this race, people at the back were very quickly skiing on their own. How do these guys manage to go so quickly? After all, we were using the best possible waxes but they just left us for dead during the double poling phase of the race. Perhaps the fact that there were 13 non-starters (possibly on account of the temperature) played its part, or perhaps it's just that the competition in the Nordic countries is always higher than it is in the Alps or North America.

Anyway, the race settled down and, surprisingly, we found the track in pretty good condition. There were a few places where dirt or stones were showing but these were fewer than we'd seen before and, generally, things went well. There was one short area of two-way traffic which was far too narrow (and led to crashes later in the week); the steep downhill proved a bit dodgy on the first lap when taken at speed (but better on the second lap); the steep climb towards the end of the 10 km loop brought many people almost to a stop while the equally steep hill down into the stadium proved very fast (and this caught out Peter who fell briefly); and the track at places on the 5 km loop was much too narrow, but otherwise everything was good.

A little way up the track, Brian was going well (we both found that the wax worked well on the softer parts of the track but less well on the hard sections) and was pleased to finish ahead of Tommy Aunan, a Norwegian living in the US, who'd beaten him in the 30 km classic race in Brusson. I managed to stay ahead of Peter for the first 10 kms or so, but as we set out on the 5 km loop, he came past and I wasn't able to stick with him up the hill. Honestly, what a cheek. Doesn't he understand the protocol that people don't

just turn up and beat their steamed President without as much as a ‘by your leave’? I felt a bit depressed by this until I saw, later in the sauna, how fit he looks. Anyway, my plan had been to try to catch him on the way back down into the stadium but, just at the crucial point, going round a nadgery turn, I fell (ironically, right at Fiona’s feet, who was so shocked that she failed to catch it all on camera), and the cause was lost.

The second lap passed uneventfully but, in common with other people, even though the temperature was up to -11 °C at the finish, everything got seemingly very cold over the last few kilometres and my hands and feet were freezing at the end. Alasdair also took part in this race in the M05 category, but this was not his best performance of the week, at least not in percentage terms. BMCCSA member Patrick o’Connor (living in America and spending time in Germany), reported no difficulties in his 15 km race but he still recorded a confident British gold medal. Our friend Vitali Kurochkin of Russia picked up yet another gold medal in this same race, albeit in the M09 category.



It was chilly! But the cold seems to have shrunk Alasdair more than me

A few more minor problem? There was only one feeding station all the way round the 30 km course (which I missed!), those who finished towards the back found that they had to wait nearly an hour for a bus back to the accommodation (they’d been half-hourly until then) and, when we received the results that evening, they were not in the correct format (no FIS points, etc.) – why was this, when the Masters has spent ages and a lot of money developing the standardised SKIMA system for just this purpose?

Men’s M01-M06 30 km free

Fastest	Dimitri Vedeneev	RUS	M03	1.14:50.2	
1)	Erwin Haas	GER	M04	1.19:08.7	
29)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	1.41:16.3	28.0 %
32)	Peter McManners	GBR	M04	1.49:23.2	38.2 %
33)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	1.52:48.9	42.5 % (35 starters)
1)	Arkadiy Varanchin	RUS	M05	1.21:33.0	
52)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	2.09:49.7	59.2 % (55 starters)

Men's M07-M09 15 km free

Fastest	Andre Grob	FRA	M07	49:00.1	
53)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	1.18:29.9	60.2 % (53 starters)



Nearly home for Peter in the chilly 30 km, while Fiona and Brian adopt near perfect teamwork at the top of the hill. Will Fiona successfully grab the bottle? Stay tuned for the next exciting edition

I complained about the lack of buses at the Team Captains' meeting that evening, and was fobbed off by the answer that it was not a Team Captains' matter (so nothing changed!) but they did agree to add more drinks stations. So it was that Mike and Fiona started off their races the following day. It had got a bit warmer by this time (-7 °C at the Sports Academy but still -13 °C in the stadium). Despite all his training and his Russian coach, Mike managed to fall on the tricky downhill corner but still improved a lot on his performance in Brusson.

We'd skied out to watch Fiona at the high point of her 15 km B track and she was going very strongly with the temperature rapidly improving to -7 °C at the start, -3 °C at the end. Sadly, a little further on she was knocked over by a non-racer out training on the track. It is quite common for people to be out on the tracks during races (and there's not a great deal the organisers can do to prevent it), and generally they do this sensibly and without incident. But for a racer to be knocked over by a planker is totally unacceptable and I raised this at the Team Captains' meeting, where I was told "There's not a great deal the organisers can do to prevent it"! Anyway, it didn't cost Fiona that much and she finished well up in 13th position, a vast improvement on Krasnogorsk. I heard complaints about the 15 km B loop – it followed the 15 km A for the first 4 kms or so (so shared part of the poorly-prepared section and the two-way section) but then was very flat, followed by a non-stop 4 km long climb – well outside Masters rules. The organisers, it seems, considered the very minor drops on this climb to mean that it wasn't 'continuous'. There was also one short sheet ice section which we'd been warned about at the Team Captains' meeting (if they knew about it, why didn't they cover it with snow?), but at least they didn't have to ski the steep, tricky downhill.

Men's M01-M06 30 km and ladies F01-F06 15 km classic

Fastest	Fred Anders Solbakken	NOR	M03	1.21:05.9	
23)	Mike Bangle	GBR	M03	2.01:48.4	50.2 % (24 starters)
Fastest	Sirkka Ehrnrooth	FIN	F05	55:41.3	
1)	Eija Ristanen	FIN	F04	57:09.0	
13)	Fiona Crossley	GBR	F04	1.13:46.4	29.1 % (16 starters)

As Brian, Alasdair and I skied out to watch Fiona, the temperature had gone up to that very tricky 0 °C so experimentation with grip wax was needed. Start had provided us with a fantastic new stick wax, covering +1 to +3 °C and I tried this on one ski, covered with something cooler (Swix VR 45, 0 to -2 °C) to prevent icing, and klister (also covered) on the other ski, while Brian opted for the klister alone option. Although both gripped well but equally iced up a bit, the Start stick seemed to work better overall, which was good because it was the wax we used for the final event of the competition.



Different styles for Mike and Brian finishing the 10 km classic. But sorry, Mike, those knee pads ...

The following day, Tuesday, we had both the 10 km classic race in the morning and the 10 km free race in the afternoon, making it a bit tough for people who'd raced the day before. Fiona, down to start in the free race, opted to scratch – a decision she might have regretted because she couldn't have finished worse than 12th. Aside from that, though, we had Mike, Brian and me starting the classic race, Peter, Alasdair and Patrick starting in the afternoon. It had cooled somewhat for this race, -5 °C to -4 °C for the race, so Swix VR 45, 0 to -2 °C, on top of VR 40 -2 to -8 °C, worked very well right from the beginning.

Mike set off first, being in the youngest age group of the Brits, and wasn't seen again until the finish. He was intent on beating Brian and I claiming (correctly) that he is a better athlete than us. We, however, had other ideas. As in the earlier, skating race, the pack seemed to disappear fairly soon after the start and, fairly quickly, we discovered one of the problems of poor track preparation. Only one classic track was cut in some places and I got stuck behind someone who was a bit quicker than me on the downhill but slower than me on the uphill (other people complained about similar problems). I wasn't able to get past him if I stepped out of the tracks and he wasn't that keen on responding to "Track". Finally he did step aside but I'd

used quite a lot of energy to get past him and Brian caught and passed me. Initially I managed to catch and hold onto him, but once we came to the climb up to the tricky downhill turn, he was too strong and pulled ahead (this race, being just 10 kms, avoided the poorly-prepared section of the track, which was a relief).

After passing through the stadium and starting the long climb on the 5 km loop, I entered into a good battle with my friend Libor from the Czech Republic (who'd knocked me over in the same race in Brusson). Initially he came past as we started the downhill section, but I wasn't going to let him go and closed and then passed him with about 1 km to go. It then became a battle to stay ahead, especially going over the steep, short climb of the bridge into the stadium, and finally we entered into a double-poling battle up the finishing straight which, thankfully, I just managed to win. So, altogether, quite a good, hard race, with Brian finishing just over a minute ahead.

Men's M01-M06 10 km classic

Fastest	Ari Palolahti	FIN	M02	27:18.2	
1)	Fred Anders Solbakken	NOR	M03	27:22.6	
30)	Mike Bangle	GBR	M03	38:28.9	40.6 % (31 starters)
1)	Sergey Ivanov	RUS	M04	27:59.7	
35)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	35:59.6	28.6 %
37)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	37:08.2	32.7 % (43 starters)

We went to watch Alasdair and Peter race the skate race in the afternoon (Patrick was on the different, easier course so didn't come past us). Peter came past without problem and headed on to a better percentage performance than his first race and got below the 'threshold' for a 'good' British skier (30 %), but Alasdair fell in almost the same spot as I had in the 30 km, which led to a few expletives having to be deleted from the Finnish air – ah, well, just one of the pressures of racing!

Men's M01-M09 10 km free

Fastest	Luca Bortot	ITA	M01	24:30.2	
1)	Jean Francois Duchampt	FRA	M04	26:06.0	
32)	Peter McManners	GBR	M04	33:36.1	28.7 % (35 starters)
1)	Nils Eliassen	NOR	M05	26:50.2	
36)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	36:53.6	37.5 % (38 starters)
1)	Andre Grob	FRA	M07	27:23.2	
40)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	40:57.5	49.6 % (41 starters)

Wednesday was a somewhat poor day for Anglo-Finnish relationships (and, no, I didn't receive a text message from my wife). This was the day of the annual World Masters Association meeting, and we were invited by our new president, Diddy Dieter (Dieter Heckmann's son) to give our honest and open comments on the Rovaniemi event. I, dear reader, on behalf of all Masters skiers, stuck my hand up and mentioned just a few of the major problems, namely the lack of track marking and the poor track preparation. I knew that I had the support of many other nations but, mysteriously, none of them saw fit to speak up in my support. So this allowed the Chief of Race to be very rude in response, along the lines of "I'm sorry that the British team are disappointed by this event, but I look forward to taking part in the next major on-snow event to be held in Britain". Forgive me, but I think that a more appropriate response might have been "Sorry". We also decided, at this meeting, that the 2010 Masters will be held in Falun, Sweden.

With temperatures remain stubbornly around 0 °C, a degree of panic about the grip wax for the upcoming 45 km classic race was settling onto the British team. We visited Citysport and Intersport in the town, but they offered nothing out of the ordinary. So we finally went to Sportysport, run by someone with previous World Masters medals and, in my best Finnish, we discussed the possible wax of choice. He offered two: Rex pink klistar and a new gloopy gloop stick wax (could have been made out of our supper), again from

Rex, covering the range +3 to -5 °C. This latter looked very strange and semi-liquid in its pot but, nonetheless, Fiona decided to invest in both. She and Brian later accused me of meanness, when I subsequently asked to buy into Fiona's klistert cartel, for not being willing to invest during the initial purchasing phase, which was an outrageous accusation but what could I say, they had me bang-to-rights.

The new gloopy gloop wax requires application by a Herr Dryer, but no such person could be found so Fiona used a hot air blower instead. It seemed to work, partially, during testing but, in the end, it all became academic (a) because a recurring back injury ruled Fiona out of the race anyway, meaning a rather sad end to her Masters campaign, and (b) everyone else opted for the Start super wax. Before that, though, we welcomed new BMCCSA member, and first-time MWC entrant, Paul Newman to our team, he arriving on Thursday all the way from Germany, while we were out watching the relays (in which we didn't enter a team, even if we could have, because of it being the day before the 45 km skate race). And then there was the small matter of the 45 km skate race itself to get out of the way.

We had just two skiers in this race: Brian and Peter in M04. Paul and I skied along the tourist tracks to the far point of the 10 km loop to allow Paul to regain his ski legs a bit, and then we skied very slowly and carefully along the race track watching the race progress. When we got to the stadium, we decided to visit the waxing tent while waiting for the bus to take us home. With the warm weather, though, this edifice had undergone something of a change. Erected on snow in the first place (perhaps not the wisest decision), all of this snow had melted, leaving huge puddles all over the floor area – not really that appealing.

We watched Brian and Peter set out on their first lap and, at about one kilometre from the start, both were going well, with several people behind them. We also watched them up the steep hill before the plunge down into the stadium (thankfully, the organisers had sensibly taken the climb and sharp downhill turn out of this race – it would have been tough the third time around) and both were progressing nicely, Brian already up on his rival from Brusson where they'd tangled, Zac Zacarias from Australia, although he just failed to overtake Zac by 0.9 seconds on the line. This was a good race for both Brits, though – Brian put up his best percentage of the winner's time for this event, while Peter was a little down on earlier races at 41 % but still managing to put quite a few people behind him.

Men's M01-M06 45 km free

Fastest	Dmitri Vedeneev	RUS	M03	1.47:01.3	
1)	Gianni Penasa	ITA	M04	1.50:31.6	
26)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	2.21:04.6	27.6 %
34)	Peter McManners	GBR	M04	2.36:17.3	41.4 % (39 starters)

The final day of racing, Saturday, started just as we'd expected, at around 0 °C. Mike had expressed his desire to pound me into the ground in this race (but was still happy to ask me for waxing advice – hmmm, this tactic may require some re-thinking). Unfortunately, though, Mike had got sick the previous evening and didn't feel much better in the morning, so he decided to pull out and return home straight away – a shame, really, given his dramatic improvement since last year.

Strictly speaking, it should have been klistert conditions by now, but the track by the Sports Academy proved that Start's super wax was still working, so this is what we all went for, covered by VR 45. I'd resolved not to test the grip wax anyway and perhaps this was just as well. As it turned out, the two loops of the track had been prepared completely differently: the lower 10 km part was icy and clearly klistert conditions, while the 5 km steeper part remained loose and allowed the stick wax to work very well. Had we seen this in advance, we might have opted for something different but, as it was, we stuck with the stick. My initial thoughts, early in the race, was that the ice would very quickly strip the soft grip wax off but this proved to be incorrect; in fact, it worked very well throughout almost all of the race. Whether it gripped or not on the 4 km poor snow section was, however, largely irrelevant – this section had been so poorly prepared that anything other than double poling was simply wishful thinking.

I can only assume that, the previous evening, the piste-basher driver had inadvertently left his wife's vibrator on the track cutter and that it had been set to 'stun'. The tracks (where they existed at all), were dreadful, easily the worst I have ever seen in a MWC; the skis were shaking from side to side all over the place and, because one couldn't know where they might head, kick-double-pole or diagonal stride were almost out of the question. Even the stupid little drop out of the trees, because it was solid, icy and unpredictable, was unreasonably scary. Worst, there was one section, maybe just 100 m long, which was cambered sheet ice, almost without tracks, and which caused me a lot of difficulty. Brian and Fiona, standing at the end of this section watching, reported that the top guys were diagonal striding up this part showing almost perfect style even without tracks, taking about 10 seconds, whereas I was struggling all over the place, using a huge amount of energy but with no grip and no discernible technique, and taking maybe 30 seconds. So I was losing 20 seconds in just one short section, and it got worse as the laps passed. But, as I said above, the grip worked extremely well on the 5 km hilly part of the track, and I was able to diagonal stride all the way up this.

As I came to the end of the first 10 km loop, I spotted Patrick heading out along the crap section, seemingly not enjoying it any more than I was. Anyway, it had been my intention to try to catch Alasdair, who had started just 5 minutes before me, but he was going exceptionally well and I had made up just one and a half minutes half way into the race. Although we both slowed on each of the three laps, he slowed more than me on the last lap and, although I didn't pass him, I managed to maintain a respectable 4 minutes between us at the end. The last 3 kms or so, though, proved the limits of even the super wax; for some reason (the temperature was rising), it suddenly decided to start sticking a lot, even on the downhill and, although I managed to catch and pass someone from a higher age class on this section, what should have been a nice quick descent into the stadium turned out to be quite a slow struggle. Other people, apparently, had the same waxing problems.

Things were not going so well for Paul, however, behind us. Although he negotiated the first 15 kms without difficulty, aiming to ski well within his limits, a long-standing foot injury was giving him pain and he was faced with the classic dilemma – to continue and risk more permanent damage, or bite the bullet and pull out. In the end he opted for the latter; probably not the best return on his investment in travel and entry fees but at least he learnt what a Masters entails and is very keen to improve his experience at the next event in McCall.

Men's M01-M06 45 km and Men's M01-M09 30 km classic

Fastest	Fred Anders Solbakken	NOR	M03	2.01:39.5	
1)	Sergey Ivanov	RUS	M04	2.03:39.5	
27)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	2.55:56.3	42.3 %
	Paul Newman	GBR	M04	DNF	(32 starters)
1)	Vladimir Maltsev	RUS	M05	2.08:34.9	
34)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	2.59:32.0	39.6 % (41 starters)
Fastest	Ivan Garanin	RUS	M07	1.29:33.5	
36)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	2.06:33.2	41.3 % (37 starters)

So that was it, racing over for the Masters. That evening we attending the banquet, by no means the worst I have ever attended (it was, at least, handily held in the large hall of the Sports Academy where we were staying); the food was okay but they could have been a bit more generous with the drinks, and Fiona was asked to dance by the ex-Norwegian national director! In summary, I found the event disappointing in many small respects. On the other hand, Alasdair, Fiona and Mike all improved significantly on their previous performances, Brian should also be pleased with his results even if he wasn't quite at his 15.6 % best, Peter did exceptionally well on his debut and Paul no doubt learnt a lot for the future.

I have, though, saved one little story until the end, because for me it typified the whole event. Alasdair and I were a smidgeon behind the others when we finished the last race (just what does it take to complete 45 km skate in less than 1 hour 50 minutes, and 45 km classic in only just over 2 hours?). With the best part of an

hour to wait for the bus to take us home, we headed for the waxing tent which, as reported above, had already turned into a swimming pool. When we got there, though, they were already dismantling the tent while we, and a few others, were still trying to keep warm in it. So there we were, trying to keep warm after a long, hard race, while the organisers, who had clearly hired the tent by the hour, wanted to save just that little bit more by dismantling it around us. They just couldn't do too little for their guests who had come from so far and wide. I'm certain that McCall 2008 will be infinitely better than this!

We must, though, express our sincere thanks to Start, our sponsors. They really did us proud with their waxes and we were happy to use them and impressed with their performance.



85.7 % of the 2007 British team (Mike had beef burgered off by this time) pose nonchalantly but very smartly on the tracks outside the Sport Academy