

# THUNDERBIRD RACE TEAM

Newsletter: April 9, 2017



## T-Bird Racers Attend the NASTAR National Championships on March 23-26:



Jamie, Bob, Mike, Art & Dick

The MACC race season came to an end in early March for the T-Bird Racers. However, this was not the end of ski racing for the 2017 ski season. Seven T-Bird racers made the trek to Steamboat Springs, Colorado on March 21<sup>st</sup> to race in the NASTAR National Championships, held from March 23<sup>rd</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup>. Racing consisted of two days of GS (giant slalom) and another day of slalom racing for those that wanted more racing.

For those of you that are not familiar with the NASTAR program, it stands for National Standard Race and is run at most ski resorts around the country. The program was established in the 1970s and is now run by the US Ski Team. Most ski areas have a relatively easy GS course set up where anyone can race (for a small fee) and compare their time against the National Pacesetter, currently Ted Ligety. His race time in the early season trials established the zero handicap and other racers (including former US Ski Team members A. J. Kitt, Marco Sullivan, and Casey Puckett) travel around the country racing against the pacesetters for all other participating ski areas to establish their handicaps. So, when you race NASTAR at your local ski area, the local pacesetter's time and handicap establishes the base (zero) handicap and your time versus this establishes your handicap. The handicap, along with your sex and age, determines whether you are a Platinum (fastest), Gold, Silver, Bronze, or other (slower, no medal) racer. It is a fun program and allows you to compare your ability level against any racer around the country.

The National Championship racing is done against racers of the same sex, age (in five year groupings), and ability levels (based upon your local area performance). This makes for very spirited competition.

The negative in this year's racing was the temperatures at Steamboat. Good racing depends on firm snow conditions on the race course. This was difficult to accomplish as the courses were located on the lower level of the Steamboat Resort and the daytime highs at the base ranged from the high 40s to the low 60s, with night-time lows only occasionally dropping below freezing. In spite of these temperatures, the Steamboat course crew salted (to raise the freeze point) the courses to firm them up, with some degree of success, especially for the morning racers. Overcast skies on some days also helped to keep the snow

in better race shape. In spite of these hurdles, racing went on for the T-Birds (and the other one thousand plus racers at the nationals).

After this lead up, you're probably wonder who from the Race Team participated and how they performed. Here is the information that you've been waiting for:

<u>T-Bird Racer</u>	<u>Age Group</u>	<u>GS Class</u>	<u>Giant Slalom Results</u>	<u>Slalom Results</u>
Jamie Pawelek	Male, 65-69 years old	Bronze	2 <sup>nd</sup> (Silver Medal)	
Bob Rossi	Male, 60-64 years old	Silver	9 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>
Dick Synowiec	Male, 70-74 years old	Silver	6 <sup>th</sup>	
Tim Laula	Male, 60-64 years old	Gold	3 <sup>rd</sup> (Bronze Medal)	
Art Ellwanger	Male, 70-74 years old	Gold	6 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>
Mike Jablonski	Male, 70-74 years old	Gold	4 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>

The NASTAR National Championship was a very well organized and fun event. Besides the three days of racing, there were activities every day, including a chili lunch, the opening party with bump (upgrade) awards, a large prize raffle, the big awards presentation at the GS racing conclusion, the awards reception with lots of food at the top of the gondola lodge, a couple of concerts, and the awards presentation at the slalom racing conclusion. There were also many booths in Gondola Square where the event sponsors gave away freebees every day.

The highlight of the freebees was the Swix booth where experts sharpened and waxed skis for competitors. I thought that my skis were sharp until I skied on boards sharpened by the Swix tuning expert using the Swix EVO Pro Edger electric diamond edge sharpener. WOW is all I can say. The tool is pricy, but I am considering buying one to tune my large quiver of skis.

It was also fun to have AJ Kitt and Marco Sullivan making their pacesetting runs directly in front of me. It is great to see racers at that level perform their magic going through the courses. Of course, this is a double-edged sword, as their performance and handicaps were not adversely affected by the soft snow and ruts in the race courses, which gave almost all of the racers handicaps much higher than we normally get. In the second run of Sunday's slalom, the ruts from the first run deteriorated into pits that could swallow a small racer. I am large enough to not get swallowed, but the conditions do play with your mind and affect your approach to the course, usually NOT making you faster. Oh well, that's ski racing.

#### Mike's Musings:

It was an interesting week of skiing and racing at Steamboat. Locals told us that it was a low snow season and the warm temperatures came about a month early, contributing to the "interesting" conditions. At the end of our first day of skiing and because of the soft, heavy snow at the lower elevations, I, for the first time in 51 years of skiing, opted to ride the gondola down to the bottom of the hill. I felt that with three days of racing and five days of skiing remaining, I did not want to injure myself on this trip. This drew the ire of some of the other members of our group, especially the "baby" of our group, 60-year-old **Brian Dusina**, who joined our group at the last minute, but did not qualify to race in the championship. He felt that I should relinquish the "Iron Mike" status because of this. Naturally, other members of the condo chorus chimed in support of this erroneous conclusion. Of course, this is the same group that later in the week took long breaks on the hill, quit skiing early, complained of being tired and sore, had headaches, needed long soaks in the hot tub, went to bed early, and on and on. Wusses all! I think that my title is still appropriate.

**Art Ellwanger** had the misfortune of falling in the second run of the first day of racing and pulled/tore a muscle in his leg. Unfortunately, this had a very negative effect on his ability to ski, much less race, and his performance, even with strong pain meds, was significantly affected for the rest of the trip. Fortunately, it did not affect his ability to eat, drink, and party, which as the senior member of our group, he had to lead by example.

**Jamie Pawelek** decided to do a repeat performance of his skiing at Whistler a few years ago where he decided to enter a mogul field at high speed (probably 40 mph). That was not pretty, but he survived. Here at Steamboat he tried the same process at only a slightly slower speed. This time he also went down hard, bruising his body and attempting to smash his helmet into the snow, much to the consternation of his head. He had a few days of headaches, but no apparent long term damage (at least that we could tell).

**Dick Synowiec** made it through most of the week basically unscathed. We were making the final run to the bottom of the hill on our last day of skiing. The air was warm, the snow was heavy and soft, and we were going down to the bottom at slow speeds and with a few rest stops (as Dick is getting old). At about 95% of the way down, Dick lost control for just a moment and sped up into a pile of heavy snow, spun around and fell hard, injuring his almost healed shoulder and twisting his knee. He was able to make it the rest of the way down in one piece, but was hurting thereafter. Fortunately, it appears to be minor damage, as he is feeling better already.

**Bob Rossi** did not have any of the on-hill mishaps that others had, but he had some stomach bug that, while causing him some discomfort, did not affect his food intake. Bob is a man of slight build, but can put away more food than any of the rest of us. His breakfasts were double the intake of mine and some of his dinners were epic. At the Mexican restaurant, the first dinner was too small to satiate his hunger, so he ordered another dinner. As he said himself, "How could one person spend \$30 on

dinner at a Mexican restaurant?" But he did. Of course, we all would like his ability to eat like he does and NOT gain weight (especially ending up in the wrong places).

**Brian Dusina** was the beer connoisseur of our group and at every opportunity tried some of the many types of craft beers available (and there were a lot of opportunities in this town). Two of his goals for the week, since he was not racing, was to ski 20,000 feet of vertical in a day and to record a 50 mph top speed on the newly acquired Ski Tracks app on his phone. He got off to a good start one day on the vertical goal, but the warm temperatures in the afternoon made the number of required run difficult to attain and he finished with just under 17,000 feet of vertical. We were all skiing fast, big arc carving runs under the Sunshine Express chair (which that morning had firm snow and light traffic) and when I stopped 2/3 of the way down for every else to catch up, Brian went shooting past me and, when he checked at the bottom, had attained the elusive 50.0 mph. So, one of two goals was not bad. Of course, he didn't quite make the 52.5 mph that I got on the same hill two runs earlier. But he's still young, so he may get faster as he gets more experience.

**Tim Loula** was staying in town with a non-T-Bird racer (John Pomerville) so we didn't see quite as much of him as we did of those who shared our condo at the Ranch (which is where the T-Birds have stayed a number of times in past visits to Steamboat). He did well, winning a 3<sup>rd</sup> place (Bronze medal) in the kiddie (60-64) age group.

You are probably wondering how I could finish 4<sup>th</sup> in both the GS and slalom. Well, there were a number of very fast racers in this class and my newly made Polish racer friend from Poland / Chicago / Colorado was just slightly (less than a second) faster than I was, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in all of the races, pushing me off of the podium. I was disappointed, but the clock does not lie. As I said earlier, that's ski racing.

The social aspect of the trip was fun too (as it always is for the Race Team). The six of us ate our breakfast in the condo before taking the shuttle to the hill, but dinners were at a variety of nice restaurants in Steamboat Springs. We ate Italian, Mexican, steaks, fish, and a variety of other dishes. The final night was spent at a cook-your-own steak house, where we all had large quantities of very good food and where Bob (after finishing a whole rack of ribs) ordered a chocolate lava cake with whipped cream and a scoop of ice cream with chocolate syrup. Not wanting to have Bob feel bad by eating his cake alone, three of us made the sacrifice and ordered the same dessert. I think that I was ready to burst at the end of this eat-a-thon. It was a fitting send off to an excellent week of skiing, racing, and camaraderie.

The conclusion that all of us reached at the end of the NASTAR National Championship trip is that it was a great experience and that we would consider doing it again in the future, hopefully getting more T-Bird racers to join us when we do it again, maybe even next year. It was a great finish to the race season.

To reiterate what I have said in the past, "**skiing is fun**", but racing with the T-Birds is "**more fun**". All T-Bird skiers, regardless of their ability level, should give racing a try. It is not only a good time (on and off of the slopes), but will make you a much better skier, while having fun doing it. If you would like to find out more, please call or e-mail me. You will not be disappointed.

See you next season (or at other T-Bird activities).

## **Your Thunderbird Race Team Director:**

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