

Masters World Championships – Seefeld 2003



Our cover-girl this month is Nicola Walker. Nicola appears in a fetching red, white and blue number and is seen here competing in the 15 km classic event. Nicola's other interests include apple sauce



Our cover-bloke this month is Norman Clark, demonstrating this photographer's ability to capture people not demonstrating quite their best technique. See below for more details of this and a full report of the Masters World Championships in Seefeld



Our inside-cover girl this month is Irene Chawko, looking apparently stationary and clearly happy but, in fact, travelling at full speed in the 15 km ladies classic race in Seefeld



And just to prevent me writing anything until the third page, here's Alasdair Wilson charging up one of Seefeld's smaller hills on his way to starting the last lap of the 45 km skating race

They've come close to cancelling MWCs before now (many people remember the debacle of Grindelwald), but the omens did not look good for this event for quite some time. During two weeks around Christmas there was no snow at all, and on Monday of the week before the event was due to start, the track was, from all reports, little more than a sheet of ice. This did not deter, however, a total of 1064 people from parting with \$150 to take part at what is surely, along with the likes of Lillehammer, Lahti and Holmenkollen, one of the spiritual homes of nordic skiing. Luckily, the snow started to arrive just as we did, and we probably landed up with an additional 300 mm by the end of the event, not all of which was welcome.

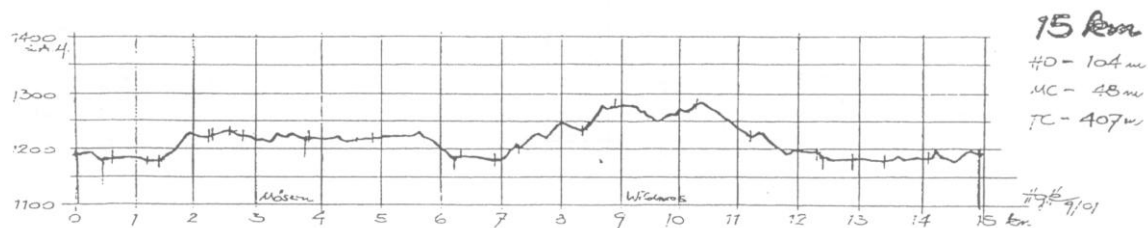
An entry of 1064 would, in principle, have made this quite a large event, but there were a lot of DNSs throughout the week and, although I don't have any accurate figures, I would guess that there were about 950 actually taking part. The largest team, as might be expected because they were, after all, the 'hosts', was Germany with 277 people (don't get political and ask why Germany was hosting an event in Austria), followed by Russia with 146 and Austria with 126. Britain came in 20th with 8 entered racers, just behind the likes of Australia (10), Denmark (11) and Spain (11). However, if you count BMCCSA members, our total goes up to 11. Disappointing were the USA, with only 20, and Canada with 14, but maybe people from there still aren't happy travelling.

First to arrive from GB, and fresh from the Marcialonga, was Chris Virgo, who arrived on the Monday before the event. Adam Pinney, Irene Chawko and George Gabriel arrived on Wednesday. When we went out on Thursday morning, we found the tracks in fairly good condition, snow wise, although rather poorly signposted and, in one or two places, with lots of gravel mixed in. This latter proved rather unpopular with (a) me (my brand new Rossignol classics getting gouged on their very first outing) and (b) some Russians who, instead of taking the British line of saying "Tut" and getting on with it, were seen waving damaged skis about in the race office, demanding huge sums (not forthcoming) of compensation.

Things could have got off to a rather awkward start, when we discovered that Nicola Walker and Chris Virgo's entries had not, apparently, been received. At first the organisers were unmoved, but then 'Rocket' Bob Frampton, hero of the hour, strode onto the scene and all was well (one of the advantages of having someone from the BMCCSA on the organising committee). So grateful were we for this that Bob, who was not racing, would have received a year's free years membership, had he not made the tactical mistake of paying just before the offer was made!

Norman Clark joined us on Thursday, and Alasdair Wilson on Friday, giving plenty of time to discover the tracks. Nicola Walker and Peter Gurney arrived on Saturday, so had to race without having seen the course. This proved (at least for the 'main' 15 km circuit) to be hard but fair. The first downhill after the start was interesting, especially in flat light, but didn't actually claim many victims, and the track then continued fairly flat for about 1 km, before the first of the steep climbs. It then wiggled on fairly easily (with one quite steep, curving downhill) until about the 5 km point, where it started a long and largely unbroken climb up to the high point at about 8 kms. It was, at least, possible to get a good rhythm going up, though. The high point was deceiving, because although the track then started downhill, there was a number of short, sharp uphill before it rejoined the meadows (the ladies and older men's track, and thankfully our track for the 45 km, cut this section out).

One of the features of Seefeld, as anyone who's skied there will know, is that the track descends in a series of 180° turns (U-bends as they became known to Irene, adopting my terminology, although we all know that the real term for such corners is 'foul water waste trap'). These were not difficult (it was perfectly possible to control entry speed), but repeated snow-ploughing had built up rather large banks. Luckily the organisers agreed to deal with this (in fact, this was one of the good features of this event; the organisers took account of, and acted on, all suggestions for improvement made in the Team Captains meetings), and stabilised the corners with 'snow-cement', which certainly helped. After descending to the meadows, the track then continued more or less flat for about 1 km, before a final, and rather unpleasant, two (or three on the easier track) short, sharp climbs up to the finish. For those of you interested, below is the profile of the 15 km 'A' course.



So much for the background, let's get on to the racing, which started with the 30 km freestyle for Bert Scholten and me (20 km for Patrick o'Connor and John Murray, both skiing for the US, and Norman). This proved fairly uneventful by all reports; the tracks were hard and not too flat (personally I would have preferred them to be a bit better groomed, but I suspect that they were left hard to promote fast times), and although the first downhill proved a bit tricky because it was difficult to see the track edges, there were no falls. Bert was complaining about a cold before the start, and was coughing like nobody's business at the beginning, to the extent that I thought it worthwhile going past him up the first hill. He didn't appreciate this gesture, though, and sped up, but still only finishing 8 minutes behind him in his 'speciality' was not too bad. When the results first came out, we feared that John had established a new BMCCSA record, by being the first person to 'win' over 1000 FIS points ($\% \text{ of winner's time} \times 6$). Luckily, this proved not to be the case. There is also a rumour that he is being ostracised by the US team. Well, I can tell you, we don't turn our skiers into ostriches, we welcome them with open arms, so from now on, John, you're welcome to compete for a decent and caring team.

The following day saw the 30 km classic race, involving Irene and Nicola (doing 15 kms in the ladies category), and Alasdair, Chris, Peter and George for the blokes. The temperature was apparently -0.1°C and waxing might have been a problem, but I heard no complaints about this. Having said that, the conditions were quite tough, and Peter was the only one of the male Brits who got to the finish, George in particular complaining about a long-standing back injury. No such difficulty affected Nicola or Irene, although Nicola complained about being tired from recent British Army Championship racing and Irene complained about not really liking classic. However, better results were to come from both in future days.

The very next day saw the 10 km in both styles, freestyle in the morning and classic in the afternoon (this is one disadvantage of the 'new' WM structure, the obligation to do two or three races on two or three days). Bert, Norman, John, Nicola and Irene were all signed up for the freestyle race, while Alasdair, Chris, George, Peter, Patrick and I entering the classic version. John, no doubt tired after the 30 kms, decided not to start this race, as did Peter who was suffering from a bout of asthma, but everyone else seemed to enjoy themselves. Nicola, in particular, was quite well up the field in her race and, at the end, was claiming that she could have overtaken a few more people. But sorry, Nicola, it's deeds not words which count here, and any such claims need to be validated on the field of battle (I think, though, that what she meant was that she could have overtaken more people had she not been so tired, which we can accept).

By the time the start of the classic race arrived, the temperature was around 0°C and waxing was proving tricky. Although a Rex 0 to -1°C stick did the job very well in the end, by the time we'd settled on that there was no time to do a proper warm-up, which I'd planned. This, combined with a whole morning of increasing nervousness, and because this was the race I was hoping to do well in, led to me starting much too fast (Alasdair also, apparently, had the same problem). By the time I got to the long hill, therefore, the heart was going flat out and the breathing was as fast as I could go. As a consequence, I didn't think that I went up the hill quite as quickly as I'd planned, but the finishing times were none the less satisfactory for both of us, and these things are, with the little race experience we have though, always difficult to judge. George and Chris were, I think, both pleased and relieved to get a race finish under their belts this time.

Following this flurry of racing activity, we then had something of a slack time for several days, in particular because we were not able to put forward any relay teams (I raised the question, in the annual WMA meeting, of whether mixed-nation *hors concours* teams should be allowed, and whether each nation should be allowed to put forward more than one team in each age category, but these did not seem to be widely supported. A shame, really, because many relay categories had very few teams in, and these being only from the larger nations. I have a feeling that relays might, at some stage, be dropped from the programme altogether). This lull, though, allowed one coaching session to take place, when I went out with Chris, Alasdair and George, and for the social side to take off. One evening we were joined at our hotel by Patrick, very much taken by Irene's eyes and commenting that "I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow" (*Cor, blimey, a bit of culture at last. Sir Henry B.-S.*). Sadly, he was too late with this, because Jane Austen has already put these words into the mouth of Lizzy Bennett in *Pride and Prejudice*, some 190 years earlier.

Friday was the 45 km skating race for Bert and Alasdair, Irene and Norman doing the shorter 30 km version (John, Peter and Nicola had all left by then). For some reason we had a sudden and short-lived temperature inversion for the start of this race, with temperatures in the morning down to -16 °C. This led to a need for a bit of last minute re-waxing, because the weather forecast (which actually hadn't been much good throughout the week) hadn't predicted anything nearly as cold as this. This proved to be Norman's least good race of the week (although he'd left before I had a chance to talk to him about it), whereas Irene was very pleased with her time. For Alasdair, this was the first time he'd skated over such a distance, and I think that he found it rather tough. On the other hand, he maintained fairly good technique right to the end, and I think that it's only a question of doing more long skating races before he will improve.

And so to the last race of the week, the 45 km classic for Chris and I, 30 kms for Patrick. We'd had a lot of snow overnight, and temperatures around 0 °C were certain to make waxing tough. I'd developed a plan, which was to cover the wax of the day with a thin layer of something slightly harder (to prevent icing), but lost my nerve just before the start, and thought that I could get it completely wrong. So I got the Toko professionals to do it. They, I'm pleased to say, managed to get it completely wrong on my behalf, to the extent that I had so much ice on the bottom of my skis after the start that I could have walked down the first hill. Then followed three hours of much the same, but at least the problems must have been similar for many others, given the number of fir branches spread around the track (and the number of people I saw skating). I was still hopeful of beating 3 hours, but just missed out on the last lap. A shame really, because I thought that, with the right wax, I might have been able to keep up with a few others.

Men's M01-M06 30km freestyle, Sunday 2nd February

Fastest	A. Di Gregorio	ITA	M01	1.11:04.3	
1)	J.F. Duchampt	FRA	M03	1.13:17.6	
49)	B. Scholten	NED	M03	1.38:51.0	34.9 %
51)	A. Pinney	GB	M03	1.46:12.9	44.9 % (56 starters)

Men's M07-M11 15 km freestyle, Sunday 2nd February

1)	A. Schuwey	SUI	M07	37:50.7	(Fastest)
73)	P. O'Connor	IRE	M07	57:11.4	51.1 %
74)	J. Murray	GB/USA	M07	1.21:25.0	115.1 % (74 starters)
1)	E. Brangenbergg	GER	M09	44:37.1	
16)	N. Clark	GB	M09	54:16.6	21.6 % (21 starters)

Men's M01-M06 30 km classic, Monday 3rd February

Fastest	G. Englaro	ITA	M04	1.22:44.2	
	A. Wilson	GB	M04	DNF	

1)	P. Virtakoivu	FIN	M05	1.26:14.9	
39)	P. Gurney	GB	M05	2.19:49.3	62.1 %
	C. Virgo	GB	M05	DNF	(47 starters)
1)	N. Kharitoov	RUS	M06	1.29:31.2	
	G. Gabriel	GB	M06	DNF	

Ladies F01-F06 15 km classic, Monday 3rd February

1)	E. Kashirskaja	RUS	F02	43:51.3	
9)	N. Walker	GB	F02	56:48.6	29.5 % (9 starters)
1)	E. Bitchougova	RUS	F03	40:26.9	(Fastest)
10)	I. Chawko	GB	F03	1.09:17.5	71.3 % (10 starters)

Men's M01-M11 10 km freestyle, Tuesday 4th February

Fastest	P. Barzaghi	ITA	M01	24:40.0	
1)	G. Vanzetta	ITA	M03	25:14.5	
42)	B. Scholten	NED	M03	33:34.3	33.0 % (49 starters)
1)	H. Walch	GER	M07	28:52.9	
62)	J. Murray	GB/USA	M07	58:16.3	101.8 % (63 starters)
1)	K. Dotzler	GER	M09	32:12.7	
15)	N. Clark	GB	M09	41:33.7	29.0 % (20 starters)

Ladies F01-F11 10 km freestyle, Tuesday 4th February

Fastest	E. Vedeneeva	RUS	F01	28:08.6	
1)	I. Rodkina	RUS	F02	29:20.0	
18)	N. Walker	GB	F02	37:07.7	26.6 % (20 starters)
1)	E. Aigro	EST	F03	31:27.0	
11)	I. Chawko	GB	F03	41:27.7	31.8 % (11 starters)

Men's M01-M11 10 km classic, Tuesday 4th February

Fastest	A. Fedorov	RUS	M01	25:34.3	
1)	V. Koshkon	RUS	M03	26:05.7	
32)	A. Pinney	GB	M03	37:07.0	42.2 % (35 starters)
1)	G. Englaro	ITA	M04	26:44.9	
41)	A. Wilson	GB	M04	39:23.5	47.3 % (43 starters)
1)	P. Virtakoivu	FIN	M05	28:02.4	
60)	C. Virgo	GB	M05	49:24.5	76.2 % (64 starters)
1)	N. Kharitonov	RUS	M06	29:33.1	
47)	G. Gabriel	GB	M06	46:57.3	58.9 % (48 starters)
1)	O. Kvaale	NOR	M07	29:57.2	
62)	P. o'Connor	IRE	M07	43:11.1	44.2 % (67 starters)

Men's M09-M11 30 km freestyle, Friday 7th February

1)	E. Brangenberg	GER	M09	1.13:12.8	
11)	N. Clark	GB	M09	1.34:30.2	29.1 % (19 starters)

Ladies F01-F06 30 km freestyle, Friday 7th February

Fastest	E. Vedeneeva	RUS	F01	1.27:44.7	
1)	I. Rodkina	RUS	F02	1.29:09.5	
12)	I. Chawko	GB	F02	2.22:18.1	49.8 % (13 starters)

Men's M01-M06 45 km freestyle, Friday 7th February

Fastest	A. Di Gregorio	ITA	M01	1.44:35.9	
1)	S. Hofstaetter	AUT	M03	1.50:19.5	
35)	B. Scholten	NED	M03	2.25:38.9	32.0 % (40 starters)
1)	E. Haas	GER	M04	1.55:29.5	
40)	A. Wilson	GB	M04	3.07:07.8	62.0 % (42 starters)

Men's M07-M08 30 km classic, Saturday 8th February

1)	O. Kvaale	NOR	M07	1.29:32.8	
38)	P. o'Connor	IRE	M07	2.10:42.3	46.0 % (46 starters)

Men's M01-M06 45 km classic, Saturday 8th February

Fastest	C. Baldauf	AUT	M01	1.53:11.2	
1)	B. Schneider	GER	M03	2.00:43.5	
20)	A. Pinney	GB	M03	3.02:31.0	51.2 % (23 starters)
1)	P. Virtakoivu	FIN	M05	1.57:32.0	
	C. Virgo	GB	M05	DNF	

Some final Seefeld thoughts and reflections

One of the interesting characters to appear in Seefeld was a good Russian skier (Gerard Evans has since met up with him in Russia) named Vladimir, who would have been skiing but did not get his entry form in on time. He was therefore busy selling some good quality carbon fibre poles for £30 (at least one of the British team bought some) and some rather more dubious liquid glide wax. How shall I describe it ...? Let's just say that if you changed from Lloyds Bank to the Sperm Bank, what he had in his test tube was what you might have with you after you'd made a withdrawal. This is some sort of liquid high-fluoro wax (other companies offer it) which is simply wiped onto the base of the ski. Vladimir was trying to tell us that nothing else would work for the British Biathlon team at the World Championships in Russia. At first he was trying to sell it, but in the end he gave it away to Bert, so we wait eagerly for Bert's test report, with a view to procuring some before the WMC in Russia in 2005.

So was Seefeld the best WMC ever, as the organisers were aiming for? Difficult to say, really, because others (Kuopio, Kiruna) have also been good. Certainly there were nice tracks, and it's always better to have the tracks near the accommodation. I would raise two small criticisms, which are, firstly, that the classic tracks should have been cut during non-racing days and, secondly, that the start-finish stadium was very spectator-unfriendly and, as a consequence, there were hardly any spectators. From a racing point of view, many Brits had good races, but the 'magical' 30 % of the winner's time proved elusive for all but Nicola and Norman. On the whole, though, yes, this was one of the better events, and now all that remains is for Lillehammer to be even better. Get training, and we'll see you there.

Some other images of the MWC



Super-sexy British skier (“*phwar!*” A.A. Pervert) and Irene Chawko (“*oops.*” A.A. Pervert) (“*Shurely shum mistake.*” Ed.) discuss post-race tactics



Most of the British Team listen intently as Norman Clark (left) reads a bedtime story. Others seen here are, from left: Adam Pinney, Chris Virgo, John and Jeanette MacDonald (Australia), Anne Murray, Irene Chawko, George Gabriel, Alasdair Wilson and Peter Gurney



Chris Virgo looks stable at the start of the long sweeping downhill



Unknown skier has photo taken with two British Champions

And that's not all

I thought that I was the only one entitled to take the p*** out of British Masters skiers, but Norman Clark here demonstrates that he, too, can be a bit of a take-the-p*** artist with his thoughts of Seefeld.



Subtract 8 minutes for reading the signs and that works out at a respectable 5.25 minutes per km



The new BMCCSA ski suit



I propose a 9:00 am start, that'll get the Brits home before dark



Incredibly generous, they keep showering us with all these FIS points



Seems you might have missed the wax today, Adam



Irene, fed up of working in TV, seeks a career change