



HORSEPOWER IN THE SNOW

The winter season in St. Moritz is not just about skiing, skating and racing. It is a modern-day extension of the plush and prophan British winter holiday, with creative ways to have fun

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Left: Skiing races on the frozen lake.
Below: Underground Bobsleigh garage

THERE ARE SOME PLACES ON OUR earth that are simply unlike anywhere else. It is enough to mention their names, and almost everyone has an image in their minds. St. Moritz is such a place. The name today stands for mountains, winter sports, luxury, elegance and style. This is not only because Roger Moore, aka James Bond, dashed down the ski slopes in "The Spy Who Loved Me" back in 1977, but also because of Gunter Sachs, who – married to the French actress and sex symbol Brigitte Bardot – made St. Moritz the epicenter for jetsetters in Europe, way back in the 1960s.

St. Moritz, today still a tiny village of slightly more than 5,000 people, lies on 1,856 meters above sea level in the heart of the really spectacular Upper Engadin district of Switzerland. Back in 1864, hotelier Johannes Badrutt told his British summer guests how

beautiful the winter is in the Swiss Alps. Because the Brits couldn't believe it, Badrutt invited them for a winter holiday and promised, that in case they are not happy, he would pay all the expenses. Needless to say that he hadn't to pay for them, because they loved it so much that they stayed until Easter and got back to England completely relaxed – and with a strong tan, as the saying goes. Some people claim that this was the birth of winter holidays as we know it today.

Even with the wonderful weather, the guests from England became bored during long winters, so they imported some strange sports. Amongst these is the Cresta Run, which involves racing a special kind of Skeleton sled down a natural ice track, mostly dressed with nothing more than a pullover over a shirt with a tie, and a very odd safety equipment. Horse racing on the frozen lake of St. Moritz is another one of these creative imports.





Driving event on a prepared field outside of St. Moritz

The latter was the basis of today's White Turf event, founded around 1907. It still takes place every January/February – when the ice is thick enough to carry a race track, all the horses, up to 15,000 visitors and a whole event village with VIP tents, stalls and cars. This year, in 2018, the ice was around 50 cm thick and easily strong enough to prevent everything from breaking through and sinking down to the ground 44m below. The White Turf goes the whole mile in the luxury game – Arabian horses are flown in, together with the sheldais or other rich owners, to compete against each other, and against the low temperatures, which can easily reach 20 degrees Celsius below zero. The White Turf, spread over three weekends, is the biggest series of events during the St. Moritz winter season – even though there are no important Ski World Cup races, or the Winter Olympics here anymore, as they were in 1928 and 1948.

A lot of beautiful people gather on the ice, women in expensive coats showing even more precious jewellery, and everybody has a good time. Although

it is a high-society event, there are plenty of "normal" people present to enjoy the horse races, or the even more spectacular skijoring races, where the "rider" is not sitting on the horseback but is following the horse on his skis, towed by 1 horsepower.

For everybody who doesn't race horses, St. Moritz offers much more relaxing excursions, with horse-drawn carriages both on wheels and skids. Nothing better than a cozy ride through white winter forests, which look right out of a fairy tale book.

There are only about one dozen bobsleigh racetracks all over the world. But owning the world's only natural ice bobs track, St. Moritz has become a favorite training destination for international bobsleigh racing. No wonder that you can find the most modern bobsleigh garage of the world, which holds up to 100 bobs, right here. Everybody who enjoys racing or even racing design must be stunned by the smooth airstream design of the shiny bobs, waiting for the start to race down the ice channel and



Top: Modern "5 star" stable is a wellness paradise for the horses.
Above: Airstream design at its best.
Below: Sometimes your car reminds you that you are driving in harsh conditions.
Right: Race horse with skidded Sulky after a successful race



A LOT OF BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE GATHER ON THE ICE, WOMEN IN EXPENSIVE COATS SHOWING EVEN MORE PRECIOUS JEWELLERY

thunder through the "Horse Shoe Corner" with speeds up to 130 km/h, producing 5 G of force – all this without having any horsepower at all.

The newest trend is to turn St. Moritz into a classic car destination. Offering some of the most beautiful roads of the Alps just around the corner, this sounds like a pretty good idea. The historic "St. Moritz Automobile Week" which originally took place in 1929 and 1930, is about to be revived by a group of automobile enthusiasts who are already organising one of the best classic car hillclimb races of the world – the Bernina Gran Turismo (you can check out their website www.bernina-gran-turismo.com for more). Of course, all this action won't happen during the winter season. But being fans of everything moving, these guys even use classic cars on snowy pass roads, if they have the chance.

The 2002 Aston Martin DB7 Zagato is such an example. Its 6-liter V12 engine produces 435 horsepower, way more than needed on icy roads. But fitted with winter tires the car manages the Bernina Pass road pretty well and is a sheer blast to be maneuvered up the hill, over the top at 2,309 meters above sea level and

I CAN TELL YOU THAT THERE ISN'T MUCH MORE FUN THAN SLIDING A CAR OVER A FLAT FIELD WHICH IS ACTUALLY PROPERLY PREPARED



Left: Bobs waiting for the start. Right, top: Aston Martin DB7 Zagato on top of the Bernina Pass. Right: An old fashioned gasoline station



down again on the southern side to the old stagecoach station of La Rosa, which calls itself "Home of the Bernina Gran Turismo". Today La Rosa is a small "rough luxury" hotel and restaurant for special events during the summer season only. On the way back, while sliding around the corners with this rare car (only 100 ever built), a thought occurs – better not think much about the value of the vehicle, and just bring it back safely.

Driving cars in these conditions is not the easiest thing on earth. Even if you live in a place where it snows, it is not that you automatically are able to manage driving a car on snow or ice. Knowing that some manufacturers are offering driving events on snow or ice, and being a car guy I can tell you that there isn't much more fun than sliding a car over a flat field which is actually properly prepared, like a ski slope.

What else to do in St. Moritz during the winter? Of course, there are around 350 km of ski and snowboard slopes, up to 3030 m above sea level. But there is much more to do and discover, most of which you'll find on the homepage of the tourism authority at www.stmoritz.ch/en 