



ENGADIN SKIMARATHON

The story of the biggest
Cross-country skiing event in
Switzerland

A Visionary Idea Prevails

The emerging cross-country boom in the late sixties helped a pioneering idea break through. A visionary concept has transformed into a sporting and touristic success story over half a century. Only once in its history could the „Engadiner“ not be carried out.

The idea of carrying out a major national ski race in the Engadin was discussed on several occasions in the second half of the sixties, after it had already been foreseen that the still young sport of cross-country skiing had a promising future. Initiator and thus "spiritual father" of the Engadin Skimarathon was the St. Moritz sports dealer and former ski racer Albert Scheuing. In the proceedings from the first meeting in November 1968, it can be read that 'anyone can start the race' and that 'the track should be run in a maximum of six hours'.

From the idea to the first implementation, however, was a long way; there were many obstacles yet to overcome. For the first edition Albert Scheuing ordered 250 start numbers. It soon became apparent that these would not be enough, whereupon Scheuing decided to increase his order to 999 start numbers. He had not badly estimated, and the number of participants was ultimately 945. The first winners were Karl Wagenführ from Klosters (2:19.38) and Rita Czech from Lucerne (2:54.26).

Immediately after the successful first Engadin Skimarathon, it was agreed that this event should become a tradition and that a steady increase in participants was to be expected in the coming years. But even the greatest optimist would hardly have expected in 1969 that already at the 10th anniversary in 1978 more than 10,000 participants would reach the finish. With around 13,000 participants today, the "Engadiner" has become Switzerland's largest cross-country event and the second largest in the world.

Today, state-of-the-art trail groomers are used to give perfect tracks to skiers, but this was quite different in the early history of the Engadin Ski Marathon. There was but a single man at that

time, who devoted himself totally to the track preparation: Dölf Cadonau. At his disposal was his ski-doo, or his "Töffli" (little motorcycle), as he described it from his memory. And he was by no means employed to prepare the tracks. He earned his wages as a post office worker. After quitting time at 5pm and some time for dinner, his free time activity followed; in the dark he drove the groomer alone across the frozen lakes towards Maloja and back. Often, he was not back until after midnight - but unfortunately as a post office worker he could never sleep in...

Six kilos of dynamite as a starting shot

In the beginning, of course, only classical style was used; a different style wasn't yet known. In 1983, 100 tracks were available at the start in Maloja. The starting signal was the explosion of six kilograms of dynamite. Only one person, who had a cantonal blasting card, was allowed to fire this "Böller" (starting) shot. In 1985, the 'Siitonenstep' or freestyle began to appear. In 1987 it led to the first separate tracks being prepared. Today mainly freestyle is used; only six percent of the participants race using in the classical technique.

The 23rd Engadin Skimarathon in 1991 went down in history as a "black day" for skiers and organizers; as a result of a heat wave, the race had to be canceled 24 hours before the start. Thirteen people have taken part in all 48 "Engadiners" and another 100 were present at least 40 times. They are referred to as Giubiliers (honored guests) and wear a golden laurel wreath on their start numbers.

The record for the most wins still belongs to Rosmarie Kurz. In the years 1972 to 1977 she won the Engadin Skimarathon six times in a row. Under the men Albert "Bertli" Giger is record holder: he has won the Engadin Skimarathon a total of five times. The "Engadiner" remained his passion even after his competitive career: until 2016, Bertli served as a race director and member of the Executive Board.

The idea of Albert Scheuing was, and is, ingenious; much has remained the same at the Engadin Skimarathon since 1969. Nevertheless, the Engadin Skimarathon has continued to develop steadily: the most obvious change was the relocation of the finish from Zuoz to S-chanf in 1998. The military facility there can be used to provide a comprehensive infrastructure that meets the requirements of a finish area. With the relocation of the finish, the Rhaetian Railway created the now legendary "S-chanf Marathon" stop directly in front of the entrance to the military facility. It makes the return transport of the participants and spectators more efficient and much more comfortable. And since the train ticket for the Rhaetian Railway has been included in the entry fee since 2000, many participants have made use of the opportunity to travel to the Engadin by public transport.