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Left: The Parsenn, with its mountain railway and its long magnificent ski trails down to Davos and the Prätigau, is the skier's El Dorado. — Links: Die von einer leistungsfähigen Seilbahn erschlossene Parsenn, das Dorado der Skifahrer. Blick ins Döschmatal. — A gauche: La Parsenn, eldorado des skieurs, est accessible par un puissant funiculaire. Photo: Pilet.

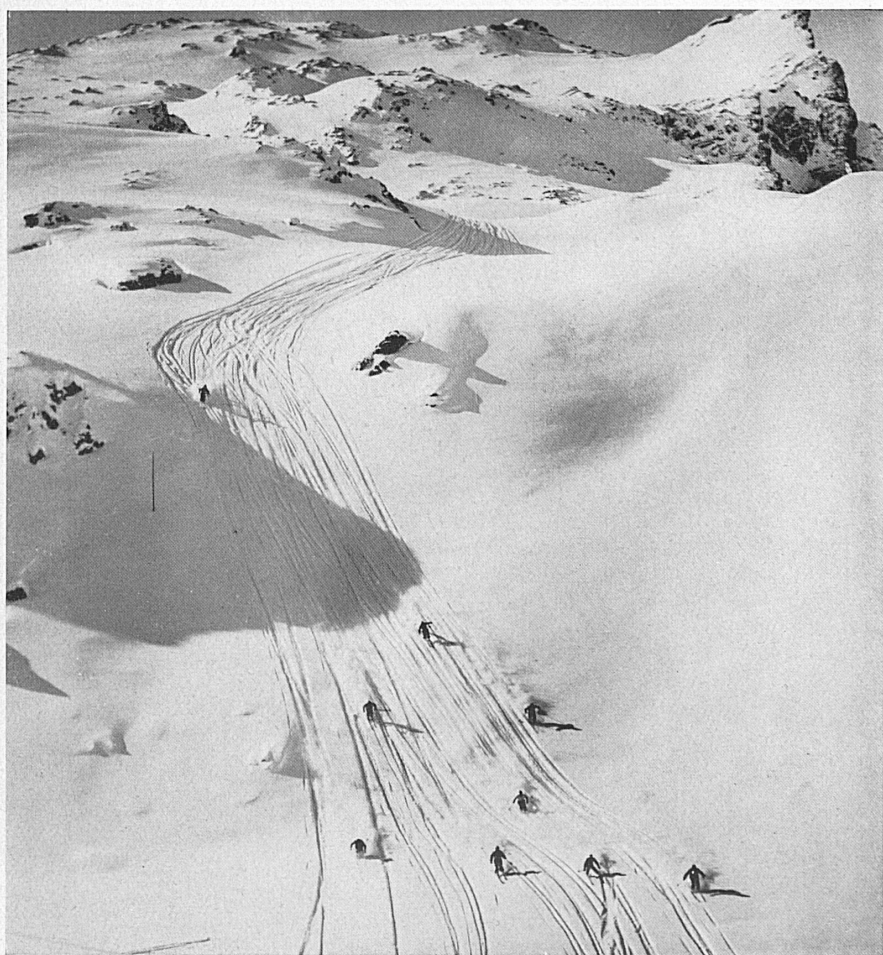
PARSENN DERBY

6th March 1949

"A skiers' world in itself", an English visitor once called the Parsenn area. That means more than that Parsenn is a beautiful resort with ski trails; it is truly a world to itself and complete in itself, such as is not to be found anywhere else. This world begins in Davos-Dorf when we enter the car of the Davos-Parsenn Railway for a 20 minute ride up the mountain to Weissfluhjoch at 8,700 ft. elevation. During the busy season this Parsenn train operates on a 10 minute schedule, carrying 140 skiers per trip, or approximately 800 per hour, so that within only a few hours some 3,000 to 4,000 passengers can be carried up to the largest and most beautiful ski territory in the Alps. Weissfluhjoch Station, which is located at the start of the many and variegated ski trails leading down into the valley, is the scene of about as much activity as Piccadilly Station in London after business hours. On leaving the train, some skiers stop for a bite to eat or a warm drink in Weissfluhjoch Restaurant, while others strap on their skis immediately and start down the trail for the zestful thrill of fresh air, sunshine and snow on their glorious trip into the valley.

On 6th March, 1949, the Parsenn Derby will be 25 years old. In 1924 Mr. Edlin, of England, who until his death in 1947 was called the "King of Parsenn" in honour of the fact that by 1933 he had made many more than 1,000 descents, had the idea of arranging a race to find out how much time was required for the trip down to Küblis. The first race, which was started at Parsennfurka on 13th January, 1924, was won by Peter Gruber, of Davos, with a great lead. From then on Peter Gruber has competed every year except one when he was unable to do so because of an injury. So far he has won 15 diamond studded golden suns which are awarded, according to a point system, as a trophy for many successful runs in the Parsenn Derby.

By the end of the 'twenties the Parsenn Derby had taken on huge proportions. Skiing had become popular and in the various categories of the Derby there were nearly



Left: In the Parsenn ski-ing paradise. — Links: Auf froher Abfahrt im Skigebiet der Parsenn. — A gauche: La belle descente sur la neige de la Parsenn. Photo: Caspar.

300 contestants, including many British, Italian, French, American and other foreign ski runners. The Parsenn Derby has become such a gigantic sporting event largely because of the many age groups and classifications, as this gives each contestant the chance to compete with others of approximately equal skill for a class trophy or at least a silver or bronze "Parsenn Derby ski".

A turning point in the history of the Derby came in 1932 when the Parsenn Railway was completed. The logical consequence was to set the starting point of the race course back about 1.9 miles to the top of the ridge. Although this made the course longer and more difficult, the increase in the number of visitors resulting from the operation of the Parsenn Railway brought about an improvement in the ski trail. As a consequence, the number of contestants rose despite the increase in the length of the race course. In 1932 Leo Casperl, of Kitzbühel, the only foreigner and first junior, won the Derby in 17 : 46 minutes. This time was beaten by a very considerable amount the following year, although the run had been made still longer in that the summit of Weissfluh Mountain was chosen as the definitive starting point of the race course.

Since 1933, therefore, the Parsenn Derby measures 6.95 miles (36,748 ft.) and covers a drop in elevation of 6,540 ft. It is probably a good thing that the Weissfluh is the highest point for miles around, for it is certain that the Derby would be started from an even higher point if any such could be found. In 1933 the race had to be postponed at the last minute due to bad weather, but the conditions were ideal when Otto Furrer, of Zermatt, set up a record of 16 : 01 minutes which stood unbroken for a full five years.

During the war and post-war years, 1940—1946, foreign contestants were rare. On the other hand, the Swiss Army was well represented during the first three years of the war. In 1940 Peter Mathis, of Davos, brought the previous record of 14 : 49 minutes established by Martin Fopp in 1938 down to 14 : 36 minutes, and in 1942 Mathis set up a new record of 14 : 00 minutes. In 1944 when the Derby was held under ideal conditions, the records in all men's classes were broken. The

new record was established by Edy Rominger with a time of 13 : 27 minutes, while not less than six runners covered the course in less than 14 minutes.

In 1948, under ideal snow and weather conditions, Ralph Olinger, of Engelberg, won the Derby and established a new record of 13 : 10.4 minutes. His average speed was 31.51 miles per hour. Although this average speed may not appear very high in comparison to speeds attained in many other races, it must be remembered that no other race is as long. Originally women's races were held on the same course as the men's. Their records improved from 35 minutes in 1924 to 24 : 43 minutes in 1930. In subsequent years trials were made over various shorter courses until in 1933 the women's course took on its present form, ending in the Conterser Schwendi after a drop of 3,900 feet in elevation over a run of 3.87 miles (20,472 ft.). The women's course covers the easier and faster part of the whole Parsenn run and thus fulfils to a considerable extent the standards of the International Women's Committee requiring appreciably easier courses for women.

Every year the Parsenn Derby attracts an extraordinarily great number of spectators. From early morning on, the Parsenn Railway and the Strela ski-lift work at top speed carrying thousands of visitors as well as contestants and officials up the mountain, while hundreds more ski up from Wolfgang or over the Strela Pass from the Arosa side. When weather conditions are good, the total number of spectators can be estimated at 4,000 to 5,000. As a result of this great popularity, it is necessary to have a large staff of officials posted at 125 checking stations along the route to make sure that no spectators get in the way of the racers.

For many years the Giant Slalom Race has been a part of the Parsenn Derby. It is held two days before the main race on the south side of the Parsenn area from Höhenweg Station on the Parsenn Railway down to Davos-Dorf. This course has a drop in elevation of about 2,000 feet and attracts the best Derby contestants. It is not laid out as a long uninterrupted slalom, but rather as a guided run with various slalom figures.

SPORTS BLANCS EN SUISSE ROMANDE

Les skieurs de chez nous savent-ils leur bonheur? Ils sont au pied de ces paradis blancs que tant d'autres n'atteignent qu'après avoir bataillé pour obtenir des devises et effectué de longs trajets pour atteindre cette Suisse enneigée des vacances d'hiver.

Suivant l'état de la neige, les skieurs peuvent décider d'aller rayer les collines vallonnées du Plateau qui aboutissent aux coteaux de vigne des bords du lac, ou bien hanter, « lattes » aux pieds, les combes du Jura, ou encore élire ces stations des Préalpes et des Alpes où ils trouveront, dessinées sur la neige, les pistes célèbres graduant les difficultés.

Le premier flocon qui tombe paresseusement du ciel gris leur ouvre toutes ces perspectives. Il leur promet la couche de neige fraîche, le paysage noir et blanc en gravure sur bois des forêts de hêtres, les coussinets sur les sapins, tout ce décor des légendes nordiques inséparable des randonnées en ski.

Il leur donne à l'avance cette griserie de l'air qui vous siffle aux oreilles, de la présence d'esprit qui vous fait éviter le roc qui pointe et les sapins du pâturage, cet orgueil de commander à vos muscles, de contrôler vos réflexes, cet apaisement de sentir s'évaporer sur la neige tous les ennuis de la vie quotidienne.

On se préoccupe aussi de l'habillement, car il existe une mode sportive qui met sa note gaie dans le paysage. Si les fuseaux

sont noirs, gris ou bleu marine, si les anoraks sont verdâtres ou beiges, les écharpes et les gants font fantaisie, de même que les couvre-chefs; que ce soit le casque à mèche avec son pompon ou la casquette à visière en bec d'oiseau. Et puis, il y a toute l'élégance des tenues d'après-ski où la camarade de sport reprend sa féminité pour « danser dans vos bras », comme chante Lucienne Boyer...

Quand le temps est venu, les uns cherchent de l'inédit, prospectent non seulement Vaud ou Neuchâtel, mais la Gruyère et le Valais, montent à 1000 ou à 2000 mètres, changent de « crèmerie » à tous les week-ends. Les autres, qui aiment les traditions, retrouvent l'accueil des hôtels montagnards et des pensions à galeries de bois où ils ont leurs habitudes et où ils plantent skis et bâtons à la même place que l'an passé, dans le vestibule. Ils ont leurs amis d'hiver qu'ils retrouvent sur la neige, comme on retrouve, l'été, au bord des lacs, les naïades et les tritons habituels.

Mieux que par l'écriture, le caractère se dévoile dans la manière de concevoir le ski. Il y a les solitaires qui aiment la neige vierge où, à côté des empreintes de pattes de renards ou de choucas, l'on ne verra que les deux traces parallèles qu'ils ont faites, et les sociables qui fréquentent les lieux à la mode, les pistes encombrées, les salles où résonnent la musique et les rires.

Il y a celui qui fait l'effort de grimper pour gagner les hau-