SKIING: THE GLORIOUS WEEKENDS IN VERMONT

Cindy Hollingsworth at Sugarbush
SOME SPICE FOR THE SUGAR

A glittering Vermont ski spa called Sugarbush has carefully cultivated an aura of jet-set snobbery that makes the insiders who ski there feel way out and the outsiders who have never dared the place feel out in the cold.

While prosperity in most Vermont ski areas is indeed a thing called "profit," in Sugarbush, there is one resort where the name is more than a description of the business that seems to want to share nothing. This is Sugarbush, whose management has persuaded a fair slice of New York's glitterati to come and play on winter weekends. By creating special little winter villages for the haute monde and indulging in some artful seminudity of nearly everyone else, Sugarbush has made itself absolutely irresistible to all the people whose secret dream is to be allowed to pass under the nose.

Everything about Sugarbush has a special style, from the brightly colored gondolas on the Italian-designed quay to the jet-set clientele that swept in when the resort opened in 1958 to the scribbles under the phone just outside the men's room: instead of the usual information about Gloria, one scribule says, "Fight Mental Health." For skiers who live in New York there is even a special way to get to Sugarbush. This is a private bus and, like anything else connected with Sugarbush, the bus, coddled and nicknamed the McPaw or Sugarbus, has little chic overtones that make the occasional Outsider who ride the bus feel like an Outsider, and the Inns, Inners.

The idea of a private bus, chartered from Greyhound every weekend from New Year's Day to the end of good skiing, was started by East Side Architect Alexander (Sandy) Melville, who has since turned the running of it over to such gold-plated stewards as America's Cup Crewman Buddy Bomard and Dolph Cramer, a New York car dealer. It loads up in midtown Manhattan every Friday at 5 p.m., and Melville, who also has his architectural paw in numerous Sugarbush houses, charges $15 ($22 round trip), including what is called the lunch. This is really supper, a sandwich washed down with white wine. It may be preceded by a crusty cocktail if one is smart enough to have brought a bottle—or can get a bottle owner to share. The various good-natured servers by two stewardesses—Cramer's wife and Bomard's chosen mascot officer for the current weekend—who get a free ride or a cut-rate ride in return for chores. The bus driver is a...
very attractive white-hatted man named Johnny McBride, who does TV and fashion modeling when he is not driving the bus.

The last time I rode up, a strict no-flirting-with-driver while bus is in motion rule was reiterated for the benefit of one of the stewardesses (a society type predecessor of the present incumbents). She had become bored with the trip, which took about six hours despite the fact that McBride pulled over at one point to remove the governor on the throttle.

On this same ride, I am happy to say, there was very little group singing. (On an earlier trip there had been much Down by the Old Mill Stream done in not very close harmony.) There was, however, much congregating in the aisle of the bus, drink in hand, and a fair amount of seat-hopping. The freeriding continued, at a rising decibel rate, for the entire 290 miles. I was surprised at so much jolly chattering. A great many of the passengers are repeaters, and I had thought they would give it the old Oyster Bay, "Hi, how are you? God, wonderful to see you," and then lapse into a six-hour coma. Not at all. The single ladies, of whom there are always several, do some vigorous spadework on the journey as insurance against a lonely weekend. And although a few of the males tend toward silence, they are basically party-oriented. The only professional travelers are the stewardesses, who may at any moment swing themselves up into the baggage rack and snooze the miles away.

Until this year the Vermont terminal for the bus was the parking lot of the Sugarbush Inn, which is always just about two degrees warmer than McMurdo Sound. It has since been changed to Elwin Kingsbury's thriving Shell station, which is just a little colder. From here a fair number go on to Stowe or Mad River by taxi or in cars that usually won't start.

My own experience with local transport was fairly typical. I was staying with the late Peter Estin, a postwar-vintage Dartmouth racer, who, despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, swore he always went to bed at a quarter of 10. My car, which had broken down in Sugarbush President Dazmond Gadd's impossible driveway the week before, had been undergoing the cure at the Shell station and was supposed to be waiting in the parking lot. It wasn't. Therefore I tackled Sandy McIvaine, who agreed to give me a lift. By the time I got my luggage to his car every cubic inch was filled with utter strangers who had piled themselves and their impediments into Sandy's car, pleading for a ride to an inn called the Inferno.

I picked up everything (the temperature this late March night was a certifiable 5° below zero) and galloped over to a Volkswagen that had been snowed in and had a dead battery. In return for promising to push it out of the parking lot, I was allowed to load my equipment aboard. My body could follow if the car started. So I pushed the car out of the lot, and it started rolling down the road that winds along the hill to the inn. It rolled and rolled, over a rise, around a corner and out of sight. Fifteen minutes later (temperature still 5° below) it had not returned.

My next move was into Sugarbush Inn, there to buttonhole a friendly native who volunteered to drive me to Estin's. First we took down the hill to find the Volkswagen, which was standing at the side of the road, lights out, engine dead as a smelt. After more trans-loading, we muddled along to Estin's. Twenty minutes later McIvaine, white with rage, stomped through Estin's door. McIvaine understood I had a brown bag. Could he see it, please. I showed it to him. "Oh, damn it!" Seems that of the six passengers he had taken to the Inferno, two had decided they really weren't going there at all and had demanded a ride back to the Sugarbush Inn. Once there they had piled out, big and, apparently, everybody's baggage. McIvaine had pursued them, found nothing, and then by some odd process, concluded that it was I who had made off with his bug. Not having his suitcase, we offered instead a mild sedative (brandy), which he grumpily refused as he headed out once more on his frozen quest, followed by his wife (now former wife), clad in galoshes and despair. Having failed in our charity toward McIvaine, we drank the branded ourselves and shuffled off to bed. Time: 2:20 a.m.

Next morning no one seemed terribly ready, at least in my dim eyes, for the
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day's skiing. Outside it was still cold as the ninth circle; the snow was like white brick, and the wind was blowing a good 20 knots. The others seemed to gather strength as the day passed. Bothered by a fireful of chocolate bars and the prospect of a self-imposed 5 p.m. collapse, I held on through the afternoon. I was just preparing to execute the collapse—into Estin's bed—when I was told to get ready for the party. This turned out to be a birthday celebration at Ski Club Ten for Igor (Ghigli) Cassini, who, until a recent bout of sickness, wrote a regular society column under the pen name of Cholly Knicksgebercker. Ski Club Ten is the heart of Sugarbush, a tastefully rustic building full of marvelous wines and equally marvelous girls, such as Fashion Model Cindy Hollingsworth (see cover). This is where the Sugarbush people go to feel distinct from the herd and to eat lunch. Usually the place closes before supper as a favor to club member Armando Orsini, whose Sugarbush branch restaurant does all its business at night. But on this night Club Ten stayed open for Ghigli.

I went with Estin, who swiftly vanished into the party, while I vanished into obscurity, finally fleeing up against a plump, freckled, 40ish lady who felt about as relaxed in this valet company as I did. This was a costume party, a fact that most of the males ignored but the women had not, a surprising majority of them appearing skirtless with black silk stockings and tight heels that gave you lots of leg. The best of the legs belonged to Skeeter Werner, who had recently retired from international ski racing, and Faith McVicar, who had by now shed both her glasses and her despair.

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The Champagne of Bottle Beer
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At first there was a photographer scurrying around snapping pictures with a battery of flashbulbs which, in this dim cave, left one’s eyes with a Hiroshima halo for some minutes after each firing. The party finally ended when a fat stockbroker, who shall remain nameless, became weary and went outside to rest his eyes. As a resting place he chose the frozen mud beneath his Jaguar, where he lay, feet protruding into the dark road. Harcourt (Bill) Amory went to the rescue of his good old friend the stockbroker, a charity to which the good old friend responded by leaping up and punching Bill in the face. This made everyone feel fairly morose, and we all went home.

The day after the party I staggered up the mountain with Peter Estin and his mountain class. This is a regular crew of Club Ten people who used to take a long lesson with Peter on Saturdays and Sundays. They are a very El Morocco-looking lot—cool, but amusing themselves very jolly, quite good-looking, extremely sophisticated, foreign or quasi-French in accent, and all very good skiers. Their vitality is amazing. The previous night’s do for old Ghigli had been, apparently, just the restful interlude they needed to prepare them for a day on the mountain.

And I understand, on any weekend neither red wine nor black morning takes one second from their skiing.

The group this day included the Count Vittorio Cannoris and his wife Cristina, Armando Orsini, Peter Estin and one or two other camp followers. Also in the group was a stocky, lank-haired young man clad entirely in lemon yellow, who was smoking a cigar rather awkwardly and chattering in French and Italian as we rode up in the gondola. We skied the lift line fairly fast, and the young man kept bubbling in various Mediterranean tongues as he flashed in and out of the moguls on the hard-packed slope.

“Ah,” I said to myself, “a friend of Orsini’s from Italy.”

Halfway down the lift line we made a left onto a hairy trail that winds along

BOOK OF AMERICAN SKIING

This account of a weekend at Sugarbush, the newest resort in the newly rich Vermont ski complex, is adapted from The Book of American Skiing, to be published this fall ($1).

Spice for the Sugar, continued

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through a lot of birch trees. The snow was deep, cut up and a little crusty. The young man still skied fast, but now not so steadily. I stopped at the first turn and looked back just as he spun in a cloud of snow. He arose, smiled, and said something in French and came down another 20 yards. Suddenly he went down again in another cloud of snow. This time he arose silently, lurched another few feet and almost fell again. The next word he spoke was pure Anglo-Saxon, delivered with pure New York infection, and that was the end of the Romance languages for that afternoon.

When the young man was reorganized, we set out after the main body of the expedition. It was just around the next turn, looking for the top of a small aspen whose trunk had suffered some recent bark peeling. Clinging to the top of the aspen, bending it with weight, was a porcupine. Vittorio began tugging at the tree, apparently to get the porky close enough to grab. Cristina slid over toward me. "How do you call that—some annehmul?"

"A porcupine," said I.

"Ah," said she, "un porc-apie."

"Oui," said I, "un porc-apie."

"Oh," said she. "It would make a divine hat."

At this point Vittorio noticed that it was getting better and risked a sprint from the prickly tree. Instead he contented himself with shaking the annehmul down into the snow. Once on the snow, the porcupine set off into the woods with a marvelous, rolling gait. "Ah," said Orsini, "he has a good backside, I think, for merengue. And with that the mountain class swept off through the trees once more.

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FOND OF THINGS ITALIANO?
TRY A SIP OF GALLIANO

Italy, land of masterpieces, is famous for another rare work of art...the liquid gold of Galliano, the legendary liqueur "distilled from the rays of the sun." Try a sip of its bright, sunny flavor. Galliano—the fine Italian liqueur that conquered America.
Within the cluster of silvery-grey structures that comprise Sugarbush Village (left), every skier's wish can be granted: there's a nursery school; a boutique, for necessities and frivolities; the Store, purveying all sorts of groovy gourmet items; three restaurants; and for slope-weary bones, a comfortable bed at the Hotel Sugarbush.

What's he trying to do there? they said. Prefabricate a winter paradise?

They were right. He was L. Damon Gadd, a high-octane real-estate developer. There was Sugarbush Valley, tucked under Lincoln Peak in Vermont's Green Mountains. And, yes, back in 1957 he pulled out of a bar a mini-Switzerland complete with a gondola lift, T-bars, ski boutiques, Christmas-card hotels, gingerbread bins, Austrian ski instructors' curses, responding smiles wrought in Dior scarves—the whole velvet works, almost. Jerry-built plywood and a bunch of Beautiful People, they said. How ridiculous.

It was ridiculous. When one proud owner moved into his house at newly born Sugarbush, the heating system was such that the moment the ice melted from the pipes, the resulting water doused the furnace. Armando Orsini, the gastronome, had only an old barn available for a restaurant site; he hung decadent chandeliers from barbaric beams; late at night the champagne on the tables was replaced by mattresses on which the most proper Bonhomias and the fussiest New Yorkers slept for lack of accommodations elsewhere. Vincent Sardi, a fellow aristocrat in the restaurant business, rented a house nearby that his children dubbed, with good reason, Mud Manor. And the Cabots—but even in an age when nothing is sacred I can't bring myself to report how dining daren't act in the presence of a Cabot.

What is this? they said. St. Moritz in Vermont? Is that crowd serious?

Yes indeed, the crowd was serious, all the way. The lifts multiplied, the trails proliferated (from the babyish Cat's Meow to the vicious Spillville); housing and plumbing caught up with the skiing—and not just for the Cabots. The Skich Hendersons bought a retreat which includes, besides a villa, a mountain called Peak Sketch. The Vincent Sardis acquired a field of 168 acres. The brothers Canini, Oleg and Igor, became winter residents; gossip and haute couture joined parallel turns and powder snow. Ski Club Ten was founded as a kind of festive refuge for the movers and the shakers. It was not only America's answer to the supreme exclusivity of St. Moritz's Corviglia Club, but it actually had some of the same sports for members, like Stavros Niarchos and the Duke of Alba. Before long, movie stars flocked to Sugarbush, followed by models, moguls, millionaires…
Narcissus mountain, they said. Why do you come to Sugarbush—
for the skiing or for makeup lessons?
Good question. As the 1960’s un-
rolled, an odd reply took shape—
for the skiing. Sugarbush became
breathtakingly down-to-earth. The
Edward Tintman of the skyscraper-
building family moved into a sum-
puous chalet, but they have sprawled
dinner parties instead of seated ones
because somehow everyone always
lies around on the floor. A flam-
boyant host has been known to pre-
side over his Sunday brunches in
crimson underwear. The Tintmans
transport their house guests to the
slopes in the most horrendous wreck
of a jeep I ever had the pleasure to
nearly fall out of. Because of all
such marvelous private entertain-
ing, Club Ten is no longer so ma-
jectically In. Sure, the Club’s annual
ski race remains important together
with the celebration staged after-
ward for possible survivors.
But the paramount public event
of the season is the Waiters’ Indoor
Slalom at Osmar’s. Toad Sugarbush
attends, in stunning après-ski. This
isn’t the only instance of the aplomb
with which the place can strike the
proletarian note. Guess how your
typical New York-based Sugar-
busher has arranged to reach his
haven on weekends? By First Class
jet as it behoves a Beautiful Per-
son? By Bentley? At least by Pull-
man cart? No sir. By bus—b-u-s.
Every Friday afternoon you can see
him and his band troop into the
so-called Chalet Bus at Park Avenue
and 52nd Street, and it’s a miracle
he isn’t paying with subway tokens.
Sugarbush has had it, they say.
You don’t see any real glamour any
more.
True, in a way, Sugarbush gla-
mour no longer has the high visi-
tibility of old. It’s become private and
informal. Look closely, and it’s still
very much there. Red underwear or
not, the Sunday brunches fortify you
with caviar and champagne for
slaloms down the Snowball run.
The Chalet Bus has a bar that
breaks out vintage wines in the Lin-
colin Tunnel. If you miss this par-
ticular bus, you always hitch a ride
in somebody’s Cessna to Burling-
ton. Failing that, any Volkswagen
or Rolls will get you to the Blue
Tooth Bar at midnight, in time to
see something definitively Sugar-
bushy: maybe in Boston a Cabot
talks only with God, here he warms
with the farmer folk.

The hell with the place, they say.
But if we write now, can we still get
a room Christmas week? THE END