

The Inferno is the World's Oldest and Longest Amateur Downhill Ski Race

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Every year in January, novices and experts alike flocked to the beautiful Swiss resort of [Mürren](#). This gorgeous, chocolate-box village with an authentic Alpine atmosphere is home to the mother of all downhill racing.

The Inferno is the oldest and longest amateur downhill race there is. Whether you're a full-time serious adrenaline junkie or you're simply craving an exhilarating break from the office, [head to the mountains](#) for this notorious competition.

It's Longer Than The Olympic Run



You probably can't quite fathom the proportions of this downhill race.

You might be picturing something amateurish, a modestly sized run that anyone can just cruise down. Think again. **We're talking extremely long.** And incredibly fast. If you're blessed with full snow cover, it's a journey of nearly 10 miles (or 14.9 km). This invigorating experience involves dropping 1990 vertical metres.

To put it into perspective – that's nearly 5 times the length of the 2014 men's downhill course at the Winter Olympic Games.

It Lasts Between 13 And 45 Minutes

With 1,800 entrants hurtling down at 12 second intervals, there can be up to 100 racers on the course at any one time.

If the full course is open, a competent skier is expected to complete it in about 30 minutes, with the winner coming in at just under 15 minutes.

There are also now over 400 entrants for the combination race, with the cross-country taking you around the village three times on the Wednesday evening and the giant slalom on the Thursday morning.

It's Older Than You, And Me



Mürren was a little farming village tucked away in the [Swiss Alps](#), but the winter sports industry began to grow during the 1920s with the birth of the [Kandahar Ski Club](#) which was founded in 1924, leading to the set up of the [International Inferno Race in 1928](#).

Started by a group of ski-crazed Brits who bravely tackled the murderous course, un-pisted with no gates, the [Inferno](#) has come a long way. Back then, the race had no spectators or judges and until 1965 the racers would climb the mountain the night before, resting in a hut overnight before the cold and icy dawn approached.

The course has been altered over the years to make it a better experience for racers. This doesn't necessarily mean it is easier to win, but easier to ski and enjoy (given good visibility). The biggest change was when the start line was moved down at the end of the 1980s, because of injuries when it started at the top of a steep mogul field. Since then there is really no difficult skiing at all, it's just a question of fitness and how fast do you dare to go.

Modern Skis Have Sped It Up By An Hour



Back in 1928, a tweed-suited Englishman won it with a time of 1 hour 12 minutes...

The present record is held by a 40-year-old Swiss racer called Kuno Michel – in 2013 this guy managed to complete the race in just over 13 minutes. The current female record is held but Nicole Bärtschi at 14 minutes 45 seconds.

Also, you no longer have to climb the mountain on foot, which is handy as it gives you time to mentally prepare and relish in the moments of muscle relaxation before the workout begins.

And it isn't just skiers who have flown down the run, a few months ago Range Rover decided to send one of their vehicles down the route – it's worth a watch!

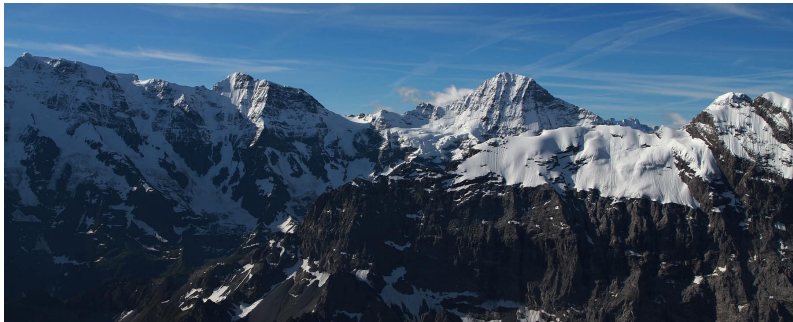


What I absolutely love about this event is the absence of any kind of elitist attitude. There's no exclusivity as long as you're a confident skier – just about anyone from intermediate level upwards is welcome and encouraged to join (I wouldn't recommend any basic intermediates take it on, but it's something to aim for!).

There's a number of scarily serious skiers, of course, but dotted in amongst them are just regular doctors, teachers, lawyers and bankers – all in catsuits too! There's a wonderful community feel and although the top racers compete for first place, the rest of you are there to have fun and escape mundane everyday life, (and scare yourself beyond your limits, haps).

In amongst the catsuits, you'll even find a bunch of famous names: Pippa Middleton 2016, Steve Redgrave has graced the finish line and even I've had a go – for your amusement you can read my blog post about my own inferno experience.

You'll Love The View



It may be an extreme experience, but what makes it so special is that it's a truly beautiful ride. The run begins in a sun-drenched spot overlooking the Eiger, Monch, and Jungfrau peaks. This is where your nerves will be at their worst, as you eagerly wait for your cue to set off.

But as you set off, the anxiety will transform into adrenaline-fuelled exhilaration and you'll soak up the fab views as your heart pumps under your ski jacket. You'll follow a sloppily drawn out 'S' shape (and if you aren't wearing a catsuit and using a pair of downhill skis, don't be surprised as you get overtaken).

The 180 degree bends and icy forest paths with plenty of uphill climbing sections – and lots of supporting crowds cheering you on – are amidst dramatic scenery that will distract you from your aching legs and panting lungs. **Anyone who completes this course is a winner.**

It's well accepted that [Murren's ski area](#) really is one of the most stunning in the world, so you're in for a treat...

Get To Know Mürren



If nothing else, the Inferno is a wonderful excuse to pay a visit to this astonishingly beautiful destination.

This rural Swiss village oozes charm and Alpine authenticity. Lose yourself amongst traditional wooden chalets and revamped farmhouses or treat yourself to a fondue in a Swiss mountain hut whilst taking in the views. Take a minute to picture yourself strolling through Murren's tranquil car-free streets.

Every corner of the village boasts an incredible panorama – cradle a mug of hot chocolate as you relax and admire the views. You deserve it if you manage to survive the course...

Fun Fact: Mürren held the first Ski World Championships in 1931 but they were organised by the Brits! The only time that world championships were organised by one country in another.

Challenge Yourself

So, how does that sound?

A trip to a blissfully quiet Swiss haven, rich with breath-taking views paired with a thrilling experience of the most scenic downhill race in the world. Take yourself out of your comfort zone, explore this lovely destination and soak up the atmosphere of the most renowned ski race in Europe.

In January 2018 the **75th running of the Inferno** will take place including:

- A team of four race from the Obere Hübel (top of the Kandahar/Muttleren chairlifts) to a finish on the ice rink in Mürren on the Friday.
- An inauguration of a Devil's club where there will be a maximum of 666 members paying Sfr. 66 per annum with bonuses like a reserved viewing area, parking spaces and apero to enjoy!

You can become a part of the Inferno's impressive history, whilst giving yourself an excuse to indulge and pamper yourself afterwards, just fill in a few details and we can help you plan your next Alpine adventure.

INFERNO



THE WORLD'S OLDEST AND LONGEST AMATEUR DOWNHILL SKI RACE



2 responses on “*The Inferno is the World’s Oldest and Longest Amateur Downhill Ski Race*”



Amin Momen says:

February 16, 2017 at 2:19 pm

Here’s a relevant extract about The Inferno from Arnie Wilson’s book Snow Crazy:

“The now legendary Inferno is said to be the longest downhill race in the world. Field Marshall Montgomery was so impressed that he wrote a letter to the Times praising it, and later arranged for NATO’s top skiers to compete.

The year after the inaugural race, the Inferno was won by another hugely talented winter sports enthusiast, Jimmy Riddell. In spite of the well-known cockney rhyming slang phrase ‘going for a Jimmy Riddle’, Riddell insisted it was pronounced Riddle as in piddle and not the more affected RiddELL. This delightful skier, celebrated author and Ski Club stalwart (who would be vice-captain of the British team at the 1936 Winter Olympics in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, a Pery medallist, president of the Ski Club and Chairman of the Kandahar Ski Club) won by such a huge margin (half an hour faster than the previous year) that when he got to the finishing tape in Lauterbrunnen, there was no-one there to greet him. He had to clomp his way into the nearest bar – skis still attached to his leather boots – to find a time-keeper. Famously, Riddell went on to teach skiing in the Lebanon, where, on occasions, the snow was so deep that skiers were starting out of the second floor windows of their hotel!”

I first met Riddell at Mürren in 1988, during the memorable celebrations to mark the centenary of Arnold Lunn’s birth. He regaled me with many sparkling stories and I became a Riddell devotee (a word which sounds more dignified than ‘fan!’)

One was about the time he and some fellow racers staying at the Hotel Alpina were dismayed to find that

blizzard conditions would prevent them skiing that day. Improvising in a very British way, Riddell and company ripped open their duvets, scattered the feathers on the hotel staircase, and held an impromptu slalom down the stairs.

Imagine such a thing today! They would surely have been dismissed as louts and vandals!”