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THE SLEEK SWISS RESORT OF ST MORITZ, SET IN THE BREATHTAKING ENGADINE MOUNTAIN'S IS FAMED FOR ITS 350 KILOMETRES OF SNOW COVERED SKI AREA AS WELL AS THE THRILL SEEKING CRESTA RUN. COMBINED WITH ITS FUR AND DIAMOND LINED STREETS, ST MORITZ PROVIDES A GLAMOROUS AND IDEAL VENUE FOR ANY SHOPAHOLIC OR ALPINE ADRENALINE JUNKIE.

THE LAKE ALSO PLAYS HOST TO THE WHITE TURF, A SPARKLING SPECTACLE OF RACING ENTERTAINMENT ON PACKED POWDER WHICH ATTRACTS ABOUT 30,000 SPECTATORS



During the winter freeze the lake which St Moritz is set upon provides a further winter playground where the most quirky cricketing event on the calendar takes place; the Cricket-on-Ice tournament. The lake also plays host to The White Turf, a sparkling spectacle of racing entertainment on packed powder, which attracts about 30,000 spectators on the first three Sundays of February to a program of flat and trotting races as well as Skikjoring, where skiers are pulled by riderless thoroughbreds.

The unique Cricket on Ice tournament evolved twenty years ago from a few British cricket enthusiasts who challenged the pupils from Lyceum Alpinum Zuoz boarding school and has now become a firmly established event on the St Moritz winter sporting calendar. Here instead of whites the players wear warm track suits, the ball is made of hard rubber and the pitch of artificial grass.

Fielding on a combination of snow and ice was a first experience for the Cheltenham Cavaliers Cricketers, who were invited to play in the unique tournament and certainly for team mate and former England cricketer Mike Smith who once opened the bowling for England.

Unfortunately, cool runnings were not to be for the Cheltenham Cavaliers. Playing in a blizzard they snatched victory on the first day of the tournament only to lose by a whisker on the second to the Old Chomeleians XI, with former eight times champion jump jockey Peter Scudamore, more familiar with success on the racecourse, failing to score two off the last ball. However, it was no coincidence that The YesNoWaitSorries Racing Syndicate, which members of the Cheltenham Cavaliers also belong, arrived at the picture postcard resort with a two-pronged sporting plan of attack on the ice.

Racehorses **Daring Affair** and **Hart of Gold** both owned by the YesNoWaitSorries and trained by south Wales based Ron Harris had been campaigning on the all weather, where the horses develop a resilience to the sand kick back, which in turn help prepare them for the similar snow ball blizzard effect on the White Turf. The equine pair rugged in extra blankets and bandages arrived to ritzy St Moritz in preparation for their first experience racing on packed powder layered over three feet thick ice on the first Sunday in February. Their traditional racing plates were removed and replaced with the equine version of snow shoes and their acclimatisation began to their new and much cooler surroundings.

As the cricket on ice tournament ended on the Saturday, the first races of the White Turf began on the Sunday, with an abundance of designer label sunglasses shading the brilliant rays, on one of the 322 days of sunshine that the resort



receives on average each year. St Moritz is the only place name anywhere to have trademark protection, and the sun motif the town still uses on its logo was registered in 1937.

Six races made up the days equine orientated events including three gallops races and two trotting, where horses pull sleighs, as well as the first leg of the Credit Suisse Skikjoring Trophy. Hart of Gold the first runner for the YesNoWaitSorries was watched by his supporters and his handler Ron Harris as the bay gelding paraded and the jockeys arrived into the paddock. However, they were barely recognisable, their facial features hidden by plastic motocross-style face masks and wearing paper inside their riding breeches to protect them against the ice and snow kicked up during the race.

As the field in the first race set off, a 1100 metre cavalry charge, the vision of the horses

slipping on the ice sprung to mind, but through the mini snowstorm caused by ten sets of galloping hooves, it seemed apparent that the horses were coping, with a wedged toe grab on the front of the horse's shoe providing extra grip on the slick conditions. Many jockeys riding at nearly 6,000 feet above sea level for the first time admit they are not sure whether to trust their mount to stay upright on the bends, but slip ups during the gallop or trot races don't appear to occur. Hart of Gold was urged on the final straight by British jockey Francis Norton and held his place when running on for a close sixth with the victory awarded to a German trained horse **Coseadrom**.

Aluminium race sleds rather than the traditional carriage with wheels are pulled by the horses in the trotting races along with twelve others. As well as the enthralled crowd the trots is overlooked by the town of St

Moritz set on the side of the mountain, littered with cosy and lavish hotels, restaurants, bars and nightclubs where cracking open the piggy bank is required in most establishments for a mere round of cocktails.

Even with the majority of crowd staying snug dressed in layers of fur; the hair on the back of spectator's necks were raised during the third race in the Skikjoring event. A nasty pile up occurred on the fourth bend due to a skier falling, luckily resulting with both horses and skiers emerging unscathed and local based Silvio Staub and his horse Odin on the winner's podium. Skikjoring is a world exclusive event to the White Turf and was first established just over 100 years ago in 1906.

Two bold, or questionably sane men challenged each other to race from St Moritz to Champfer and back, pulled on skies behind riderless horses and the sport was born, a year



Jockey Francis Norton receives his riding instructions from Ron Harris (right) as a member of the YesNoWaitSorries listens on.



Left//Hart of Gold parades in the snow before heading to post.

Far Left//Daring Affair "struts" into the parade ring, before running a very encouraging first race on the White Turf



later the race was staged on the frozen lake where the White Turf event has since been held. The skier and horse with the most points accumulated over the three meetings is crowned King of the Engadine, with the grand finale in skijoring taking place on the last meeting of the festival on Sunday 17 February.

Daring Affair, a filly compact in appearance, on her toes due to the chilly conditions and electric atmosphere strutted into the parade ring bearing the second flag of hope for the YesNoWaitSorries and then swiftly proceeded to post. Although a first racing on snow, Daring Affair had been conditioned for the challenge by a winter campaign on the all weather combined with some encouraging results. The field left the stalls at no shy pace and passed the stands nostrils flared, with the jockeys resembling an army of Storm Troopers on horseback, similar to a scene from Star Wars, with their face protectors visible through the screen of snow kicked up by the ten runners. A former German Listed winner Rushing Dancer was a convincing winner but Daring Affair coped impressively with the arctic conditions and raced prominently throughout finishing an encouraging fourth place with just a length separating her and the second and third horses home.

Trainer Ron Harris commented "This was a very encouraging run from Daring Affair considering she was carrying more weight than the winner, who has exceptional form in Germany. We were a bit concerned about her handling the conditions, but she demonstrated today that snow was not a problem. We will aim to run her again on the final Sunday of the White Turf, when she should have acclimatised fully to the conditions and improved from the experience".

If the spirits of the YesNoWaitSorries were slightly dampened from the previous day's narrow cricketing defeat and Daring Affair not quite galloping into the winner's enclosure, The White Turf renowned "Champagne Climate" certainly helped raise them during "après" race.

The White Turf racing festival transforms the frozen lake into a stylish tented city, covering 130,000 square metres and providing nothing but the finest in hospitality and entertainment. Inside the Sponsors Village Tent, restricted to invite only, is where a golden Pegasus can be seen suspended from the ceiling watching over the rich and beautiful as they break from the carnival outside to enjoy a discerning lunch or relax in the luxurious sofa lounge to the popping of champagne corks.

The crowd of 11,000 dripping in fur garments, precious rocks and a posh pooch as the ultimate alpine fashion accessory, sip on chilled champagne, guzzle oysters and local delicacies prepared by the resort's hotels. Cool vibes echo through each corner of the tented city ranging from live Latino beats, a grand piano and an orchestra. While the crowd, keen to be seen or focussing on what everyone else is wearing, soak up the rays and atmosphere on the sun bathed frozen lake. Rock legends and heroes from the world of sport are renowned to visit the dazzling racing spectacle, but with so many pairs of Gucci, Chanel or Prada shades and drenched in mammoth furs it becomes impossible to tell who was behind or under them.

Whether it's sipping on chilled bubbles, spotting who's with who, or simply watching the racing, combined with the spectacular backdrop of the snow covered mountains and crystal clear sky the White Turf should be experienced at least once by any social butterfly, fashion fan or horseracing enthusiast.

Further Information:

www.whiteturf.ch

www.cricket-on-ice.com

www.ronharrisracing.co.uk