



# Champions crowned in Steamboat

EVENT ATTRACTS RACING FAMILIES AND WORLD-CLASS PACESETTERS

BY WINA STURGEON

**IT'S THE LARGEST** ski race in the world, and it's about to get famous. Each of the 1,050 racers at this year's NASTAR National Championships had to sign a theatrical release, because the three-day event is being made into a television show. But there is bigger news.

"We're trying to work on a program where we can bring ski racing together as a whole. The contracts have not [yet] been signed, but Nature Valley [which also sponsors the U.S. Alpine Championships] is really interested in having the NASTAR Nationals and the U.S. Alpine Nationals together in the same week at the same resort," said National NASTAR coordinator Bill Madsen.

It would be a massive undertaking, but the financial impact of the recreational racing program is beginning to dawn on the ski world.

Madsen said next year's host site will be announced in June. The speculation is that it will either return to Steamboat Springs, Colo., or be staged in Aspen.

"The nationals won't be going back east in the immediate future, but we are looking to do an Eastern Championships," he said. "It would be an addition to the NASTAR Nationals, it wouldn't replace it. But it would be an automatic qualifier for the nationals. We're just discussing it, nothing's been decided yet."

## National champions crowned

Tricia and John Constable came from Valley Forge, Pa., with their sons Steven and Mark because 12-year-old Mark had qualified for the nationals. The trip cost them more than \$4,000. Steve Coulter, the new 2008 men's NASTAR champion, drove from St. Louis, Mo., with his family to compete. "I'm still surprised I won. I've been coming to nationals for four years, but I never did this," he said. By the time the Colter family gets in their car for the drive back home, they will have spent \$2,000. "But it's worth it. This is a family thing for us," he added.

Kurt Geiger, head of Descente North America, gave away Descente race suits to the winners of each age division; 300 suits in all, each retailing for \$600. "NASTAR is the base of ski racing," Geiger said. "These are people who race because they love it, and Descente wants to be part of that. There are 5,000 people in Steamboat right now, loving every minute of it. Descente has been involved in the Olympic Games for 70 years, and we enjoy this more than we do the Olympic Games."

Even the pacesetters, all former Olympians, were at nationals more for love



Pat Moore, 62, Newington, Ct., made NASTAR history by winning the gold in both skiing and snowboarding. Here he poses with pacesetter AJ Kitt at the Race of Champions finish area.

than money. Phil Mahre, just off the NorAm circuit after trying to qualify for the U.S. Nationals, was as full of energy as if it were the beginning of the season.

"I'm rejuvenated by the crowd. When you see the enthusiasm, it keeps you fired up," Mahre said.

The snow was cold enough so that the courses held up, aided by masses of slippers who smoothed out the various wide lines taken by most of the racers. But the courses were longer than most participants were used to, and to some, much steeper. Lynn Nolen, a 55-59 gold division racer, said, "I was in over my head this year. I think I should have been in the silver division, but I'm going to train hard for next year."

At the traditional Saturday night party, pacesetters sat at two long tables, signing autographs. The line wound down a double flight of stairs and around a large banquet room. Kristina Koznick sat next to Chad Fleischer at one end, and the two became the night's photo op. They offered a shared lap for multitudes of children, who posed excitedly while awed parents took pictures. Current ski teamer Kaylin Richardson and Debbie Armstrong, no longer a chubby-cheeked kid but a svelte woman of 44, signed helmets, bibs, jackets and shirts.

Five members of the race crew from the 12-trail Snow Creek resort in Weston, Mo., brought gate panels to be signed. Britney Burtchell stared as AJ Kitt signed hers. "I'm going to put it in a shadow box with my medal. I got second place in my age group," she said, with a look of proud joy. Her co-worker, Evan Brooks, had broken the top off a blue gate on his run, and later went back to pick it up. He had each of the pacesetters sign it, and they laughed, trying to hold the round tube steady for the black marker.

The new national champions were decided in Sunday's Race of Champions, made up of the winner of each age and gender division. It has "discounted" times based on the handicaps of the previous two days of racing, done in an attempt to make a level playing field between all winners, from the 7-year-old bronze medalists to the 70-year-old gold medalists.

The value of NASTAR to the sport of ski racing was summed up by 6-year-old Teagan Wold of Boulder, Colo. She came in second out of 10 other racers her age. "I'm going to ski harder for next year," she said. "When I grow up, I want to be on the ski team."

Joining Coulter as a 2008 NASTAR National Champion is Diane Mazurek of Laurys Station, Pa. Log on to [nastar.com](http://nastar.com) for full results. **SR**