

Masters World Championships, Brusson 2006



Norman Clark relaxes after picking up his second medal at the MWC in Brusson (also in this picture are Stan McDonald (foreground), Brian Adams and Alasdair Wilson)

We had 11 people signed up for the MWC 2006, a good number by normal British standards, and people started arriving on Wednesday 1st February. Among this number were two Masters 'virgins', Martin Arnold and new BMCCSA member Mike Bangle, everyone else having competed before; Norman Clark hoping to repeat his medal winning performance from Krasnogorsk last year. Brian Adams, Alasdair Wilson and myself had also competed in Krasnogorsk, Chris Richards and Gareth Buffett had competed in Lillehammer two years ago, while others, George Gabriel, Chris Chrystal and Chris Donnelly, had not raced at the Masters for several years. Although we were the 'Brits', other BMCCSA members were also present: Jack White from Canada, Patrick o'Connor from the USA and Stan McDonald from Australia. Even Sorin Milas, British Roller Ski Series champion 2004, put in an appearance skiing for Spain (because he now lives in the Canary Islands) but, although he performed well, he doesn't get onto the all time best list because he's no longer a BMCCSA member.

Martin, George and myself had driven all day from Ruhpolding, having originally chosen Milan as the closest airport to both Ruhpolding and Brusson, on the basis that all three places appeared on the same page on my map of Europe so were only about 15 inches apart. Sadly, I'd failed to take the scale fully into account (must be more in touch with my feminine side than I realise) and the driving time was excessive. We'd planned to pick up Chris C. on route in Turin but he'd been delayed by excessive snow in Munich and we had to leave him behind (he eventually arrived around midnight having come by taxi). Although there was plenty of snow at low level around Milan and all the way to Turin, where we also had a fabulous view of the Alps, appearing like a silhouette as the sun went down, it didn't get much better as we started the long climb up from the valley to Brusson at 1330 m. The temperature, even at this time of nearly 10 pm, was around +4 °C but, as we came through Brusson and continued on up to our hotel, a further 5 kms or so up the valley, at least we could (in the dark) see parts of what seemed to be a well prepared ski track. However, we were tired by then and the first priority was to check into the hotel and get to bed.

The following day when we awoke it was to clear skies, slightly below zero and with not much snow around the hotel, at least. Driving down to the stadium after breakfast, though, we found a complete circuit of 15 kms made almost entirely of man-made snow, all in very good condition. The town had invested about 4 million Euros in snow making nozzles and a pumping system all around the track, and they'd also made a large pile of snow near the stadium building which they could 'mine' to fill in anywhere where the snow got a bit thin. They had made a total of 30 000 m³ of this stuff and, because it is much more dense than natural snow, there was no doubt that it would last for the whole event. As the day went on and the sun came up, the temperature in the open climbed to something like 10 - 12 °C (although it stayed colder, maybe -5 °C, in the shade) but the snow never turned to sugar and stayed in excellent condition, until the sun went behind the mountain at about 4 pm and the track froze and became a lot harder and quicker. The weather stayed much the same throughout the whole week and a half, although later in the week it started to get colder during the night (-10 °C) but always warm in the sun during the day.

We skated (except Chris C.) all the way round the 15 km track and this proved what had been anticipated from my visit there in September 18 months earlier, that all the 'action' took place in the first 5 kms. The first kilometre or so was flat, followed by a gentle climb then a drop down to the right (which should have caused more difficulty than it did). The track then climbed steeply over a bridge and swept down and round a lefthand downhill corner, which was the only really tricky corner on the whole course, then continued down a fairly fast, narrow descent (not difficult as long as one stayed in the tracks) to the low point of the course. It then started to climb back towards the bridge in three or four separate, short climbs. The left turn off the bridge again required getting into the tracks for a smooth ride down but, once that was achieved, everything was easy from then on. There was one more climb back towards the stadium area, at about 5 kms, and then the course started climbing fairly slowly to the high point at 10 kms before descending in a long, steady drop, then a few loops around the meadow before returning to the start. This long descent generated some speed but was, in principle at least, easy to take in the tracks. It had a 180° turn at the bottom, but this only proved tricky when we did the same loop a second time in the afternoon, because the track had become icy and fast and the corner required rather more care than I had chosen to give it. At least this first sortie was reassuring, and seemed to indicate that stick wax would work for classic, and a second sortie the following day (Friday) proved this to be correct.

Various other members of the 'team' arrived on Thursday and Friday evenings and, with Gareth arriving on Saturday morning, we were then complete. Brian, trying a -6 to +6 °C klister on Friday morning, confirmed that stick wax was needed and the Start range for old snow proved ideal. And so, finally, we came to the first race, 30 km classic, on Sunday morning.

Some races start well and then just get better and better. There was no doubt that the glide wax would be HF -4 to -10 °C (on a base of molybdenum to account for the higher abrasiveness of the man-made snow), a thin layer of green klister was added the night before as a binder, and then the stick wax was applied in the morning of the race. I hesitated about exactly which wax to have as the 'active' layer but, finally, opted for several layers of -2 to -6 °C as a 'base', with -1 to -3 °C (for old snow) and some -2 to +2 °C on top, finishing with a layer of the intermediate wax. The warm-up track seemed a bit more icy than the race track, which was the reason why waxing took longer than anticipated, so I didn't get quite as much warm-up as I'd hoped, but the wax proved ideal in the race itself. I got to the ski marking with 7 or 8 minutes to go, just had time for a last pee in the toilets conveniently situated near the start and then, buoyed up by a kiss for good luck from one of the Event Girls, Brian and I, and 44 other M04s, lined up for the start.

The start, by means of a flag, wasn't that easy to see but, in fact, we were limited by people starting ahead of us anyway, so this didn't really matter. Several people fell on the very first right hand bend but we were able to avoid them and settle into the race. Brian was just ahead of me (and we were within a group of other skiers) but, after a kilometre or so, I departed from my pre-race plan and moved ahead of him. Luckily, the people ahead of us slowed down to a walk to get up the steep hill to the bridge for the first time, which was good because it prevented us starting too quickly. An interesting tactical battle then ensued, Brian wondering whether he should pass me (in which case he might well have pulled ahead) and me wondering whether I should let him pass (in which case he would probably also have won), but I decided to stay ahead and we were never more than a few metres apart until the 10 km point. On the long downhill, I was able to pull a little ahead and, with slightly better grip on the second lap, I was able to gain more and was determined that, if I got to the 10 km point on the second lap ahead, I would not be beaten. So, cheered up by a lot of vocal support from friends in the crowd, I was even able to speed up a bit over the last 3 kms and a finishing time of 1 h 48 minutes, 28.1 % of the winner's time and finishing ahead of Brian (and unexpected bonus) meant that all my goals for this season were met in just this one race.

In other categories, Mike Bangle in his debut race performed well, in category M02, to finish ahead of George Gabriel (complaining of lack of training) in M06 and not far behind Chris Richards (who had, it seemed, been training more for skating than classic). Mike's percentage was rather spoilt by the winner in his category being the fastest overall but he was on basic CH glide wax. Before the next race, we went into Brusson and bought him 100 Euros worth of glide wax (mainly LF but one HF for the likely remaining conditions) and the same Start stick waxes for old snow as I was using, and he was well set up.

Speaking to Patrick afterwards, he'd had one or two problems during his 15 km race – he'd been thrown off the track on the sharp left turn after the bridge and thought that he had taken the wrong track at one point, obliging him to stop and turn back (although I think that it turned out that he was on the correct track all along). But he reported being happy overall with his race. Our oldest competitor in this first classic race, Chris Chrystal in the M08 group (65-70) looked to be going well, he heading up the long hill as I was coming down to the sharp corner on the way back down. He maintained that, while he was fit from running, he hadn't done much ski-specific training or racing for several years. But, nonetheless, no one reported any waxing problems, most people seemed happy with their performances and neither Chris nor anyone else from the BMCCSA team finished in the last three of our categories (so no British medals!). We'd set an ambitious target for our skaters the following day.



Chris Chrystal proves what we all know; it's damn difficult to get a photo showing good style!



George finishes. Note the cunning use of double pole arms with diagonal stride legs

Men's 30 km classic

In these results, the fastest skier over a given distance is shown (e.g. the group M01-M06 or M07-M09), together with the time of the winner in a category in which a BMCCSA member took part. No ladies results are shown because Britain had no lady competitors this year but results can be found on www.mwc2006.com.

Fastest	Vladimir Legotin	RUS	M02	1.17:26.7		
25)	Mike Bangle	GBR	M02	2.07:44.0	64.9 %	28 starters
1)	Alexander Rochev	RUS	M04	1.24:41.9		
35)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	1.48:31.5	28.1 %	
37)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	1.50:08.3	30.0 %	46 starters
1)	Eero Vaisanen	FIN	M06	1.30:15.1		
47)	Chris Richards	GBR	M06	2.03:46.4	37.1 %	
56)	George Gabriel	GBR	M06	2.16:44.5	51.5 %	62 starters

Men's 15 km classic

Fastest	Ola Kvaale	NOR	M07	44:15.7		
64)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	1.08:08.1	53.9 %	71 starters
1)	Finn Magnar Hagen	NOR	M08	45:16.6		
45)	Chris Chrystal	GBR	M08	1.12:13.1	59.5 %	48 starters

Monday started much the same as Sunday, a bit below zero, clear skies and the sun coming up, and tracks in ideal conditions. We had seven BMCCSA members taking part, with Martin (and Sorin for Spain) making their debuts. Sorin, being the youngest, set off first and, while he performed well to get to just 23 % of the winner's time, this was his poorest performance of the week. Living in the Canary Islands means that all his training has to be on roller skis and, as we have all experienced, he hadn't had enough time on snow to make the transition from the directional stability of roller skis to the much less stable skiing on snow.

Martin, starting 10 minutes behind in the next oldest category, seemed to be skiing strongly. He just needs to develop his range of techniques, learn to 'change gear' from Skate 1 (paddling) to Skate 2 (double dance) and stay in the tuck longer on the downhill, and his times will come down dramatically. Chris Donnelly, who lives in Munich, put up the best percentage of the Brits over this distance, although he seemed to be hampered by a leg injury, while Gareth, too, also managed to keep clear of the dreaded last three places. Our only disappointment came in Alasdair Wilson who, complaining about balance and breathing difficulties (he'd arrived with a cold which might, or might not, have been the same cold which several of us caught during the week), pulled out after about half distance.



Martin Arnold disproves the theory, paying someone else to look like an arse alongside him



Gareth descends the long descent at around 12 kms. Could be a bit more tucked!

Two of our overseas members, Jack and Stan, both raced in the M08 category over 15 kms. Jack, from Newfoundland in Canada, had suffered from global warming, the snow only arriving late and he was complaining about a lack of training time. Still, I'd be happy to get to just 19 %, with or without training. As might have been anticipated, though, our best performance by far came from Norman in his 10 km race, not quite continuing where he'd left off in Krasnogorsk where his last race had netted him a silver medal, but still coming away with an excellent bronze medal. As this was the one distance where he missed out on a medal last year, he now has the whole set, one for all distances. Perhaps the only complaint was that the 5 km course used by the older racers was not particularly physically demanding, so no direct comparison is possible between Norman and Stan, on the harder course. But, as we have said in the past, you still have to win on whichever type of course you are faced with.

Men's 30 km free

1)	Dmitri Vedeneev	RUS	M02	1.13:15.1		
17)	Sorin Milas	SPA	M02	1.30:17.6	23.3 %	20 starters
Fastest	Alexander Abramov	RUS	M03	1.11:51.9		
32)	Martin Arnold	GBR	M03	1.45:14.7	46.4 %	35 starters
1)	Jon Engen	USA	M04	1.14:42.7		
40)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M04	1.46:29.6	42.5 %	48 starters
1)	Domenico Invernizzi	ITA	M05	1.18:21.4		
	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	DNF		69 starters

1)	Manfred Haeusler	GER	M06	1.19:31.8		
50)	Gareth Buffett	GBR	M06	2.03:17.0	55.0 %	62 starters

Men's 15 km free

Fastest	Andre Grob	FRA	M07	40:18.4		
1)	Emilio Longo	ITA	M08	42:08.5		
25)	Jack White	CAN	M08	50:08.5	19.0 %	
38)	Stan McDonald	AUS	M08	58:00.0	37.6 %	43 starters

Men's 10 km free

1)	Arnfinn Haugland	NOR	M10	31:54.3		
3)	Norman Clark	GBR	M10	34:14.1	7.3 %	7 starters

So that was the 30 km race done. That evening we had a rather unexpected visit from BMCCSA member Colin Tucker (whose hips it was which appeared on the cover of the Newsletter a few years ago), touring Europe in his mobile home and taking part in Masters alpine skiing events. A day's rest was welcome between the 30 km classic and the 10 km races but, for those who had raced the skate version, no such rest was possible. This might have played its part because, although we were some 300 metres lower than the Olympics one week later, as the Eurosport commentators kept saying, recovery takes longer at altitude and, at 1330 m, we were near the limit permitted by Masters rules. At least, though, by being maybe 100 m higher in our hotel, we were following the accepted principle of "living high, racing low"!

More or less the same waxing conditions as for the 30 km race applied but, this time, Mike was on his new HF wax. This, unfortunately, caught him rather by surprise, as he reported afterwards that he was going so quickly into the second corner that he couldn't quite get round it and had to fall. Despite this, he brought his percentage down dramatically when compared with the 30 km race. This, I was hoping, was going to be my best race of the year, having achieved 31 minutes over the same distance in Bruksvallarna and similar in the pursuit in Ruhpolding. I was looking to go over 20 km/h for the first time, and the best ever percentage by a Brit in a MWC classic race, 25 % held by Brian, was beckoning. Sadly, things did not quite turn out as I had planned. My friend and fellow National Director, Libor from the Czech Republic, fell just in front of me on the very first corner and brought me down as well (he was very apologetic both then and afterwards). The red mist came down, I leapt up and went like the clappers to catch up with the group ahead, caught up with Libor and shouted "Track" but he wouldn't move, then tried to double-pole past him out of the tracks (there was only one track at that point) and failed and, sadly, that was it. I'd gone much too fast, the heart was at maximum and breathing was difficult, and we hadn't even got to the one kilometre point! The whole of the rest of the race was a huge struggle, even if the 10 km was a bit easier than the 15 km course, because it missed out the drop to the lowest point and the corresponding climb back up.

Behind us, Alasdair also had the misfortune to earn a British medal (bronze, and discounting his DNF in the 30 km race), even if 38 minutes represents a reasonable speed. George and Gareth were having their own private battle in the M06 category, although George maintained that he was always well in control of the situation. In the older group, Chris C. (perhaps getting used to ski racing again) was able to lower his percentage of the winner's time compared with his performance in the 15 km race. As an aside, everyone skied the same course for the 10 km classic and skate races (except for Norman in the skate version of the race, doing only 5 kms), so direct comparison of times is possible. I would have preferred two tracks to have been available for the classic race, but the organisers argued that it would not be possible to prepare the track, in the middle of the day, to take out one or more of the classic tracks before the skate race.



Mike Bangle on his debut



Chris Donnelly just 3 kms from the finish in the 30 km skate race. Note the lack of snow anywhere other than on the track

Men's 10 km classic, M01-M06

Fastest	Vladimir Legotin	RUS	M02	23:48.1		
23)	Mike Bangle	GBR	M02	36:42.2	54.2 %	24 starters
1)	Gianpaolo Englaro	ITA	M04	26:06.8		
36)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	33:31.5	28.4 %	39 starters
1)	Heikki Ruokonen	FIN	M05	26:00.1		
53)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	38:19.9	47.4 %	55 starters
1)	Pekka Virtakoivu	FIN	M06	26:59.6		
47)	George Gabriel	GBR	M06	41:22.3	53.3 %	
48)	Gareth Buffett	GBR	M06	41:58.4	55.5 %	51 starters

Men's 10 km classic, M07-M09

Fastest	Ola Kvaale	NOR	M07	28:15.5		
1)	Henner Misersky	GER	M08	28:53.5		
38)	Chris Chrystal	GBR	M08	45:19.7	56.9 %	42 starters

Us who had raced in the classic race (and who were feeling as fresh as daisies, ha ha) had recovered by eating the cheap but good lunch provided in the refreshment tent and so were out watching the others racing in the skate race. Unfortunately, Chris Donnelly's leg injury prevented him from taking part (his doctor had advised him not to race but assumed that he would race anyway, but he heeded the advice). Because the Masters entry fee is fixed irrespective of the number of races entered, and because Chris had never planned to do the 45 km, this injury meant that the one race he was able to do was rather expensive.

There are different ways to look at the skate race (the problem, you see, dear readers, is that I like to try to report equally and fairly on all BMCCSA members, but this is difficult to do if racers just have an uneventful race and have nothing particular to report). Norman, skiing 5 kms, put up the best objective performance (in terms of percentage of the winner's time) but was unable to repeat his bronze medal performance from Krasnogorsk. Of those doing the 10 km distance, Pilbury Doughboy or not, Jack put up the best percentage performance. Sorin recorded the fastest time, not that much quicker than Brian, but Chris Richards (although a little slower than these two), had a better percentage than Brian and certainly had more people behind him his category. In fact Chris was probably showing the best technique of all the Brits, looking very strong as he came past us, and this was the first time he'd ever been below 30 %. Both Martin and Stan recorded slightly better percentages than in the 30 km race while Patrick, although still happy with his race, again (I think) had a few problems finding the correct track.

Men's 10 km free

Fastest	Lucia Bortot	ITA	M01	21:35.7		
1)	Igor Glushkov	RUS	M02	22:29.8		
21)	Sorin Milas	SPA	M02	27:59.3	24.4 %	24 starters
1)	Alexander Abramov	RUS	M03	22:14.1		
34)	Martin Arnold	GBR	M03	32:25.7	45.8 %	35 starters
1)	Paolo Somnavilla	ITA	M04	22:41.5		
39)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	28:26.1	25.3 %	
	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M04	DNS		52 starters
1)	Manfred Haeusler	GER	M06	24:29.4		
49)	Chris Richards	GBR	M06	30:18.9	23.8 %	68 starters

Men's 10 km free

Fastest	Del Pletcher	USA	M07	25:33.9		
54)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	38:45.2	51.6 %	56 starters
1)	Finn Magnar Hagen	NOR	M08	26:10.8		
37)	Jack White	CAN	M08	31:57.4	22.1 %	
47)	Stan McDonald	AUS	M08	35:47.7	36.7 %	54 starters

Men's 5 km free

1)	Arnfinn Haugland	NOR	M09	15:27.3		
5)	Norman Clark	GBR	M09	16:34.9	7.3 %	8 starters

That evening was selection time for the honour of representing Britain in the relay. In principle we could have put two teams together, in M04 and M06, but there was some reluctance on the part of a few people to take part so, in the end, we entered only an M04 team. Wednesday was a rest day, during which time the Masters meeting took place. We were presented with four candidate venues for the MWC 2009: Goms in Switzerland and Autrans, Les Rousses and La Bresse in France. All looked good (although La Bresse seems rather far north so snow might not be guaranteed) and the Masters President will decide which of the four will be invited to make a more detailed presentation this autumn. My money is on Autrans, simply because it is probably the most snow-secure, already has a stadium and other facilities, and is used regularly for races.

Between the 10 km race and the relay, the conditions of the snow changed and it definitely transformed to klister conditions (or at least klister protected by a stick wax). Unfortunately we didn't realise this and stuck to stick wax. Although this provided just enough grip, it wasn't really sufficient for what was required in such a short, fast race. Also, I think that I was just starting to suffer from the altitude and, even though the classic leg was done on the easy 5 km loop, I found it very hard work. I was last leaving the stadium but at least avoided the two people who fell at the first corner (you would have thought, three races into the event, that they would have learnt – and it wasn't even a tricky bend). I was trying not to get left too far behind, but soon went into oxygen debt and reached the limit of my breathing capacity. Despite this, we were only a minute and a half behind 9th place at the end of the first leg. There were perhaps some problems with the timings in this race, because the results showed that Brian brought us up into 9th place at the end of the third leg but Chris maintained that he was not overtaken by anyone and I don't think that we were ever anything other than last. Nonetheless, we were not embarrassingly far behind 9th place, with Alasdair in particular putting up probably his best performance of the week in the second leg.

Men's 4 x 5 km relay

Fastest	Italy	M01	49:51.7				
1)	Italy	M04	G. Englaro	12:58.0	A. Agradi	13:11.4	
			D. Magnabosco	13:17.7	P. Somnavilla	13:07.3	52:34.6
10)	Great Britain	M04	A. Pinney	15:56.9	A. Wilson	16:50.9	
			B. Adams	16:23.0	C. Richards	17:37.6	1:06:48.5

The longest, 45 km, race is always last on the programme, this year the classic race taking place on Friday and the skate race on Saturday. The previous evening the Jury had set a very strict time limit; all skiers had to have started their final lap by 1:00 pm. I objected to this, because it corresponded to the M02 class having to ski the first 30 kms at 13.8 km/h, but the Jury was unmoved.



The slightly less than victorious British relay team, looking very smart in new team kit and pleased that it was all over. L to R: Chris Richards, Brian Adams, Alasdair Wilson, Adam Pinney

This time we took advice from the professional wax service (a new Italian company called Maplus), who recommended a multi-grade klistar (-6 to +6 °C) with a warmer klistar (-3 to +2 °C) over this, then a final layer of Swix VR50 (0 to -4 °C) on top to prevent icing. This proved to be perfect and it was just a shame that we hadn't adopted it in the relay the day before. Unfortunately, Mike had never experienced klistar and landed up putting rather too much of the warmer klistar on his skies, which made it impossible to apply the final stick wax, which was to have unfortunate consequences.

The start order changes for this race, meaning that Patrick went off first, at 09:30, followed by Chris Chrystal five minutes later (these two doing 30 kms), George and Gareth were off at 10:30, with me 10 minutes behind and Mike a further 10 minutes back. George quickly pulled ahead of Gareth and then, as in the 10 km race, managed to control the gap, eventually finishing more than 3 minutes clear. Perhaps we were all suffering from the altitude by now, though, because we all put up our least good performances, Chris Chrystal included, in this race, with the exception of Patrick, who improved on his 30 km performance. My main concern was not to fall at any stage as my legs got tired, and also to start sufficiently slowly so as to be able to complete the race comfortably. The latter meant that I was skiing pretty much on my own shortly after the start, but as I slotted into the tracks coming down off the bridge on the third lap, I realised that I had achieved the former. Perhaps I should have started a bit quicker, though, because it was a shame to have missed my target of 30 % by just 3.5 % or about 5 minutes.

Starting at 10:50, Mike had to get to the 30 km point in just 2 hours 10 minutes to avoid the cut-off. Sadly, the surplus klister on his skies was undoubtedly slowing him down and leading to icing up in the softer snow, and he missed the mark by about 6 minutes. Trying to sneak through, though, he was surrounded by four large officials and bundled off the track. This was a shame in one way, because he got to the 30 km point more quickly than he'd done in the 30 km race (even if most people slowed on the third lap) but, on the other hand, Brian said that he looked pretty shattered at this time so, perhaps, in the end, it was for the best. That was it, then, racing finished for the year (for me at least). We could have got pissed that night but, sensibly, we didn't.

Men's 45 km classic

Fastest	German Schastlivyy	RUS	M02	2.03:07.1		
	Mike Bangle	GBR	M02	DNF		20 starters
1)	Alexander Rochev	RUS	M04	2.09:35.3		
31)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M04	2.53:02.1	33.5 %	36 starters
1)	Pekka Virtakoivu	FIN	M06	2.11:49.4		
44)	George Gabriel	GBR	M06	3.31:36.2	60.5 %	
45)	Gareth Buffett	GBR	M06	3.34:56.0	63.0 %	54 starters

Men's 30 km classic

Fastest	Ola Kvaale	NOR	M07	1.26:41.7		
48)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M07	2.11:58.4	52.2 %	56 starters
1)	Henner Misersky	GER	M08	1.30:23.7		
37)	Chris Chrystal	GBR	M08	2.27:20.2	63.0 %	40 starters

More BMCCSA members had opted for the skate option of the longer race, Norman going off first while it was still rather cold. I watched him start off and, at the first corner, he seemed to be in about 4th place. I ran across to watch him come by at about 1 km, and he'd moved into 3rd place and was pulling clear of his chasers. The gap grew on the second lap and was perhaps one minute at one stage. But it started to shrink at the start of the third lap, and was maybe only 30 seconds as he came past with 4 kms to go. I was urging him to relax and maintain good technique while, at the same time, hoping that he'd saved enough energy for a sprint if it came down to it. But coming into the finish area with just half a kilometre to go, he was still safely clear and, as he himself said, having got so far, he wasn't letting anyone past him. His chaser, by the way? A certain Italian, named Mr DiCenta. But no ordinary bloke off the street, Mr DiCenta, daddy of Manuela DiCenta, top lady racer until her retirement a few years ago, and daddy of Georgio DiCenta, Olympic gold medal winner over 50 kms skate in Pragelato the following week! So no mean feat and, excellent for both Norman and British skiing, he bagged yet another bronze medal and, in doing so, set a new best ever figure for a British Master of just 4.6 % of the winner's time.

The younger blokes went off next, again in reverse order, meaning that Chris Richards was away first, followed by Alasdair, Brian, Martin and Sorin, all 5 minutes apart. Chris came storming past at 5 kms and was demonstrating excellent technique and looking strong as he climbed the gentle hill where we were watching, and was well up in his group and skiing with a pack of others, which always helps. Wife Sheila expressed the hope that he hadn't started too quickly but, although he did seem to slow on the third lap (and who wouldn't, after three time around the tough 5 km first part of this track), he maintained his good position until the end.

People had reported that Brian was looking serious and determined before this race, but things nearly went wrong at one stage and could have caused difficulties within the hitherto closely-knit British team. Catching Alasdair, himself going well with quite a few people in his group behind him, coming down the long hill, Alasdair came out of the tracks and promptly fell right in front of Brian, forcing him to shoot off the track and onto the uphill going in the other direction, where he took out two women racers, in a manner of speaking. Things then went from bad to worse, because he was in a race-long battle with one of our

Australian friends Zac but, as Zac came past, their skis tangled and again Brian had problems. Still, Brian put up the best performance of the younger British men (although he was passed by Sorin having his best race), this time putting up a better percentage than Chris.



Despite losing his feet, Patrick finds the energy for a smile at the end of the 30 km classic



I believe the technical term is “cream cracked” but we’ll just put it down to the altitude

Martin skied his best race of the week but, despite posting a faster time than Alasdair, also dramatically improved relative to previous MWC events, landed up with a worse percentage, such are the vagaries of the winner's time in any one class. Jack again skied well and strongly, but his efforts in the 10 km race had taken their toll on Stan and, reporting that he just couldn't get his legs working, he had to pull out of this race. So racing finished for everyone, and we could all have got pissed that evening, but didn't because they didn't lay on enough wine at the last night banquet.

Men's 45 km free

1)	Vladimir Legotin	RUS	M02	1:50:00.0		
16)	Sorin Milas	SPA	M02	2:15:18.6	23.0 %	21 starters
Fastest	Alexander Abramov	RUS	M03	1:47:13.5		
30)	Martin Arnold	GBR	M03	2:35:33.0	45.1 %	36 starters
1)	Jon Engen	USA	M04	1:53:05.8		
30)	Brian Adams	GBR	M04	2:23:30.0	26.9 %	46 starters
1)	Domanico Invernizzi	ITA	M05	1:59:28.3		
63)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M05	2:48:09.0	40.7 %	73 starters
1)	Manfred Haeusler	GER	M06	1:59:10.3		
35)	Chris Richards	GBR	M06	2:32:17.2	27.8 %	50 starters

Men's 30 km free

Fastest	Del Pletcher	USA	M07	1:21:27.7		
1)	Finn Magnar Hagen	NOR	M08	1:23:02.9		
28)	Jack White	CAN	M08	1:39:23.4	19.7 %	
	Stan McDonald	AUS	M08	DNF		42 starters

Men's 15 km skate

1)	Arnfinn Haugland	NOR	M10	49:09.6		
3)	Norman Clark	GBR	M10	51:24.7	4.6 %	8 starters

So, overall impressions? This was certainly one of the best MWCs I've experienced. The tracks were excellent and always well prepared, the organisation was equally excellent and they responded to requests for things made during Team Captains meetings (putting down a carpet into the waxing room to prevent slipping, improving the drinks stations, and so on), the hotel was good and not expensive, with good meal provisions, and transport to and from the hotel, either by bus or using the car we'd hired, was efficient. The banquet, though, was hopeless. But, above anything else, the standard of performance by all BMCCSA members, including those taking part for the first time, was higher than I've ever seen before. The days of Brits finishing in the last three of any event are pretty much gone, and all we need to do is keep this going until Rovaniemi next year. But I think that we should finish with our quote of the week:

"I was pulled off by four beefy Italians. It was quite a relief, actually." Mr M. Bangle.