

Masters World Championships, Klosters, Switzerland, 2017

Every year, for the Masters, I remind myself that I must make notes (weather, how people got on in races, quotable comments and so on) to help me write this review. Every year I start well, but then it trails off towards the end, and this year was no exception! So off we go, and let's see how much I can remember.

I met up with Godfrey at Heathrow Airport on Saturday morning, one whole week before the first race, for our drive down to Klosters. There were three reasons for this decision: to get much more 'track time' on the race tracks (and, for me, to do at least one time trial before the races; Wendy had taken this to extremes and had already been in Klosters for two weeks); because going in a car means no weight-limit hassles so that I was able to take four pairs of skis and waxing horse; and because, with two people in the car, the total cost is less than flying. The Saturday drive went well and we got a lot further than I thought we would – all the way to Mulhouse (pronounced, apparently, we were told by Anne Ford who'd been there, as "Milays), almost on the Swiss border. This allowed us to arrive in Klosters before lunchtime on Sunday, having noted the very small quantities of snow anywhere until we actually entered Klosters. My only problem was a very stiff lower back, which had plagued me for several weeks. I could barely get out of the car when we arrived and it was so bad that I feared that it might put paid to all my racing ambitions.

We checked in to our excellent hotel and found that we had a small apartment: two bedrooms (one a sort of sitting room, too), bathroom and a hallway which would double as a secret waxing space. The hotel also had a (small) swimming pool, sauna and heated boot racks (which we used), and a fitness room and table tennis table (which we didn't). Our first action, though, was to get to the race tracks, which were about one mile from the hotel and where we were able to park right outside the sports stadium. There was plenty of snow, but the temperature that afternoon peaked at +9 °C. The tracks were not very well marked and were rather soft in places, so we missed the first loop after the start and, instead, headed over the bridge and up the loops of the meadow where we met Wendy coming home from her morning training. Wendy pointed us more or less in the right direction but I don't think that we did the full course that day, although we did keep having to take our skis off to cross roads.

On Monday morning we set off again, this time guided by Wendy and, therefore, following the correct tracks. Shortly after the start, the tracks turned left and headed up and around a shallow climb before descending via one almost 180° right hander then a 90° left hander and fast downhill to the bridge across the river. Two humps before the bridge controlled the speed nicely but, after just more than one kilometre, the bridge looked worryingly narrow (although it caused no problems later). What followed were two long loops up and down the flat meadows until, having crossed the main road after maybe 3 km, we started the first long climb which lasted about 500 metres; not very steep but a good test nonetheless.

After the climb the track dropped down over the road again and continued down to a 90° right hand turn which was to cause us problems later! A few hundred metres relatively flat led us to the first drop-off, with a gentle corner at the bottom, a short climb up, another left hand corner and a swoop down to the bridge over the river. Following that came the longest climb, again not very steep but which, apart from one dip, went up steadily for about one kilometre. Then we turned sharply and whizzed down above the river, with a short climb then down to the steep drop-off taking us more or less back to the bridge. I couldn't help noticing how much of the track, especially the climbs, were cut on a camber across the hill.

We looped back up the valley again, up a short, reasonably steep climb, down into a dip again, up the other side then over the river again. A short flat section followed, then there was a steep climb up past a stable followed, after a short drop, by a long, very gentle, climb up to "bridge section". Here were two or three different sections of track cut side-by-side. We had to be in the middle, allowing us to go under the bridge to the start of the final, substantial, climb which ended, at the high point of the course, with a short, sharp climb up and over another bridge. After this we swept back down again, this time taking the left-hand track down the multiple-track section, over the bridge and then around a few fairly flat loops. Another short climb up through the trees (the only dirty part of the track) then there was a long easy downhill which ended by going down through a narrow section past another farm which I didn't find, with its curves, to be very easy.



A good example of how the course looped. On the right is the runout of the steep drop



The rather confusing bridge section, with tracks all over the place!

A further drop led to a short climb followed by a drop down to the right, another left hand corner then a shush down and into the trees. Next came the steepest climb of the course, but it was short (maybe 10 metres), followed by a longer climb and then a long, straight, gentle downhill, over the road, another gentle climb and this led on to the steepest drop back beside the initial long climb but with two corners, to right then left before crossing another road and dropping to a 90° right hand corner which led back over another road and on to the last one kilometre or so of flat, over the river again and into the start area. Altogether, a really rather nice circuit!

Monday afternoon peaked at 13.5° C but we went out and skied the 15 km circuit once more, Swix yellow klistar (+3 to +12° C working very well). Tuesday morning was important, because it was the morning of my 10 km time trial, with Godfrey and Wendy deciding to join me, too. Sadly, it was zero degrees and snowing, and I could get no grip wax to work, despite two different klistar attempts. Godfrey and Wendy skated, making their lives easier but our times, one hour for Godfrey and me, and 1 hour 20 minutes for Wendy, showed just how poor the conditions were. This time trial had been intended to establish my race pace and build my confidence prior to the racing but, in fact, it had the opposite effect! The only good thing was that the exertion somehow surprisingly eased off my back, and I had no more trouble with it – phew!

Wednesday presented the best conditions so far, tracks well-groomed and firm in the morning, and all downhills runnable in the track or with slight half snowplough, although I did fall going through the farm as a result of trying to stay in the tracks even at high speed. Much of the rest of the British Team arrived that evening and settled in, so we did two further laps on Thursday. In the afternoon, Godfrey and I practiced the steep drop-off with Wendy (just out of shot in the photo above left) until we were all happy to run it in the tracks, which was by far the fastest option. Sadly, for the races they moved the cut track from the left to the right without warning anyone and, because this made the corner at the bottom tighter, all our practice came to nought.



The start of the second long climb, where Marie-Claude and the GB Supporters' Club encamped



The finish; the inflatable caused fun by deflating during one race – luckily no one got caught up!

I rested on Friday, but other people went out for a final training session and found the tracks hard and icy in the morning. Sadly, this was not a good day for the British team – Hans fell on the corner of the fast downhill, hit his head and had to spend the night in hospital. This accident went on affecting him for several days and he was unable to race at all, eventually leaving the event early. That evening the rest of us attended the opening ceremony, which was reassuringly short but with ample supplies of cheese and wine. Helen arrived later that night (so no chance to try the track) and, because she was camping for one night in Gail and Wendy's room and didn't want to go past reception, we eventually rescued her, after several phone messages, wandering around the hotel gardens!

Finally, Saturday, and the first races, 30-15 km skate, arrived, warm! The air temperature at the start was about +3 °C and, although the recorded temperature at the end was +7 °C, it was probably more like +10 °C. The rather poor warm-up tracks meant that running along the roads was perhaps the best way to warm up; the organisers later claimed that skiers could cross the bridge and warm up on the meadows, but this was a totally flat area. Alistair Brown, off first, had by far the best of the conditions, after which things softened dramatically, and the snow over the return bridge, in particular, was very soft and deep. What I remember in particular were the very high winds, which made forward motion up the meadow and at the high point on the track difficult. Brian and I started together in the M06 class but he pulled steadily ahead of me, not helped when I had a stupid fall on the 90° corner after about 3 kilometres when I tried to get out of the tracks because I was a bit worried about my speed. At the end of the first lap, Brian was coming back over the first bridge as I was about to head for the transition, i.e. he was about 5 minutes ahead of me. So I was rather surprised when I got to the finish to find that he had DNFd after 17 kilometres, dispirited with no competitors in sight, the same problem I'd had.

In the shorter, 15 km, race we had quite a large number of participants, with first-timer Roger Homyer putting up by far the best BMCCSA performance at 29.8 % of the winner's time, well ahead of Chris D, having his worst performance of this event, who was also ahead of Godfrey, whose race was spoilt by a heavy fall at the bottom of the steep drop-off, although I'm not sure whether this was caused because of the tracks having been moved from left to right. This was Ian's debut on his 'home' track; he easily surpassed the time-trials he'd done in preparation for this event and he put three people behind him.

Among the ladies, Gail posted the second-best British performance of 38.2 %. Although happy with her performance, and ahead of quite a few people including Bronwen, it was not her best-ever Masters performance. Helen and Anne were just one place, although several minutes, apart in the F06 category, while Wendy performed substantially better than her Tuesday time-trial!

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

Fastest	Sergio Bonaldi	ITA	M02	1.14:01.8	24.3 km/h		
1)	Reto Burgermeister	SUI	M03	1.15:29.2	23.8 km/h		
22)	Alistair Brown	GBR	M03	1.57:37.9	15.3 km/h	55.8 %	(25 starters)
1)	Barry Makarewicz	USA	M06	1.25:08.2	21.1 km/h		
52)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	2.04:31.0	14.5 km/h	46.3 %	
	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	DNF			(64 starters)

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

1)	Nikolay Korzhov	RUS	M07	44:00.6	20.5 km/h		
55)	Roger Homyer	GBR	M07	57:08.2	15.8 km/h	29.8 %	
70)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M07	1.05:33.8	13.7 km/h	49.0 %	
73)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	1.13:27.0	12.3 km/h	66.9 %	(76 starters)
1)	Andre Escoffier	FRA	M08	46:49.0	19.2 km/h		
59)	Ian Murray	GBR	M08	1.21:10.9	11.1 km/h	73.4 %	(62 starters)
1)	Andre Grob	FRA	M09	49:43.1	18.1 km/h		
25)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	1.08:32.3	13.1 km/h	37.9 %	(37 starters)

Ladies F01-F06 15 km free technique, Saturday 4th March

Fastest	Natalia Ziatikova	RUS	F03	47:03.7	19.1 km/h		
8)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	1.05:02.2	13.8 km/h	38.2 %	
10)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F03	1.14:25.0	12.1 km/h	58.1 %	(11 starters)
1)	Elizabeth Youngman	USA	F06	52:18.1	17.2 km/h		
15)	Helen Murray	GBR	F06	1.25:35.4	10.5 km/h	63.6 %	
16)	Anne Ford	GBR	F06	1.34:47.8	9.5 km/h	81.3 %	(18 starters)

Ladies F07-F09 15 km free technique, Saturday 4th March

Fastest	Tatiana Esipova	RUS	F07	58:15.7	15.5 km/h		
25)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	1.31:00.6	9.9 km/h	56.2 %	(27 starters)



This shot, of the return bridge, gives a good impression of how soft conditions were



Gail approaches the finish

We had only two competitors in Sunday's 15 km classic race, Chris Richards and Des Goff, another Brit making his debut. Patrick o'Connor was in Klosters but, sadly, ill, so didn't race at all. When I talked to him later in the week, he suggested that this could be his last Masters event and, in addition, he also decided not to renew his BMCCSA membership. Grip waxing conditions for this event were very difficult, Chris complained of no grip as he crossed the first bridge where I was spectating, and it seemed that hairies or some other sort of no-wax solution was probably the best option on this day; the only day when they would have worked well.



Roger Homyer, in fine form on his debut



Des Goff heads over the bridge, also on his debut

Men's M07-M09 15 km classic technique, Sunday 5th March

Fastest	Gianpaolo Englaro	ITA	M07	46:54.3	19.2 km/h		
	Hans Nilsson	GBR	M07	DNS			(48 starters)
1)	Olaf Knai	NOR	M08	49:46.8	18.1 km/h		
47)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	1.10:34.6	12.8 km/h	41.8 %	
54)	Desmond Goff	GBR	M08	1.46:01.9	8.5 km/h	113.0 %	(56 starters)
1)	Veikko Piirainen	FIN	M09	52:05.0			
	Patrick O'Connor	USA	M09	DNS			(35 starters)

Only three of us made it to the start of the 10 km classic race on Monday. The previous night I scraped the skis (see later article) and applied Swix Violet (silver) klister, -2 to +4 °C, and then tried unsuccessfully over night to freeze it because snow was forecast. The snow did indeed appear overnight but it made little difference on the tracks. Early testing at 08:30 showed that the klister worked acceptably with a temperature of -2 °C at race start although rising quickly, but our race experience suggested that perhaps a slightly warmer klister was needed because we had to run out of the tracks up the steeper hills. About half way round, there was a short cut-off which excluded the steep drop-off. This was rather poorly prepared and Gail fell where the outer track had disappeared (I also had problems here). Stranger things were to follow, though because, at about the 7 km point, one of her skis came off and flew past her and the Canadian in front of her. How she managed to get that far remains a mystery but, of course, time was lost as the ski was recovered and reattached. Things did not progress so smoothly for Des, however. He had a fall on the 90° corner after about 3 km (remember that one?) and decided to retire.

Men's M01-M06 10 km classic technique, Monday 6th March

Fastest	Christian Baldauf	AUT	M04	27:48.5	21.6 km/h		
1)	Sergey Ivanov	RUS	M06	30:05.1	19.9 km/h		
38)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	40:52.9	14.7 km/h	35.9 %	(48 starters)

Men's M07-M09 10 km classic technique, Monday 6th March

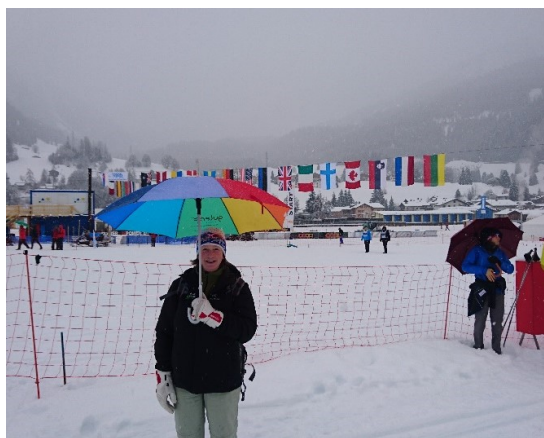
Fastest	Heikki Ruokonen	FIN	M07	31:05.0	19.3 km/h		
	Hans Nilsson	GBR	M07	DNS			(52 starters)
1)	Ferdinand Kraller	GER	M08	32:20.3	18.6 km/h		
	Desmond Goff	GBR	M08	DNF			(59 starters)
1)	Leonid Perminov	RUS	M09	34:26.1	17.4 km/h		
	Patrick O'Connor	USA	M09	DNS			(34 starters)

Ladies F07-F09 10 km classic technique, Monday 6th March

Fastest	Vera Ziatikova	RUS	F03	32:08.2	18.7 km/h		
11)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	44:43.2	13.4 km/h	39.2 %	(12 starters)



The sign says it all – power was what I lacked!



Anne in non-skiing mode but ready for the weather

Conditions were much softer and warmer for the skate race in the afternoon. The non-racing British contingent were spectating at the start of the second long climb (the normal position) where it was very slushy. Alistair had another strong race (his last, he had to leave after this one), albeit collecting a British Gold medal, in the same conditions as everyone else this time while, for Brian, this was by far his best race and, in fact, the best performance by a British BMCCSA member (only being beaten by our American member Steve in his longest race two days later). It was also Chris Richards' best race, while Chris Donnelly improved but was still going to do better, and Roger too had his best race (second best British man of the event) while Ian enjoyed this race far more than his first race, although this was his last (he decided subsequently that 30 km classic would be a little too much for him). I heard no dramas from Godfrey and this was a better race than his earlier 15 km one.



Alistair, in full summer mode, starts the climb



Chris R at the start, in not very nice weather

Men's M01-M06 10 km free technique, Monday 6th March

Fastest	Sergio Bonaldi	ITA	M02	25:16.6	23.7 km/h		
1)	Michal Jurco	SVK	M03	27:21.0	21.9 km/h		
19)	Alistair Brown	GBR	M03	39:29.6	15.2 km/h	44.4 %	(19 starters)
1)	Renato Burch	SUI	M06	28:02.2	21.4 km/h		
34)	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	35:51.7	16.7 km/h	27.9 %	(47 starters)

Men's M07-M09 10 km free technique, Monday 6th March

1)	Guido Masiero	ITA	M07	29:06.8	20.6 km/h		
50)	Roger Homyer	GBR	M07	37:35.8	16.0 km/h	29.1 %	
57)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M07	40:26.2	14.8 km/h	38.9 %	
60)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	46:18.6	13.0 km/h	59.1 %	(64 starters)
1)	Einar Vikingstad	NOR	M08	29:58.0	20.0 km/h		
42)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	40:40.0	14.8 km/h	35.7 %	
55)	Ian Murray	GBR	M08	47:23.5	12.7 km/h	58.1 %	(58 starters)
1)	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M09	31:45.5	18.9 km/h		
21)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	41:38.2	14.1 km/h	31.1 %	(34 starters)

Three of our four British ladies improved their earlier performances, in the case of Helen (perhaps now more familiar with the course) going from 63.6 % to a fine 37.8 %. Only Wendy made this her worst event of the week, but she then pulled herself together for the 30 km classic race.

Ladies F01-F06 10 km free technique, Monday 6th March

Fastest	Natalia Ziatikova	RUS	F03	28:43.9	20.9 km/h		
6)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F03	42:05.7	14.3 km/h	46.5 %	(7 starters)
1)	Nancy Burden	CAN	F06	34:33.9	17.4 km/h		
16)	Helen Murray	GBR	F06	47:38.6	12.6 km/h	37.8 %	
18)	Anne Ford	GBR	F06	53:14.7	11.3 km/h	54.0 %	(19 starters)

Ladies F07-F09 10 km free technique, Monday 6th March

Fastest	Tatiana Esipova	RUS	F07	34:11.8	17.5 km/h		
28)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	57:30.2	10.4 km/h	68.2 %	(28 starters)

After the rest day on Tuesday, conditions were the best of the week for the longest skate races, 45 km for the youngest male skiers, 30 km for others. It was -2 °C at the start, rising to maybe +5 °C as the day went on. For some reason I decided not to warm up properly (thinking that I'd have plenty of time during the race for this) and this proved to be a huge mistake! My first lap was horrible, I found it very difficult to get going and I very nearly abandoned at the end of this lap. But subsequent laps got better as the track got more compressed and an icy line developed and, in fact, I managed to catch and overtake a few people on the last lap, my race only being slightly spoilt by one silly fall on the last climb when I put a pole onto my left ski. Godfrey had a fall coming down from the high point on the first main corner where the tracks had been washed out but this was his best race, as it also was for Chris D, Gail, Bronwen, Steve and Chris R who, by just one and a half seconds, broke the 15.0 km/h barrier. Sadly Anne retired with a bad knee, while Roger had left earlier in order to prepare for the Birkbeiner race.

**Bronwen (nearest camera) about to start****Brian in his best, 10 km skate, race****Men's M01-M06 45 km free technique, Wednesday 8th March**

Fastest	Reto Burgermeister	SUI	M03	1.54:00.8	23.7 km/h		
	Alastair Brown	GBR	M03	DNS			(18 starters)
1)	Barry Makarewicz	USA	M06	2.04:48.3	21.6 km/h		
32)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	2.57:24.2	15.2 km/h	42.1 %	(44 starters)

Ladies F01-F06 30 km free technique, Wednesday 8th March

Fastest	Natalia Ziatikova	RUS	F03	1.26:06.0	20.9 km/h		
6)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	1.50:32.9	16.3 km/h	28.4 %	
8)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F03	1.58:54.3	15.1 km/h	38.1 %	(9 starters)
1)	Nancy Burden	CAN	F06	1.35:38.7	18.8 km/h		
16)	Helen Murray	GBR	F06	2.14:47.3	13.4 km/h	40.9 %	
	Anne Ford	GBR	F06	DNF			(20 starters)

Men's M07-M09 30 km free technique, Wednesday 8th March

Fastest	Guido Masiero	ITA	M07	1.26:38.5	20.8 km/h		
53)	Christopher Donnelly	GBR	M07	1.54:10.4	15.8 km/h	31.8 %	
58)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	2.05:14.8	14.4 km/h	44.6 %	
	Roger Homyer	GBR	M07	DNS			(64 starters)
1)	Sakari Matikainen	FIN	M08	1.29:50.0	20.0 km/h		
37)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	1.59:58.5	15.0 km/h	33.6 %	(51 starters)
1)	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M09	1.37:15.1	18.5 km/h		
14)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	2.03:22.0	14.6 km/h	26.9 %	(24 starters)



Smiling this much, Godfrey surely wasn't working hard enough!



Chris D. passes his Number 1 fan and official GB supporters team, Mrs. Chris D., Marie-Claude!

In contrast to the skate race, conditions were the worst of the week for the last individual races, with only two Brits involved: Brian Adams over 45 km (his last chance to participate in the "Real men's" race), and Wendy McRae over 30 km. It was perhaps a shame, particularly for Brian that, because of an avalanche at the top of the course, the highest 3 km loop was cut out, although I imagine that most people were happy not to have to make the climb on that loop. The temperature at the start was +1 °C and it soon started to rain heavily, and this continued throughout the race while the temperature went up to something like +5 °C. Wendy had asked me for assistance with her grip wax, and I prepared a combination so cunning that even a fox would call it the king of cunning: Rode Nero at front and back to deal with the cooler early temperature, Swix yellow in the middle for when the temperature went up, and silver klister to prevent icing – she was not fantastically impressed. Brian, on the other hand, paid CHF 15 (£12) for the 'professional' wax service and was rewarded with Swix Universal klister.

Wendy, unfortunately, skied into the finish (instead of making the transition) at the end of the first lap and then, rather than returning to the transition track, she was advised by officials to continue past the finish line and on to the track again, resulting in one missed timing point and disqualification. I appealed (luckily without having to pay the CHF 50 fee), not on the basis that she hadn't made the mistake but, instead, that the officials had guided her wrongly and, luckily, when the results finally came out, she'd been reinstated!

Ladies F07-F09 30 (24) km classic technique, Thursday 9th March

Fastest	Marianne Niemi	FIN	F07	1.23:27.6	17.3 km/h		
15)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	2.14:15.9	10.7 km/h	60.9 %	(17 starters)

Men's M01-M06 45 (36) km classic technique, Thursday 9th March

Fastest	Bruno Carrara	ITA	M02	1.36:01.0	22.5 km/h		
1)	Yury Stepanov	RUS	M06	1.42:21.8	21.1 km/h		
21)	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	2.23:29.5	15.1 km/h	40.2 %	(25 starters)

Men's M07-M09 30 (24) km classic technique, Thursday 9th March

Fastest	Gianpaolo Englaro	ITA	M07	1.12:06.0	20.0 km/h		
1)	Ferdinand Kraller	GER	M08	1.17:32.8	18.6 km/h		
	Ian Murray	GBR	M08	DNS			
	Desmond Goff	GBR	M08	DNS			(43 starters)
1)	Veikko Piirainen	FIN	M09	1.22:56.0	17.4 km/h		
	Patrick O'Connor	USA	M09	DNS			(27 starters)

There are several internet-based weather forecasts available for the Klosters area and, between them, these had been fairly useless throughout the two weeks, often differing in their predictions by several degrees, disagreeing on whether it would freeze or not and, in fact, often not able to even get the current weather conditions right, which they could have done by someone simply opening a window. On relay day, though, Friday (the last day of competition), all website agreed very closely: +1 °C at about 10 a.m. rising to +3 or +4 °C during the day, so this is what I grip-waxed for, on behalf of myself, Wendy and Gail, almost the same cunning combination as the day before: Rode Rossa klister (-2 to +4 °C) and Swix KX75 (+2 to +12 °C) underfoot, but without silver. Sadly, while they all agreed, none of these websites had forecast the +8 °C temperature shown in the stadium when we arrived, nor the +14 °C this rose to during the racing!

The grip wax shouldn't really have worked but, surprisingly, it did! I tested it briefly on the wax-testing tracks which, by this time, had degenerated into a fairground water-splash feature with a small pond in the centre, and this showed that it was adequate. This allowed me to return to the changing room, remove my thermal vest and head out for my warm-up running on the roads. 15 minutes or so later and I was sweating like a pig as I put my ski boots back on and headed for the start. To get to the holding pen required a trip through another shallow pond, which rather dampened the socks! But then, 5 minutes or so later, we were off, our category, M06, being combined with M05 (in front) and M07 (behind) and all thoughts of wet feet were forgotten. My first plan was to shake off Arne Stornor, staunch classicist and someone I usually beat easily, but he insisted on sticking with me up around the first loop, down over the bridge and up the meadow. I finally got rid of him up the one and only steep climb, which was pretty much the end of the hard work.

After the climb there was the descent over the road (which was a little tricky because a trench had been dug across it to get rid of all the melt-water), then the drop to the right-hand corner, a little climb and then we were back on the descent towards the main downhill. I was going well at this point, with only the steep downhill to negotiate and this was done at speed but with a light, stabilising half-snowplough. Fully into the tracks for the bottom of the slope and just the road covering to negotiate when, uh-oh, the skis stopped while I didn't and down I flew. I omitted to delete the expletive which started with an "F" and rhymed with "duck" but was back up fairly quickly although, while I was getting up again, I was passed by Friedl the Aussie, another M06 and an M07; damn. Nothing to do but complete the double-poling last 1 500 metres and hand over to Chris R, annoyed to have lost those places.

Chris overtook the Aussies soon after the hand-over, though and, by this time, we were one and a half minutes ahead of the Danes but with not much chance of catching the Czechs and that is how the rest of the race played out. Chris R had followed my grip waxing suggestion and all of us, apart from Wendy, found that this worked well (I was able to stay in the tracks all the way around the track, at least where the tracks existed) and, after good contributions from Chris D and anchor-man Brian, we trounced the Aussies (revenge for Vuokatti!) and beat the Danes into the bargain. For the first time ever, GB also managed to get a ladies relay time to the finish, coming home in a strong 10th position.

4 x 5 km relay, Friday 10th March

Fastest	M02	ITA	52:42.0						
1)	M06	SUI	1.01:00.7						
10)	M06	GBR	1.22:05.9	Adam Pinney Chris Donnelly	21:19.5 19:53.3	Chris Richards Brian Adams	22:40.7 18:12.3	34.6 % (12 starters)	
Fastest)	F02	RUS	1.06:47.7						
10)	F02	GBR	1.48:50.1	Gail Donald Anne Ford	22:48.7 30:06.2	Wendy McRae Bronwen Steiner	31:14.2 24:41.1	62.9 % (10 starters)	



Conditions on relay day left a little to be desired!



First GB Ladies Relay Team, which would have been victorious had 9 other teams stayed home

And that was it, racing over for another year. Some of us stayed to race the Engadin on Sunday but there's no space to report on that. On Saturday I took the bus up beyond the high point of the race track and can confirm that an avalanche had happened. As I walked down along the tracks, they were in rather poor condition and it seems unlikely that they would have been able to hold the event at all one week later. Nonetheless, this had been a good event, despite the warm conditions and I think that most people enjoyed it. We end, therefore, with a short appreciation from newcomer Ian:

"After many emails with Adam about my suitability to take part in the MWC, having never langlaufed competitively before (apart from the Engadin 3 years back), I finally decided to go for it, although Adam made me aware that I would definitely not be in the leading bunch, taking into account my training times! Having raced for Britain in the late 60s in alpine events, I felt confident on the downhill sections but the thought of dragging my 85 kg up some of the steep slopes gave me some sleepless nights! My training was also curtailed because of having to do my grandfatherly duties with a weeks' alpine skiing in St. Anton the week before the race with my grandchildren. Nevertheless I felt reasonably ready for the task ahead.

The first race on the Saturday, 15 km skate, gave me my first experience of a group start and a serious shock, as the peloton took off up the hill, leaving me and two others well behind! With poor wax, by the bridge I was already 100 m behind in last place and slogged my way up the course into the wind, beginning to feel a bit panicky about coming in last!! Luckily my slow regular plodding pace wore down a couple of tail-enders and I was delighted to overtake them and finish in for me a reasonably respectable time.

The 10 km on the Monday was a lot easier and the conditions much more favourable, so I managed to improve on my previous effort, even though the wax again left a lot to be desired!

All in all, in retrospect it was a lot of fun to have participated and I thank Adam for his encouragement and clear explanations of the pros and cons. As far as I am concerned, it is a masochistic pastime but one certainly feels good having done it! I doubt I will be back to try my hand again in the Masters but you never know! Good luck and best wishes to the rest of the team, who by the sounds of all the emails, had an enjoyable stay in Klosters and appreciated the courses and ambience."