

## Masters World Championships, Seefeld, March 2023

I think that I can say, without fear of contraception, that I have never encountered such skiing conditions! Seefeld, on our arrival on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> March, was green and, on Monday 15<sup>th</sup> March, temperatures peaked at +16 °C. You can imagine what this was doing to the tracks, but you don't need to use your imagination, because I'll tell you! The tracks were very soft, in many places the classic tracks were full of water and, most worryingly, there were brown patches of earth beginning to appear through the snow. On the plus side, the downhills were slow so, provided one was happy to step in soft, deep snow, they were all do-able. That evening we received an E-mail from the organisers saying that some changes were being made to the event schedule, bringing all short-distance races forward to Sunday and cutting them from 10 to 7 km, while putting the middle-distance races back to Monday and Tuesday. Was this, we wondered, a last, desperate, effort to put on at least *some* racing, before the whole event was cancelled?

The following day, though, Caramba, even worse! We woke to heavy rain and tracks which hadn't frozen overnight, either. We decided not to ski at all that day, Tuesday, because, as the photos below show, there were 'grey snow' patches which seemed to indicate that the track had thawed right through to its base, and we didn't want to damage it by skiing on it. We noted, from the webcam footage, that no one else seemed to be out skiing, either. The whole place had the air of a ski resort whose season had finished, not one which could be 'rescued' by the small amount of snow predicted for the following day.



We awoke to 3-5 cm of snow, which at least made the place look nice and slightly improved the tracks for the morning. In the afternoon we went on a shopping spree to Leutasch, where the tracks were very unpleasant; half soft and half icy, but the frozen bits made the one downhill treacherous. The shopping was successful, but the skiing was not to be repeated. We found, though, a *huge* mountain of man-made snow; we wondered (incorrectly) whether this was the backup plan to keep the Masters tracks in good condition.

Thursday. We found the tracks in rather good condition in the morning and maybe one more centimetre of new snow. We met up with Kelley, and later Nerys and Jon, on the tracks. Kelley reported having skied over to the far side of the valley, where the corduroy of the track-setting machine had frozen solid and was making the downhills and corners tricky, and I found a similar thing on the race tracks, at least until the snow softened and became rather nice. Thursday, though, was the last day of frost; on Friday, at 8 am, it was either +3 °C, +4 °C or +8 °C, depending upon which weather forecast we wanted to put our trust in!

Not much to report for Friday or Saturday; it was only really worth skiing in the morning, before the snow 'collapsed', but I did do a little time-trial around the 7 km track, which prompted me to decide to race on Sunday, a day which brought mixed fortunes for the British Team! First off for us, in the M03 category, was Simon from Huntly, making his debut. He was, sadly, in the same category as the fastest classic skier on the day, but maybe it was the three DNSs which he might otherwise have beaten. Simon was followed by Peter, also making his debut, and posting the fastest British classic time of the day. In the following, speeds are based on the 7 km track being only 6.5 km long although it might, in fact, have been only 5.9 km).

We had two ladies in the classic event, too: Jacquie Barlow, masquerading as Janet Alexander and therefore likely to get disqualified, and Allie Wilson; this being Jacquie's Masters debut. Both were happy to have safely completed their races. Jacquie raced in the F07 category but, because of her real age, I will show her in the F04 category where she belongs.

Last came me, my first race for three years and my first serious effort after two bouts of Long Covid. My goal, therefore, was to pace things properly so that I could get to the end without either exploding or having to stop. It was disappointing to see the rivals I would normally beat disappear into the distance, but there was nothing to be done about that. The universal klister worked extremely well, though, and it was pleasing to pass one person from Switzerland on the way up the steepest hill, but disappointing to get passed by someone from USA on the way down the steepest hill!

**Short distance classic technique, Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March**

**Men's M01-M09 7 km**

Fastest	Giovanni Gerbotto	ITA	M03	14:08.7	27.1 km/h		
11)	Simon Bate	GBR	M03	27:00.7	14.4 km/h	90.8 %	(11 starters)
1)	Gian Jörger	CH	M06	16:46.8	23.2 km/h		
29)	Peter Drew	GBR	M06	23:42.7	16.4 km/h	41.3 %	(33 starters)
1)	Bernhard Schneider	GER	M07	18:24.4	21.2 km/h		
35)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M07	28:30.1	13.7 km/h	54.9 %	(37 starters)

**Ladies F01-F09 7 km**

Fastest	Catrin Ingvarsson	SWE	F04	20:28.4	19.1 km/h		
9)	Jacquie Barlow	GBR	F04	35:01.3	11.1 km/h	71.0 %	(9 starters)
1)	Patricia Pearce	CAN	F08	22:43.5	17.2 km/h		
17)	Allie Wilson	GBR	F08	30:05.3	13.0 km/h	32.5 %	(21 starters)



**Martin Watkins descends the last main hill in a promising start to his Masters career**



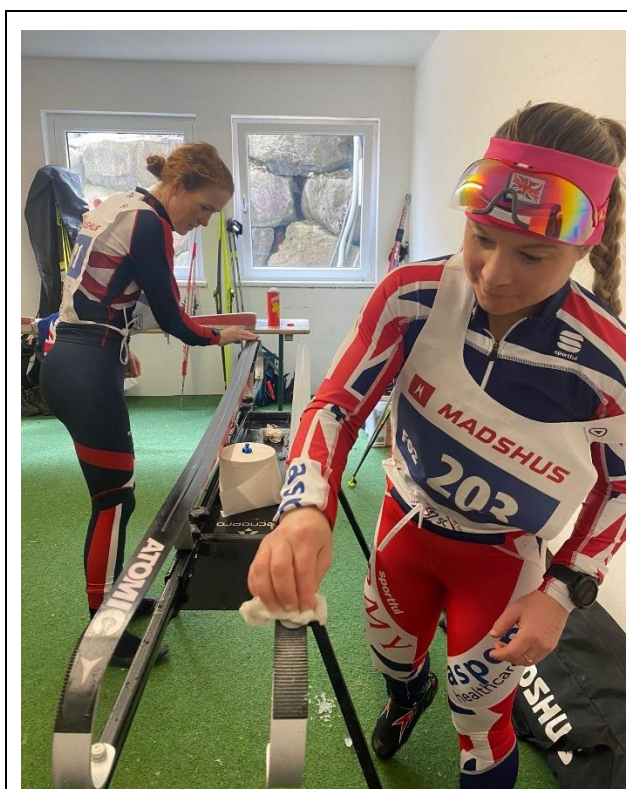
**Looking quite dynamic (*shurely shum mishtake, Ed*), yours truly powers to the finish in a disappointing finish to his Masters 2023 career**



The classic races took care of roughly half the British Team, with the other half competing in the free technique race in the afternoon. Conditions were much worse than for the classic race in the morning, with a temperature of about +11 °C and wet, soft, snow. As I stood watching, I could see people's skis getting sucked almost to a stop by the conditions! First to start was Jon Bowskill, another of our Masters first-timers. Poor Jon got off to rather an unfortunate start, taking a tumble towards the bottom of the first descent after the start, which put him at the back of his field. This was one of the few occasions at the World Masters where the fastest skier overall was an M01 but, to show the difficulty of the conditions, he was almost two minutes slower than the fastest classic skier over the same course in the morning.

Our ladies were off next, but not quite to the perfect start. Going down the hill just after the start, someone fell right in front of Nerys, who clattered into her and got up with a broken pole. This was not a track for legs-only, nor was it a track for just one pole so, luckily, the Swedish national director handed her a replacement pole which, sadly, was probably nine inches longer than it should have been. It's difficult to know exactly where Nerys might have finished without this incident, but she certainly produced by far the best percentage of the winner's time on the day, moving her immediately into 5<sup>th</sup> place on the Best British Ladies of All Time masters list.

A little later, our three-time medallist (who holds three of the four places on the All Time list ahead of Nerys), Kelley, and more regular Masters competitor from Munich, Bronwen, set off in the F04 class, up against the fastest lady on the day. Kelley found the conditions rather tough, while Bronwen had had her preparations for the Masters rather hampered by a difficult year, and having glitter in her hair (don't ask).



**Kelley and Nerys clean their skis in our comfortable wax cabin**



**Bronwen prepares for the off, or recovers after the finish, not quite sure which!**

Last off were two more British Masters newcomers, Martin and Lauro. Neither reported any problems as such, and Martin certainly beat the greatest number of people in his age category. There were suspicions, though, based on the speed with which Martin was passed by someone going down one of the hills, that the person concerned must have been using the now-banned high fluoro waxes, but we will never know about that. Lauro finished just one place behind Australian Zac Zacharias, who is well-known to some of us because of battles we have had with him in the past. Finally, we should not forget our North American BMCSSA member, Steve Smigiel in the M10 class. I didn't have the chance to talk to him before his race, but his 49 % of the winner's time was some way off his performances in recent years and also a way off his best (which was 19.1 % in the 15 km Free in Pillerseetal back in 2014).

In summary, rather a tough day but, with it raining on Sunday evening and with the temperatures not dropping below zero overnight, we were not expecting the conditions to be much better for the classic races the following day. I will just finish this description of Day 1 by pointing out that the oldest gold medal man, Charles French (5 km classic) and the oldest gold medal lady, Saeki Katsumi (5 km classic and 5 km free) were born in 1924 (98) and 1935 (87) respectively; those of us planning to out-live our rivals to guarantee a medal in the future may need to reconsider our plans!

#### Short distance free technique, Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> March

##### Men's M01-M09 7 km

Fastest	Toni Escher	GER	M01	16:04.7	24.2 km/h		
1)	Markus Meister	GER	M04	16:39.6	23.4 km/h		
21)	Jon Bowskill	GBR	M04	26:23.3	14.8 km/h	58.3 %	(21 starters)
1)	Francesco Benetti	ITA	M07	18:36.6	21.0 km/h		
20)	Martin Watkins	GBR	M07	20:56.4	18.6 km/h	12.5 %	(59 starters)
1)	Luzi Corsini	CH	M08	20:18.5	19.2 km/h		
49)	Lauro Franzese	GBR	M08	29:00.8	13.4 km/h	42.9 %	(52 starters)

##### Ladies F01-F09 7 km

1)	Hanna Riedl	GER	F02	22:06.7	17.6 km/h		
4)	Nerys Jones	GBR	F02	23:06.4	16.9 km/h	4.5 %	(5 starters)
Fastest	Sigrid Mutscheller	GER	F04	19:23.3	20.1 km/h		
7)	Kelley Haniver	GBR	F04	24:25.6	16.0 km/h	26.0 %	
15)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F04	30:15.8	12.9 km/h	56.0 %	(15 starters)

##### Men's M10-M13 5 km

Fastest	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M10	15:04.4	19.9 km/h		
16)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M10	22:27.3	13.4 km/h	49.0 %	(19 starters)

Monday; I have been doing Masters for the best part of 30 years, on and off and, in all that time, I can say that I have never encountered worst conditions than faced us this morning. When we went to bed on Sunday evening, it was raining heavily, it did not freeze at all over night, and we found the tracks extremely soft, wet and deep. It was about +5 °C when we started and the highest temperature during the day was only a fairly modest +8 °C, but this was on top of many days of thaw.



You know you're in trouble when they start pumping water off the track!



Winter Olympics, Seefeld, 1964, the last time of very little snow. Notice the large pixie (left)



This was the rescheduled medium distance classic race, which meant that our younger men were doing 20 km over three laps of the previous day's 7 (6.5) km track, while the rest of us were doing three laps of the somewhat easier 5 km red track. I say easier but, in fact, it was almost the same in terms of difficulty, but without the 1.5 km or so of relatively flat track at the highest point. First off were our young men: Simon, Jon and Peter. For Simon, it was a substantially slower race than the day before, but a much-improved percentage of the winner's time (the real judge of performance) and, this time, there was one person behind him! Jon, too, was slower in his race and was up against the fastest person on the day, which didn't help his percentage. Peter, though, improved both on percentage and, by one, on the number of people he beat; all three of them must have been getting used to the Masters by now!

**Medium distance classic technique, Monday 20<sup>th</sup> March**

**Men's M01-M06 20 km**

1)	Peter Reidl	GER	M03	59:02.3	19.8 km/h		
10)	Simon Bate	GBR	M03	1.32:14.8	12.7 km/h	56.2 %	(11 starters)
Fastest Markus Meister							
17)	Jon Bowskill	GBR	M04	1.33:32.3	12.5 km/h	70.2 %	(17 starters)
1)	Gian Jörger	CH	M06	58:13.6	20.1 km/h		
28)	Peter Drew	GBR	M06	1.20:10.9	14.6 km/h	37.7 %	(34 starters)

On to M07 and M08, and Martin, Lauro and me, doing three laps of the slightly easier 5 km course. Just to give you an idea of the conditions, two people fell on the flat before we even got to the hill down from the start! One person's skis just seemed to hit a wet patch and down he went, and the second person piled into him! I thought that this gave me the chance to have a few people behind me, but they came shooting past down the hill and, after less than a few hundred metres, I was plum last! The organisers had promised to cut four classic tracks and, to their credit, this was more or less what they'd done. But it made little difference; people were hunting all over the piste for the fastest line, which was often out of the tracks on the side.



**Simon Bate and his posse**



**Allie in action in her longest race**

What made conditions worst for me were the downhill. There were soft, deep ruts all over the place, so if one tried to run straight down the hills, there was always the chance of a ski getting stuck in a rut and heading off in its own direction, while if one tried to snowplough to control speed, this didn't really work because the snow was so soft and deep. After falling at the bottom of the third steep hill, and struggling to keep control on other steep downhill, for the first time in my skiing career I had the thought that I might hurt myself! Not falling as such but, say, twisting a knee. I was thinking of stopping as I came to the end of the first lap and, when I failed to see the huge puddle and went through it up to my ankles, that decided it! It had taken me just over 24 minutes to complete 5 km; one fall, one submission but thankfully no knockout! I believe that, apart from when I dislocated and broke my shoulder in Russia, this was the only time I have ever abandoned a Masters race.

Further up, though, Martin was going great guns. A little slower than he had been in the skate race the previous day, but much, much higher up the field (ninth) and, at just 4.8 % of the winner's time, this shot him up to 11<sup>th</sup> on the BMCCSA All Time Best Men's table, making him the best Brit not to win a medal, and also by far the best ever British classic result; an excellent performance! A little behind, Lauro was the only Brit to both increase his speed compared to his skate time (something he had claimed to be able to do), and improve his percentage!

We had one lady racer, Bronwen, on this tough day. This was maybe not Bronwen's finest hour (and 22 minutes, 27.4 seconds proved it) because she only rarely classic skis, but she did slightly improve her percentage compared to the previous day's skate race. She had it all to do again, though, in the following day's skate race.

#### Men's M07-M09 15 km

Fastest	Bernhard Schneider	GER	M07	48:20.9	18.6 km/h		
9)	Martin Watkins	GBR	M07	50:41.0	17.8 km/h	4.8 %	(59 starters)
	Adam Pinney	GBR	M07	DNF			
1)	Daniele Vuerich	ITA	M08	48:24.9	18.6 km/h		
31)	Lauro Franzese	GBR	M08	1.06:49.2	13.5 km/h	38.0 %	(40 starters)

#### Ladies F01-F09 15 km

Fastest	Catrin Ingvarsson	SWE	F04	54:13.1	16.6 km/h		
8)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F04	1.22:27.4	10.9 km/h	52.1 %	(8 starters)

Tuesday – Ladies Day. If the previous day, middle-distance classic, had been (mainly) for the male members of the British Team, today was one for the ladies, because they were all racing. Steve, too, was out playing in his preferred skate discipline. Conditions did, indeed, look somewhat better at the start than they had been the previous day (at least the puddles seemed to have largely disappeared from the track), but there were some fairly stark figures:

Men				Ladies			
Category	Raced	DNF	DNS	Category	Raced	DNF	DNS
M01	15	1	0	F01	1	0	1
M02	10	0	3	F02	5	1	0
M03	18	2	1	F03	9	0	0
M04	22	1	0	F04	13	0	0
M05	42	2	6	F05	9	0	0
M06	36	2	6	F06	16	2	6
M07	51	0	9	F07	14	1	1
M08	45	3	12	F08	17	3	5
M09	36	2	4	F09	9	0	4
M10	21	2	7	F10	4	1	2
M11	9	1	2	F11	4		
M12	3	0	0				
<b>Totals</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>58</b>		<b>94</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>23</b>

If we look at these, we can see that 20 % of men and 24 % of ladies decided not to even start, 5 % and 9 % respectively did not finish. We might expect these figures for the long races in tricky conditions, but not a medium-distance race which, in addition, had been shortened from 30 km to 20 km for younger men!



**Kelley climbs to a popular cheering point – note the condition of the snow**



**Jacquie shows the importance of wide arms for stability when cornering, especially when pole (left) is broken**

First off was a large group of ladies, F01, F02 and F03 all being combined. Nerys seemed to be worryingly not near the front. This might have been down to her not having raced on snow for several years. She was, though, passing people in her group as she came round the first loops at the bottom of the initial hill. She was also going faster by about 1 km/h compared to her first race. Next off were Kelley and Bronwen. Kelley was feeling a lot better about this race than her first one, but was actually skiing a little slower for a worse percentage, and just missed out by 0.3 seconds in the race for 7<sup>th</sup> place. Bronwen admitted to not having rewaxed her skis and this probably accounted for her slightly slower speed.

Jacquie was racing in the F07 category, where she beat two of her rivals. Unfortunately, she snapped a pole early in the race and had to ski without a basket for quite a long way before Peter, I believe it was, came to her rescue. As before, though, I've put Jacquie into the F04 category where she belongs.

Allie and Steve were still circulating at this point. I shouted encouragement to Steve as he started his second lap and he had the energy for a friendly smile; we got no such response as we encouraged him up to the top of the last descent before the final climb up to the finish; conditions (which peaked at about +16 °C) had led to the tracks deteriorating badly as the race went on, and this looked like hard work for Steve. We were cheering for Allie at the same point, but she'd been struggling with a bad shoulder. After stopping for a rest of several minutes at the end of the first lap, she made a shortcut to avoid the hills on the second lap and pulled out as she passed us.

Up front, though, there were no problems for Nerys, who recorded an extremely strong performance to take silver medal. She was beaten by Eva Lehotska from Slovakia, who Martin recognised from the European Police Ski Championships in 2009. This prompted me to do a little research, whereupon I found that she'd once competed in a FIS cross-country race in Slovakia in 2002, coming home in 27<sup>th</sup> place behind the likes of Justyna Kowal-chick and Katerina Smutna, who both went on to fame at the highest level. No disgrace, then, in coming second to someone of her calibre. Almost the whole British Team went to cheer Nerys as she stepped up to collect her medal that evening, followed by a nice meal together in the centre of Seefeld.

#### **Medium distance free technique, Tuesday 21st March**

##### **Ladies F01-F09 15 km**

1)	Eva Lehotska	SLO	F02	50:03.4	18.0 km/h		
2)	Nerys Jones	GBR	F02	50:58.4	17.6 km/h	1.9 %	(6 starters)



Fastest	Sigrid Mutscheller	GER	F04	44:13.5	20.4 km/h		
8)	Kelley Haniver	GBR	F04	56:12.3	16.0 km/h	27.1 %	
13)	Bronwen Steiner	GBR	F04	1.13:36.6	12.2 km/h	66.5 %	
14)	Jacquie Barlow	GBR	F04	1.25:12.6	10.6 km/h	92.6 %	(14 starters)
1)	Patricia Pearce	CAN	F08	58:01.5	17.2 km/h		
	Allie Wilson	GBR	F08	DNF			(17 starters)

#### Men's M10-M13 10 km

Fastest	Andre Grob	FRA	M10	29:44.4	20.2 km/h		
16)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M10	44:53.5	13.4 km/h	50.1 %	(21 starters)

As I stood watching the races, though, the difficulty of the conditions was evident from the number of people I saw falling (in addition to the 20 % who had decided not to start). There were numerous tumbles on the first downhill after the start, at the bottom of the last long steep hill, and on the final downhill. There were also people walking around with more serious injuries; a few with wrists in slings and one with a bandaged face – not a very good advertisement for Masters racing. I think that it was Peter who commented that, when watching older skiers pause or stop before heading down the hills, it was like you could see them thinking “6 weeks in hospital, 6 months off work, ...”.



**Nerys in full flow towards second medal**



**Peter in action in the long classic race**

Wednesday was relay day but, for various reasons, we were not able to put any teams forward. The OC had told us that they would salt the whole track the previous night, prior to grooming (they had only salted the start area before that). What a miraculous difference that made! It might have slightly frozen overnight before the relays, but Jon, Bronwen and I, who went to watch the end of the relays, found a track totally transformed. The salt had made a miraculous transformation of 6-9 inches of slush into tracks which were firm and fast, with just a millimetre or so of soft snow on top, and this was despite a maximum temperature of 13 °C during the day. Things were finally looking positive for the two long-distance races!

Thursday dawned really rather warm, +8 to +10 °C depending on which weather forecast you looked at, with highs of +16 °C being predicted. The tracks, though, we still in fairly good, firm, condition; the salt applied prior to the relays still doing its work. I could not help noticing, though, that almost all snow except on the tracks and downhill slopes had now disappeared, including the large pile, maybe 2-3 feet deep when we first arrived, outside our apartment.



I won't give you the statistics in quite as much detail as before, but suffice it to say that there were 521 racers entered for this race but 156, i.e. 30 %, didn't start! In some of the larger age categories: M08, M09, M10 and F08, almost 50 % of entrants did not race. This is worrying for Masters racing in general, because people who do not feel able or willing to race may well give up the long and quite expensive commitment to the MWC and opt, instead, for other races such as loppets. Steve, our US member, joined the list of non-starters. I thought, initially, that it was because he did not fancy the conditions, but it turns out that he was ill, which led to him missing the long race and the banquet, too. Just as well that I did not circulate the story about him not fancying the conditions, because that would have been embarrassing, wouldn't it! But to come all the way from America for just two relatively short races does not seem very good value to me! I looked through 2 163 photos on the internet to find a photo of Steve but, I am afraid, with no success.

Anyway, moving rapidly on to the racing. The start of the youngest men had been brought forward by 30 minutes to try to provide the best conditions, so first off was Jon in the M04 class at 08:45, over four laps of the 7 km (probably more accurately 6 km) loop. He reported much better conditions than earlier in the week but, like many Brits before him, he found the fourth lap hardest of them all, especially as the surface started to break up. To show how much better the conditions had become, Jon's speed went up from 12.5 km/h in the medium distance race to 15.2 km/h but, sadly, the winner's speed went up even more, so his percentage was actually a little worse.

Battle was re-joined a little later in the F02 category between Eva and Nerys and, this time, things looked a lot more promising! As they started the second lap, Eva slowed for a drink and Nerys was maybe only 5 metres behind her. If only she could latch on, surely this was her Big Chance! But Nerys reported that Eva's skis seemed to be better than hers and, by the start of the final lap, the gap between them was more like 200 metres. No matter, two silver medals is no disgrace whatsoever, and there were hugs at the end between Nerys and Eva, which was a bit worrying, 'cos Eva's a well-built lass who could easily have squashed poor Nerys to death!

Some ladies were complaining of being short-changed in terms of distance and this is almost certainly true especially with the change in snow conditions. The total race time for the winners in the F02 and F04 categories (Nerys' and Kelley's groups) over a notional 20 km was only about 8 minutes longer than their times over a notional 15 km!

#### Long distance free technique, Thursday 23rd March

##### Mens M01-M06 30 km

Fastest	Toni Escher	GER	M01	54:01.8	28.9 km/h		
1)	Jan Holiga	SLO	M04	57:47.3	27.0 km/h		
24)	Jon Bowskill	GBR	M04	1.42:34.9	15.2 km/h	77.5 %	(24 starters)

##### Ladies F01-F06 20 km

1)	Eva Lehotska	SLO	F02	57:55.7	20.2 km/h		
2)	Nerys Jones	GBR	F02	58:53.4	19.8 km/h	1.6 %	(6 starters)
Fastest	Sigrid Mutscheller	GER	F04	52:45.7	22.2 km/h		
10)	Kelley Haniver	GBR	F04	1.06:49.1	17.5 km/h	26.7 %	(13 starters)

##### Ladies F07-F08 15 km

Fastest	Jan Guenter	USA	F09	37:02.4	24.3 km/h		
1)	Sirpa Paakkonen	FIN	F08	38:03.8	23.6 km/h		
9)	Allie Wilson	GBR	F08	55:19.7	16.3 km/h	45.4 %	(12 starters)

Friday, yippee, we arrived at the final day, and the last race, long distance classic. We woke to +6 °C with a peak temperature of +13 °C and rain predicted. The OC had promised to salt the tracks again prior to this race, and this is what they had done. But they had also suggested that the snow was so thin in some places that it might not be possible to cut classic tracks in all places.



A dangerous moment for Nerys, as Eva moves in to try to pop her!



Jon at full speed at the start of his long race. Luckily there were no flies for him to catch!

So when I arrived and looked at the tracks near the start, they looked eminently suitable for roller ski racing; hard, flat and icy, with people needing to double-pole because of the lack of cut tracks. I raised the issue of the iciness with our athletes, though and, while they accepted that conditions had been a little tricky on the first lap, they were not difficult and became easier as the race wore on.

Nonetheless, again a large number of participants decided that they didn't fancy the conditions: 41 % of men decided not to start (although there was at least one mistake; our friend Arne Stornor from Denmark, but who lives right by the race tracks in Lillehammer, most definitely started, because I saw him and cheered him on, but he was recorded as DNS), and 42 % of ladies didn't start, either. In fact, all three entrants in the F11 (80-85 years old) did not start, when they were all guaranteed medals!

Simon was off first and was going well, 2 km/h faster than his previous speed and on this way to his second-best percentage of the event. He had passed that key moment in the career of some of us British MWC skiers of having one person behind him, in his previous race and, this time, he overtook someone shortly after the start to repeat the feat. Peter was also going much faster and seemed to have a lot of people behind him at the start. He was hampered at first, though, as a German cut right across him down the first hill. Martin maintained his same finishing position, overtaking several people to again record 9<sup>th</sup>, although with a slightly worst percentage than his best. And then finally Lauro, putting up his best performance of the whole event, his best percentage and plenty of people behind him; he was less than 3 minutes slower than his time over 15 km, showing how much the salt has done. And that was it, racing over for MWC 2023!

#### Long distance classic technique, Friday 24<sup>th</sup> March

##### Men's M01-M06 30 km

Fastest	Bruno Debertolis	ITA	M03	1.01:44.3	25.3 km/h		
13)	Simon Bate	GBR	M03	1.49:20.6	14.3 km/h	77.1 %	(14 starters)
1)	Gian Jörger	CH	M06	1.05:28.1	23.8 km/h		
21)	Peter Drew	GBR	M06	1.32:10.3	16.9 km/h	40.7 %	(24 starters)

##### Men's M07-M09 20 km

Fastest	Yann Engek	CH	M07	51:27.3	22.7 km/h		
9)	Martin Watkins	GBR	M07	55:11.0	21.2 km/h	7.2 %	(28 starters)

1)	Gianpaolo Englaro	ITA	M08	52:18.9	22.3 km/h		
22)	Lauro Franzese	GBR	M08	1.09:34.4	16.8 km/h	33.0 %	(29 starters)



**Lauro powers his way to his best performance in his longest race**



**The whole British team (except Simon) poses after Nerys' first medal**

That evening it *chucked* it down as we made our way to the banquet, which was good except for the fact that we had to wait more than an hour for the first food to be delivered. Surely this rain was the end of skiing in Seefeld for 2023? No, apparently it snowed quite heavily the week after we left!

So, in summary, I believe that the whole BMCCSA team (with the possible exception of Steve, on his sickbed) enjoyed themselves, and the first-timers no doubt learnt a lot. There are messages for the WMA, though. Even accepting that 2022-2023 was an exceptionally bad year in the Alps, we have to consider statistics only from recent years and not long-term averages. When we do that, we see that 'bad years' are more common than we realise: very little snow in Rovaniemi in 2007, tracks very nearly wiped out at the end of Autrans 2008, Pillerseetal almost cancelled in 2014, very warm conditions in Klosters in 2017 (where we will return for the Masters in 2025), a general lack of snow in Minneapolis in 2018 and Seefeld in 2023.

We should never have been in Seefeld this late in the year (conditions were much better in February), and the number of people not starting their races was a worrying sign for the WMA. Salting the tracks made a huge difference, which raises the question of why the tracks were not salted sooner. There are some concerns over the environmental effects of chloride, sodium and magnesium in salt, and I have no idea of what the cost implications are of having to use 50-100 kg of salt per kilometre of track. In the end, the Seefeld organisers probably did their best in the circumstances, but they should not really have been put in such a situation in the first place. Anyway, let us finish with some general photos of the event.



**Oldest lady competitor, and gold medallist, Saeki Katsumi of Japan, 87 years young!**



**The rather ropey, dirty snow conditions up towards the high point of the course**





Should we maybe move the start forward by 50 metres?



How many Austrians does it take to change a light bulb or host an MWC? About 60



That's Jon, 4017, left and Simon, 3014, right starting their races. Now come on, boys, this is just double poling, that's the easy bit 😊!



Snow's a little sparse, isn't it?



Martin pointing to where he'd stood, World Champs, in 1985