



Sweet Success

From 1961 through 1967, the annual Bee Hive giant slalom competition attracted the world's top professional racers to Canada.

BY CAROLINE FORCIER HOLLOWAY

On March 7, 2014, the Georgian Peaks ski area in Ontario hosted its annual Super GP Classic, a team giant slalom race on the intermediate Minute Mile trail. Located near the town of Collingwood and overlooking Lake Huron's Georgian Bay, this private alpine club offers 24 trails with a vertical rise of 820 feet, the highest in the province.

Though the GP Classic is an amateur event, open only to club members, it recalls a little-known but interesting chapter in racing history. On February 26, 1961, Georgian Peaks hosted the inaugural Bee Hive giant slalom. It was the first professional GS race in Canada and a smashing success, attracting elite racers like Stein Eriksen, Othmar Schneider, Ernie McCulloch and An-

derl Molterer. For the next six years, top pro racers from Europe and North America convened in Canada to race on the Bee Hive circuit.

The event was named after Bee Hive Golden Corn Syrup, an energy food manufactured by the St. Lawrence Starch Company of Port Credit, Ontario, the event sponsor. A *Montreal Gazette* article published in February 1962, following the second annual Bee Hive, reported that "to those who watched this spectacular and successful event, it was evident that professional ski racing had arrived to stay." It also established Georgian Peaks as a training ground for Olympic-caliber Canadian alpine racers, including Judy Crawford (who placed fourth in women's slalom at the 1972 Winter Games in Sapporo), Todd Brooker (who raced on the World Cup from 1981 to 1987

and is now a TV ski-racing commentator) and Brian Stemmler (who competed in four Olympics, from 1988 through 1998).

The driving force behind the first Bee Hive was Ian Rogers, a Toronto lawyer who founded Georgian Peaks in 1960. A key partner was the late Dan Gibson, a portrait photographer, budding filmmaker and avid skier, who was keen on promoting skiing in Collingwood and at Georgian Peaks. Sponsorship was easily secured through Gibson's skiing friend Lorne Gray, of the St. Lawrence Starch Company. Through its signature Bee Hive corn syrup, the company was already sponsoring national and local sports events, including the National Hockey League. (At the time, corn syrup was a regular staple on breakfast tables, to pour on pancakes or add



< Left to right: A promotional poster for the first Bee Hive professional GS race in 1961; more than 9,000 spectators lined the course to watch the inaugural race; skiers ride the double chair at Georgian Peaks in Ontario on the day of the event; Austrian racer Toni Spieß chugs a can of Bee Hive Golden Syrup, provided by the event's sponsor.

PHOTO CREDIT: All frame enlargements courtesy Library and Archives Canada, Dan Gibson Fonds, Bee Hive Films No. 1, 4 and 7.

to your coffee.) The company's role in the annual GS event included covering the competitors' expenses, putting up the prize money, and advertising and promoting the race. And every year, a comely "Miss Bee Hive" was on hand to award medals and give each competitor a free can of corn syrup, which the racers drank (as seen in the films). Gibson documented the races and distributed his films for free, to promote the event and the sport of alpine racing—and skiing—across Canada (see "To Learn More").

**THE FIRST BEE HIVE:
STEIN ERIKSEN WINS THE PRIZE**

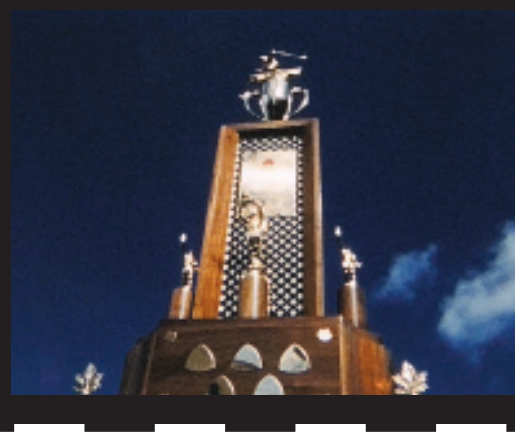
The 1961 inaugural Bee Hive attracted some of the biggest names in ski racing. Stein Eriksen, the Norwegian superstar who had won a gold medal in GS and silver in slalom at the 1952 Winter Games, took first place. Anderl Molterer of Austria, also known as the "Blitz from Kitz," took second. Fellow Austrian racers Christian Pravda and Othmar Schneider came in third and fourth, respectively. According to Red McConville, the former president of the Canadian Ski Association who raced in the 1964 Bee Hive, Toni Sailer, the world champion racer from Austria, was present for the first Bee Hive, but didn't compete due to his new career as an actor. In Gibson's film, he is seen congratulating the Bee Hive winners. In total, 23 competitors raced in the inaugural Bee Hive, including Canadian champion

Ernie McCulloch of Mont Tremblant, Québec.

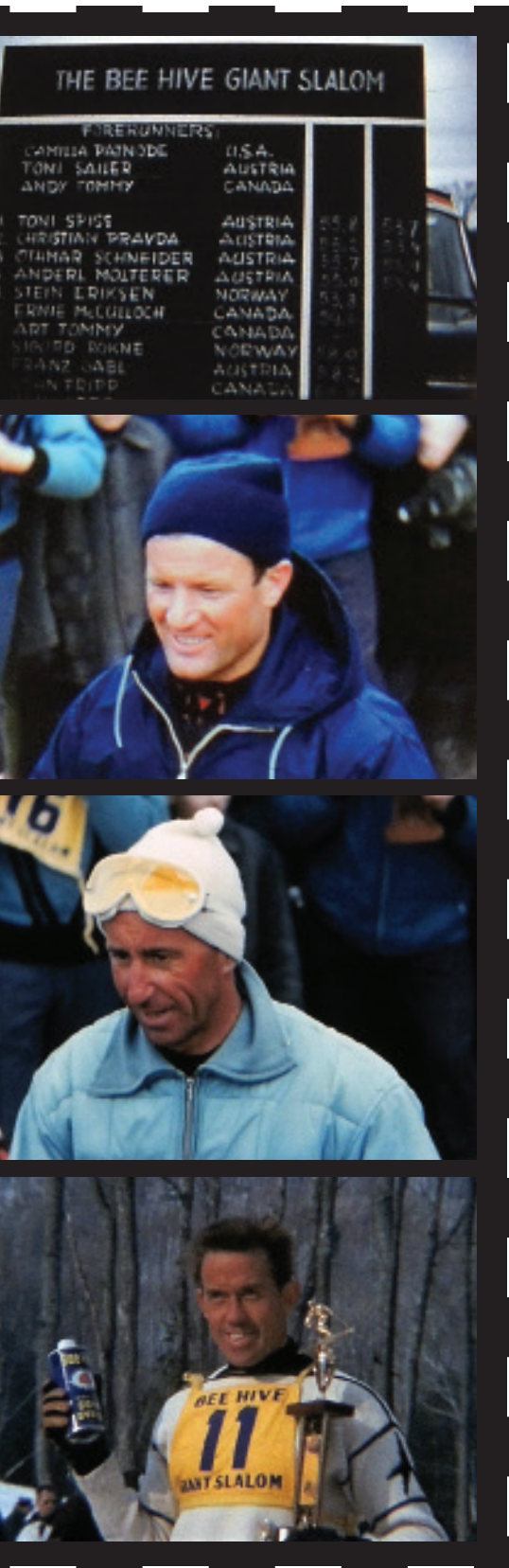
A newspaper headline of the day reads: "The real heroes of the race, however, didn't wear skis." This is a nod to the race organizers and volunteers, who ensured that the race would happen despite poor conditions that almost caused its cancellation. For a week before the race, unusually mild temperatures, mixed with rain and a lack of snow, made for almost non-existent skiing at Georgian Peaks. Officials refused to give in, spending upwards of \$3,000 hauling snow by the truckload in the days before the race. On the night before the event, chemical snow cement was used to harden the snow around the slalom gates, and snow was funnelled onto the course through coal chutes. Skiers, local workers, high school students and residents of Collingwood, Thornbury and Clarksburg pitched in to help pack and shovel snow.

The racers were discouraged by the condition of the trail, but on race day, the overnight rain had turned into freezing sleet and the course was lightning fast. By noon, the sun had melted some of the ice and turned the surrounding dirt into mud, making it difficult for skiers and spectators to maneuver.

First-person recollections recount the challenges faced by the first Bee Hive race organizers. In particular, Helen Gibson of Toronto, Dan Gibson's widow, recalls: "The day before the race there was a disas-



Top to bottom: Stein Eriksen won the first Bee Hive in 1961. After racing the GS course wearing bib 5, he was met at the finish by Miss Bee Hive and world champion racer Toni Sailer (left), who foreran the course but didn't compete.



Top to bottom: The first Bee Hive GS attracted some of the world's top ski racers, including Othmar Schneider (blue hat and jacket) and Christian Pravda (white hat and goggles); Ernst Hinterseer (with trophy and corn syrup) won the fourth Bee Hive in 1964.

trous thaw to bare grass. Snow was trucked in, and many helpers shoveled it onto the mountain to make a single track down the course, which froze overnight so the race could be held. (What) a miracle!" She was one of more than 9,000 enthusiastic spectators who lined the course to watch the event.

Many others recall vivid memories of the first Bee Hive: the "February Thaw" and the difficult course conditions, the excitement of the race, billeting the racers, and the fine reception at the end of the day at a private home in Collingwood, where a select few had the rare opportunity to meet and mingle with the world's skiing greats, including Eriksen, the star of the day.

SIX MORE YEARS ON THE CIRCUIT

The Second Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom was held at Mont Gabriel, in Québec's Laurentian Mountains, on February 25, 1962. With the sponsor offering a larger total cash purse of \$5,000, the event attracted even more pros. By changing the location, organizers hoped to promote professional ski racing across Canada and allow greater exposure for the sponsor. The race was held on O'Connell's Slip (Scott's Slip), a 4,000-foot-long trail that was reconstructed to make it steeper and tougher, and the resort used the event to promote its state-of-the-art grooming and snowmaking ability. Heli Schaller of Austria was the 1962 champion.

The Third Bee Hive challenge was held at Devil's Glen, near

Collingwood, on February 10, 1963. Twenty-five pros raced on a course set by Red McConville, the Devil's Glen co-founder. The champion that year was Ernst Hinterseer of Austria, who had won slalom gold and GS bronze at the 1960 Olympics. Hinterseer returned to Devil's Glen in 1964 to win the fourth Bee Hive. This race included three of the world's leading skiers: Egon Zimmermann, François Bonlieu and Pepi Stiegler, who won GS bronze and slalom gold that year at the Innsbruck Olympics. Other veteran professionals competing at Devil's Glen included Anderl Molterer, Adrien Duvillard, Pepi Gramshammer, Christian Pravda and Heli Schaller.

The following year, the Bee Hive headed west for the fifth annual race held on March 13, 1965 at Mount Whitehorn in Lake Louise, Alberta. Twenty skiers competed for the trophy including five talented Canadians (Jean Carpentier, Bob Gilmour, Jim McConkey, Al Menzies and Lorne O'Connor). They competed against other world-class racers, including Mike Wiegele, Toni Spiess, Christian Pravda, Pepi Gramshammer, Marvin Moriarty and that year's Bee Hive champion, Adrien Duvillard from France.

The Sixth Bee Hive was set in Eastern Canada, at Lac-Beauport, Québec, on February 13, 1966, with Ernst Hinterseer capturing first place for the third time. He completed the two-run race with a total time of 2:34.366, and Gramshammer placed second with a time of 2:34.735. The

TO LEARN MORE

Many of the Bee Hive promotional materials, such as posters, flyers, advertisements, programs, and newspaper and magazine articles, are stored in the Canadian Ski Museum collection; most of the materials can be viewed online at www.skimuseum.ca. Another resource is the St. Lawrence Starch Company collection at the Archives of Ontario in Toronto (www.archives.gov.on.ca). These records document the development of Bee Hive racing and report historical facts about the races and the racers, including photographs and trophies. Dan Gibson's films provide a fascinating record of the Bee Hive races. Three of the seven films have survived (documenting the first, fourth and seventh years of the race series) and are preserved at a third resource, the Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa. To order copies or learn more, consult the Website: www.collectionscanada.gc.ca.

race comprised 42 gates and covered 2,200 feet over a vertical drop of 700 feet. Altogether, the race included 23 racers with 10 racers from Austria, 10 from Canada, two racers from France and one from the United States (Moriarty).

According to *Canadian Sport Monthly*, much attention was placed on the timing mechanism used to clock the Sixth Bee Hive race: a new Heuer timer from Switzerland. “The device is so revolutionary that on the day before the race our officials were still trying to figure it out,” said sponsor Lorne Gray. It offered reliability and accuracy down to one-thousandth of a second.

The seventh and final Bee Hive was moved to Mont Tremblant, Québec, and held on March 12, 1967. Hias Leitner from Austria, silver medalist in the 1960 Winter Olympics, took first place. The film by

Dan Gibson offers a record of the racers in action—some in slow motion to showcase their technique and ability—including Herman Goellner, Toni Spiess, Egon Zimmermann, Anderl Molterer and others.

No one can say for certain why the Bee Hive series ended after a successful seven-year run. Some believe that competitors were asking for more than the sponsor could provide in an overall purse of \$5,000, with \$2,000 going to the race champion each year. Others say the Bee Hive had a good run and simply died a natural death. Regardless of the speculations, most agree that after Lorne Gray’s untimely death in 1969, the momentum was impossible to regain. ❄️

Caroline Forcier Holloway is an archivist, a former CSIA instructor and an avid skier. She lives in Ottawa, Ontario.

HISTORY RECORDS THAT...

The February 26, 1961 competition at Georgian Peaks, Ontario was the first pro race in Canada involving Friedl Pfeifer’s newly formed International Professional Ski Racing Association (IPSRA). One month earlier, in January 1961, Pfeifer and his Aspen sidekick, Fred Iselin, had run a race-for-money giant slalom on Buttermilk at Aspen. The winner was Anderl Molterer, the Blitz from Kitz, who took home \$1,450, arguably the first major cash prize for ski racing since 19th-century gold miners on long boards raced for money in California.

Following the Buttermilk race, IPSRA was formed as a nonprofit corporation, according to an account in the October 1961 issue of *Skiing Magazine*. One of the new organization’s first acts was to accept an invitation from Canada for its members to compete in the previously planned Bee Hive race. Because of a winter drought, snow had to be shoveled onto the course on the steep escarpment that is Georgian Peaks. More than 9,000 eager spectators showed up. IPSRA racers took the first six places.

“In quick succession that winter,” reported *Skiing*, “IPSRA staged five

more races—at Aspen; Boyne Mountain, Michigan; Sugar Bowl, California; Loveland Basin, Colorado; and Stevens Pass, Washington. By season’s end in April, Pfeifer’s pro group had drawn more than 25,000 spectators, and paid out \$15,500 in prizes.” (Equal to \$118,000 today, adjusted for inflation.)

The top money winner in pro racing’s first season was Molterer, with \$5,000. Other committed IPSRA racers were Stein Eriksen of Aspen Highlands and Boyne; Christian Pravda and Pepi Gramshammer of Sun Valley; Toni Spiess of Aspen; and Othmar Schneider of Stowe.

For IPSRA’s second season in 1962, Pfeifer stipulated that racers would have to be 24 years of age or older. He wanted to avoid attracting younger racers, as a concession to the FIS (International Ski Federation), which opposed money competitions of any kind.

Pfeifer, his eyes twinkling, sardonically told *Skiing* of his worry that IPSRA might have difficulty recruiting more good skiers. “Some top Europeans,” he said, “are making so much money as amateurs they can’t afford to turn pro!” —*John Fry*

BEE HIVE CHRONOLOGY

First Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

February 26, 1961

Georgian Peaks, Ontario

First place: Stein Eriksen (Norway)

Top prize: \$2,000

Second Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

February 25, 1962

Mont Gabriel Lodge, Québec

First place: Heli Schaller (Austria)

Top prize: \$2,000

Third Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

February 10, 1963

Devil’s Glen, Ontario

First place: Ernst Hinterseer (Austria)

Top prize: \$2,000

Fourth Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

February 23, 1964

Devil’s Glen, Ontario

First place: Ernst Hinterseer (Austria)

Top prize: \$2,000

Fifth Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

March 13, 1965

Mount Whitehorn, Lake Louise, Alberta

First place: Adrien Duvillard (France)

Top prize: \$2,000

Sixth Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

February 13, 1966

Lac Beauport, Québec

First place: Ernst Hinterseer (Austria)

Top prize: \$2,000

Seventh Annual Professional Invitation Bee Hive Giant Slalom

March 12, 1967

Mont Tremblant, Québec

First place: Hias Leitner (Austria)

Top prize: \$2000