

# 1990 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS AND BOBSLEIGH CENTENARY IN ST-MORITZ



*The Swiss Olympic team in Sarajevo in 1984 : Silvio Giobellina, Heinz Stettler, Urs Salzmann, Rico Freiermuth, bronze medallists.*

It is no accident that bobsleigh's 100 year jubilee was celebrated in the context of the 1990 World Championships from 29th January to 11th February in St-Moritz. The sports and tourist centre in the Upper Engadine is not just the birthplace of bob racing, but has also been the setting for roughly a third of all the 55 previous world title competitions.

## BACK IN ST-MORITZ

Indeed, St-Moritz's was responsible for the organization of the 56th World Championships in 1990 for the 18th time. In all, the ice channel between St-Moritz and Celerina has been used for 28 world title races, 13 with the boblet and 15 with the four man bob. Even though the latest bob runs to be built were conceived almost entirely on the drawing board and are entirely artificially iced, the time-honoured Olympic bob run at St-Moritz has lost none of its fascination. On the contrary, victories on the labyrinth of curves between St-Moritz Badrutt Park and the Cresta finishing area in Celerina which place the highest demands on pilots, are still rated highly on the international bob circuit. What is more, despite continual friction between national and international federations, most of the Swiss sports public has been and remains sympathetic to its bobsledders. It has been primarily the Swiss with the racing sledges who have won the coveted medals, particularly in Olympic competitions and world championships - and this at a time before they had become blasé about them thanks to the exploits of the Swiss ski aces.

At the 1990 bob championships in St-Moritz, the Swiss had the advantage of competing in their own country. However, the best foreign teams are particularly motivated in the ice corridor going down to Celerina.

## 84 SWISS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP MEDALS

In the overall statistics of the bob World Championships medal table, with a total of 314 distinctions (156 in two-man, 158 in four-man bob) between 1924 and 1989, Switzerland is clearly in the lead. The yield includes 84 medals, comprising 38 with the boblet and 46 in the four-man bob. Particularly for gold medals, the Swiss are unchallenged at the top with a total of 32 (14 two-man, 18 four-man). This lead is maintained for both silver medals, with a total of 25 (12/13) and for bronze, with 27, comprising 12 boblet and 15 four-man bob medals.

# HISTORY

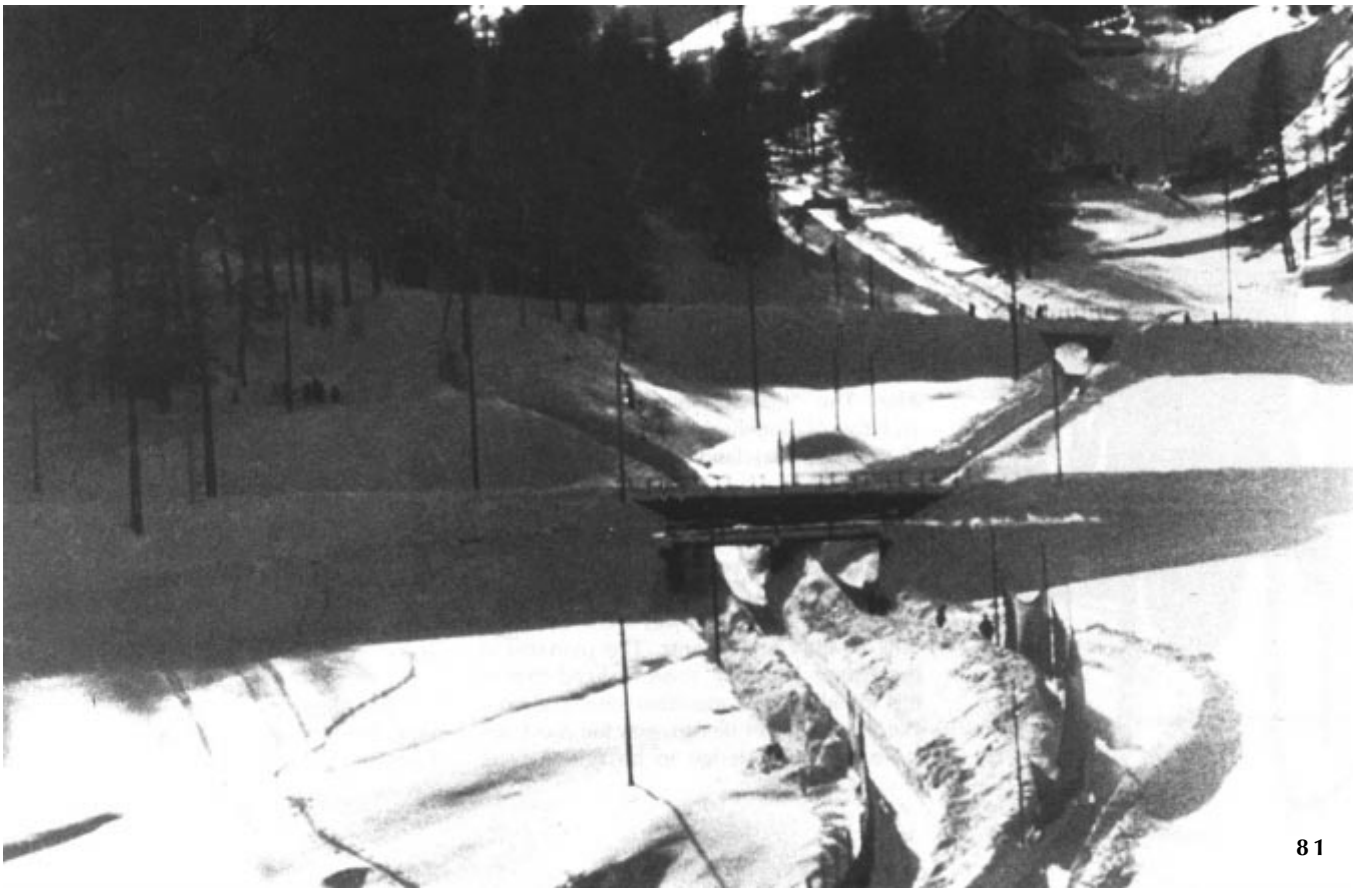
In recent years, Switzerland's strongest rival has been the German Democratic Republic, which after years of research and tests made its sensational entry into the world championship trials in 1976. Despite the strong GDR showing, over the last four years, the Swiss have headed the medal table: Switzerland 11 (5 gold/4 silver/2 bronze); GDR 9 (2/3/4); Soviet Union 3 (1/2); and Austria (-/1/-). Only these four countries have succeeded in breaking into the medal table. A particular achievement is the consecutive series of wins since 1986

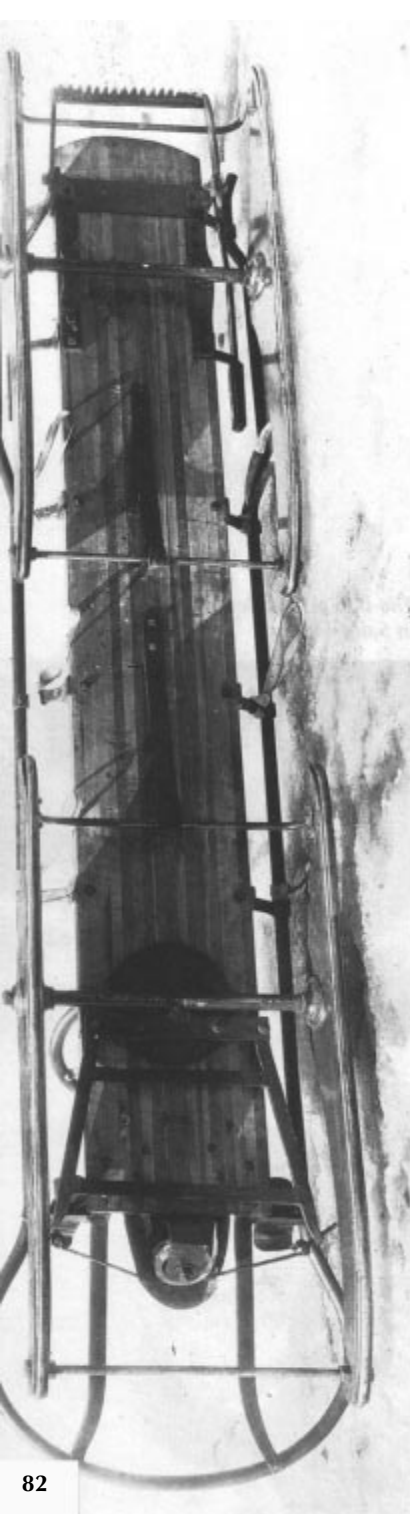
by the Swiss four-man bob team (including the Olympic Games in Calgary) in Königsee (FRG).

## **ST-MORITZ LEADS THE WAY ON BOB INITIATIVES**

With centenaries, the exact date of birth is often unclear or totally unknown. In the case of the "100 years of bobsleigh" however, the birthplace may safely be said to be St-Moritz. For it was here that true bob

*The bob and skeleton track  
in Saint-Moritz.*





racing began and has almost uninterrupted-ly been nurtured and supported until the present day.

The major part of all the initiatives involving the racing team sport in the ice channel have spread all over the world from St-Moritz.

## FROM SLEDGE TO BOB

Long before mankind had invented the wheel, without which life today would be unimaginable, the sledge was well-known as the oldest artificial means of transportation. The single-runner toboggan served Indians for transporting loads both in winter and in summer. But also in the Alps, the twin-runner sledge has been used for work purposes, like bringing in the hay, for centuries.

It was the sledge which gave the creative impetus to the joys of winter sports. Kings and wealthy noblemen had magnificent sledges built which were pulled by horses. The ordinary man adapted according to his position (or the size of his purse), and used modest vehicles for sledging, which enjoyed great popularity even before the expansion of skiing. After a temporary decline, a notable resurgence of interest occurred, and as early as the second half of the 18th century, the "Kessler" make of sledge, a massive wooden construction with rings on an iron pole (which jingled merrily), was being produced in the German-Speaking part of the Alps. The "Kjälker" followed in Norway, and the "Grindelwaldner" and "Davoser" sledges in Switzerland.

The first mention of an official sledge race was on 12th February 1883, when 21 participants from seven nations rode down the 12 km of road from Davos to Klosters. The first ice sledge run was the Cresta Run, built in 1884 in St-Moritz. The pioneers in the Upper Engadine soon realized that in this ice channel a modified steel skeleton, like the Canadian design, was the most suitable. The first sledge to be ridden lying



face down (a "clipper sled" called "America") is supposed to have been brought to Davos in 1887 by the New Yorker Lester P. Child. Immediately afterwards in St-Moritz, Major William Bulpett had a bare steel skeleton built without wooden side slats.

## BOBSLEIGH PIONEERS

The next stage of development led to the bob. In the winter of 1889/90, the New Yorker John Whitney in Davos, and at the same time Wilson Smith from Philadelphia in St-Moritz, took two small American sledges made from steel tubes, and linked them together with cords and a board. In the Upper Engadine a garden rake was used as a brake! The limited steerability of the front section represented progress, and produced faster speeds. The trial runs impressed the St-Moritz blacksmith Christian Mathis, who built his first bobsleigh in 1891. This cost more than one hundred times less than today's models! As for the term "bobsleigh", this derived from the two words "bob" (the jerky forward movement of the upper body), and "sleigh".

In America, a document recently appeared whose certificate of authenticity dates it at "around 1880". The drawing

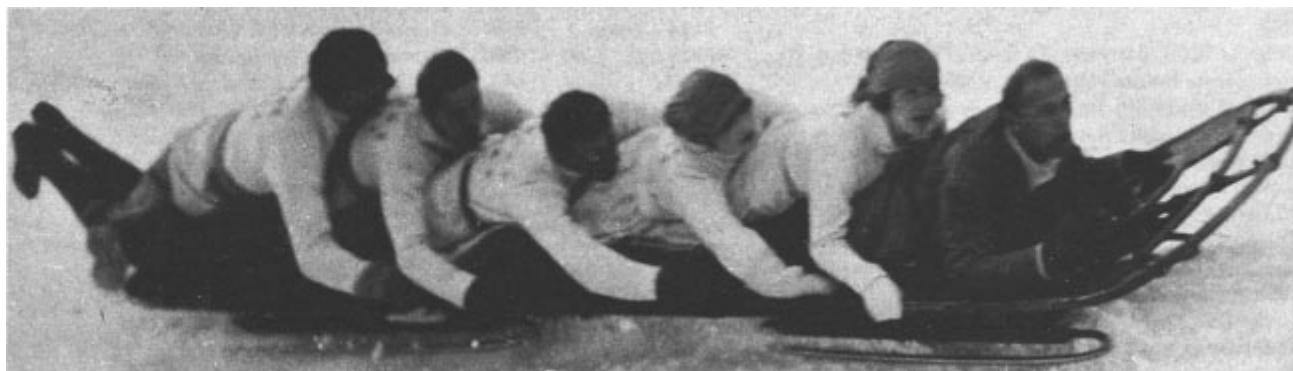
**SITES OF WORLD BOB  
CHAMPIONSHIPS  
UP TO 1989**

<i>Place</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Two-man bob</i>	<i>Four-man bob</i>	<i>Total</i>
St-Moritz	Switzerland	13	15	28
Lake Placid	USA	8	8	16
Cortina-d'Ampezzo	Italy	8	8*	16
Garmisch-Partenkirchen	FRG	4	6	10
Igls/Innsbruck	Austria	4	3	7
Cervinia/Breuil	Italy	3	3	6
Alpe-d'Huez/Grenoble	France	3	2	5
Königssee	FRG	2	2	4
Oslo	Norway	1	1	2
Sapporo (Mount Teine)	Japan	1	1	2
Sarajevo	Yugoslavia	1	1	2
Calgary	Canada	1	1	2
Engelberg	Switzerland	1	-	1
Oberhof	FRG	1	-	1
Schreiberhau	FRG	1	-	1
Caux/Montreux	Switzerland	-	1	1
Chamonix	France	-	1	1
17 different locations		52	53	105

\* discontinued after the fatal crash by Toni Pensberger

<i>By country</i>	<i>Two-man bob</i>	<i>Four-man bob</i>	<i>Total</i>
Switzerland	14	16	30
Italy	11	11	22
FRG	8	8	16
USA	8	8	16
Austria	4	3	7
France	3	3	6
Norway	1	1	2
Japan	1	1	2
Yugoslavia	1	1	2
Canada	1	1	2
10 different countries	52	53	105

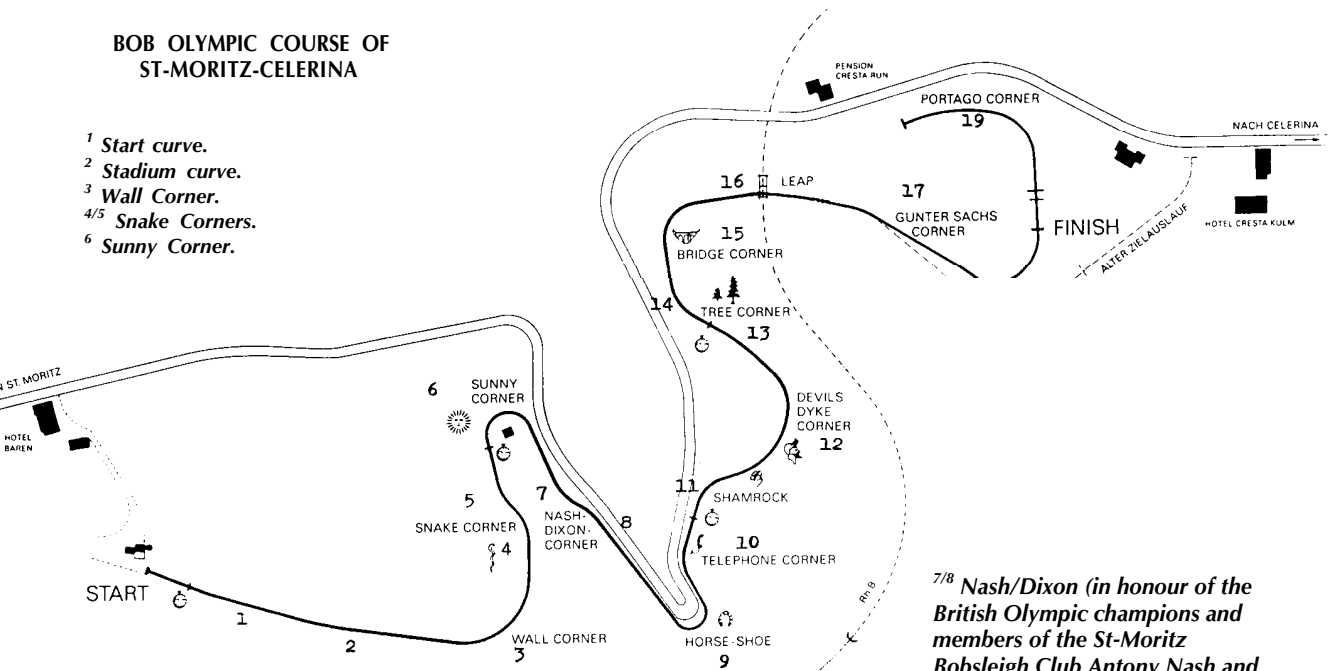
**When "stomach downwards" was popular (and still allowed) : in the twenties at 'Sunny Corner', six person bob with two women aboard.**



# HISTORY

## BOB OLYMPIC COURSE OF ST-MORITZ-CELERINA

- 1 Start curve.
- 2 Stadium curve.
- 3 Wall Corner.
- 4/5 Snake Corners.
- 6 Sunny Corner.



- 7/8 Nash/Dixon (in honour of the British Olympic champions and members of the St-Moritz Bobsleigh Club Antony Nash and Robin Dixon).
- 9 Horse shoe.
- 10 Telephone Corner (the very first course telephone was installed on this corner).
- 11 Shamrock.
- 12 Devil's Dyke Corner.
- 13 Tree curve (also called "Nameless").
- 14 Tree Corner.
- 15 Bridge Corner.
- 16 Leap.
- 17 Gunter Sachs Corner (named after the president of the St-Moritz Bobsleigh Club and promoter of bobsleigh sports).
- 18 Martineau (named after Major Hubert Martineau, President of the St-Moritz Bobsleigh Club from 1922 to 1969. Martineau died in 1976.
- 19 Portago Corner (run-out curve after the finish, already called this at the time of the former line of the course. The title was chosen to honour the dead bob pilot and motor racing driver Marques Alfonso de Portago (Spain).

### Technical Data

Start at 1852 m above sea level  
(by the druid stone, one of the oldest monuments in Grisons, in the Badrutt Park, St-Moritz  
50 m  
Sunny Corner  
Horse Shoe  
Tree  
Finish at 1723 m above sea level at Celerina  
(In Celerina before rebuilding, end 1980) :  
Steepest gradient : 16%  
Average gradient : 8,2%

Technical Data	Total Distance m	Length of section m
Start at 1852 m above sea level	0	0
(by the druid stone, one of the oldest monuments in Grisons, in the Badrutt Park, St-Moritz)	50	50
50 m	476	426
Sunny Corner	882	406
Horse Shoe	1124	242
Tree	1585	461
Finish at 1723 m above sea level at Celerina	1567	443
(In Celerina before rebuilding, end 1980) :		
Steepest gradient : 16%		
Average gradient : 8,2%		

Total bends : 19  
6 main turns : 3-6-9-12-15-18  
10 bends : 4/5-7/8-10-11-14-16-17-19 (after the finish)  
3 curves : 1-2-13

The Martineau finishing bend (formerly R = 40 m, length 92 m) was redesigned for the winter season 1980/81 and 1981/82. In the winter 1981/82 season, the Bariloche Corner, created for the season 1980/81 (then curve 18) was not used. Bariloche is twinned with St-Moritz.

shows bobs with twin section steering, rather like bogies with runners. The caption reads "sled sliding in Albany". This refers to what is today the capital of the state of New York on the Hudson River. Even so, this will not really damage the pioneer status of St-Moritz, as nothing was heard or written about regular bob racing in North America at this early stage - unlike in the Upper Engadine. As early as the winter of 1896/7 the "St-Moritz Bobsleigh Club" was founded, after the bobsleighters had for five years been in a sub-section of the "St-Moritz Tobogganing Club".

### **ST-MORITZ'S BOB RUN 87 YEARS OLD**

The board of the "St-Moritz Bobsleigh Club", made up of five English members (including the two ladies Mrs Shepley and Miss Cousins), passed its first statutes at the general meeting on 21st December 1897. On the subject of ladies, initially it was specified that for races, teams should include two ladies as participants. From minutes of

meetings and documents from before the turn of the century, it can be established that the first ice run for "bobbing" was built in the winter of 1895/96. Until then, bob races had been on the road from St-Moritz to Celerina. Later, the bends of the Julier, Bernina (Monte Bello-Morteratsch) and Albula (Preda-Bergün) passes were considered. The idea of constructing a bob run away from public roads was put into practice in 1903 - naturally with the opening of the bob run from St-Moritz to Celerina. And the world famous ice channel is still on the same area of land today! Obviously, new findings in bobsleigh sport have necessitated repeated modifications and remodelling.

At the outset an exclusive holiday hobby for a wealthy few, bobsleigh has passed through a transition phase dominated by the heavyweight giants, to become an extremely demanding top level sport practised by highly trained athletes. For in the ice labyrinth a barrage of blows has to be borne, and enormous gravitational forces endured in the bends.

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***A bend always considered one of the key points in the Olympic bob track at St-Moritz, the world famous 'Sunny Corner'.***

