

SLEDS AND SLEDDERS A QUICK LOOK

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Abstract: With the number of avalanche deaths in recent years claiming more snowmobilers than any other sport it's time we take a look at the sport and its people.

In the past there have been meetings where I have been asked questions about my sport and the people in it and over the last few years I thought it was time to try to summarize and put down on paper the few things I do know about this sport.

This paper will try to help the Professionals and the Educators in this industry to better understand snowmobilers (SLEDDERS).

The audio/visual display will go through the who, what, when, where and why of this specific sport.

1. Who are the people in the Sport, the Demographics, and the Attitudes?
2. What is the Sport and What is a mountain sled?
3. When do Sledders choose to ride?
4. Where do Sledders choose to ride?
5. Why is there such a reluctance to learn more on what would keep them safer?

1. INTRODUCTION

Some of the early pioneers of this sport were J.A Bombardier developer of Ski-Doo brand and brothers Edgar and Allan Hetteen. Allan stayed with Polaris and Edgar went on to develop Arctic Cat. I'm sure they never envisioned of how this sport would grow and continues to grow today. If we go back from the mid 60s to the mid 70s there were more than 125 manufactures flooding the market. Prices ranged from \$500 to \$2500. Today we have 4 main manufactures, which are Ski-Doo, Polaris, Arctic Cat, and Yamaha with prices ranging from \$5000 to \$15,000. There are a few other small manufactures of sleds mostly in the mountain segment that caters to an elite few. They build a substantially smaller numbers of sleds a year with prices ranging from \$30,000 up to \$120,000

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2.1 WHO are the people in the Sport, the Demographics and the Attitudes?

The **people** in this sport come from all walks of life, Doctors, Lawyers, Welders, Mechanics and Farmers or anyone looking for an exciting kind of recreation. It attracts young and old alike, male or female enthusiasts and also includes single or married people as well as families

Average sledders household income is \$68,000 US per year.

Average age is 42

75% are married

Each sledder spends an average of \$4000 per year on the activity, not including the sled.

The **Attitudes** of the people in the sport are not any different than any other recreationist. Remember this is recreation, most people are safetied to death at work, and the last thing they want to think about is safety while they're enjoying some recreation. They really need to see the value of what we're doing, to help them become interested. After all would you rather take a 2-day course or would you rather be out having fun. Furthermore, we being human tend to be more Reactive than Proactive.

2.2 What is the sport? What is a mountain sled?

Snowmobiling as a whole is a family sport. Most of us see it as a predominately male activity. There were 184,799 new sleds sold in Canada and the United States last year with the average distance traveled per sled, in a season being 2200 kms.

In the early days of sledding we didn't venture far because the sled was a limiting factor. Poor traction, reliability and not much power were all elements

Really, what we have all witnessed is the evolution of the mountain sled. In the 80's when the sleds were starting to get more reliable, we dared to venture further into the backcountry. We were limited by the machine. Most sleds then had 15 x 121 with ½ inch lugs on the tracks. So we started putting paddles on the tracks for extra traction. They worked fine until they flew off or destroyed your track when one would get lodged up inside. The start of the 90's saw some great new developments. The tracks started to stretch out to be 133-136-144 x 15 with 1.0 to 1.5 inch lugs. Engines that seem to be as reliable as most cars with power up to 110 hp.

Today we can go downtown, buy a factory stock sled with 156" x 15" track with up to 2 ¼ inch lugs, 165 hp and 15 inches of front, and rear suspension travel. We'll spend about \$14,000.00. If we want a sled on steroids we can buy one of the custom sleds from the aftermarket guys. Racer's Edge, Hy-Mark, Crazy Mountain Extreme to name a few. All as we need is a minimum of \$35,000 and we can have our own 250 hp turbo hill climber.

Today it's not the sled that is the limiting factor. Today it's the rider.

2.3 When do sledders chose to ride?

2.4 Where do sledders choose to ride?

When ever you can get time off work and **Where** ever there is snow.

That is really the long and short of it. A lot of riders when they go to the mountains tend to stick to certain areas and stay in certain bowls all day.

2.5 Why is there such a reluctance to learn more on what would keep them safer?

This also may have a lot to do with attitude. It really comes down to education. I'm not just talking about us and our need to get the word out. People are getting mixed messages. This is a hot potato for the manufactures. Safety doesn't sell fun and this sport is all about having fun. The manufactures are aware that sledders die every season from Avalanche involvements. They choose not to fund the organizations that promote backcountry training or avalanche bulletins. These organizations have tremendous general snowmobile safety campaigns. Their response to this problem was to make a poster depicting avalanche danger. So much more could and should be done. They have not yet been taught the value of Avalanche Awareness training.

Then we have the dealers that sell the sleds. Some are great and very informative as far as promoting avalanche awareness, whereas there is still a large portion of dealers that do not want to discuss this safety aspect. It may be viewed as your scaring away my customers and if discussed they might not **buy**. In reality if the buyer is educated there will be a better chance that they will be repeat customers

3. The hospitality industry / Chambers of Commerce

These are quite often the worst culprits of all because they want sledders in their areas to stimulate their economies, but don't want to help or encourage safety education. No worries here just deep snow are very often the comments when called. One reason they might think like this is. Some of the more popular snowmobile areas in Western Canada are over 25.000 sledder visits per year, combined with an average of \$250.00 per day spent per visit. Do the math.

Some have developed a different approach by giving people the info they need to make more informed decisions. Avalanche bulletins, the need for avalanche gear and proper training are being brought to there attention.

In the more proactive snowmobile areas most of the gas stations have the avalanche bulletins and hotels have sign in/out sheets.

Maybe in some places **safety does sell.**

In closing no matter what our differences are in snow sports. We all have one common goal. This is that we are humans and we need to be educated and to educate others for the common goal of preservation of life

REFERENCES

International Snowmobile Manufactures Assoc. (ISMA)
www.Snowmobile.org

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www.ccsso-ccom.ca