

# Go SNOWMOBILING ONTARIO!™

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**SPECIAL  
TIPS & TRICKS  
ISSUE**

**GREAT STORIES  
FROM THE PAST!**

**MAGICAL MUSKOKA:**

Gorgeous Scenery, Great Trails,  
All Close to Where You Live!

**FARM TRAILS:**

What You Need to Know



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**OFSC Mission is to:**  
Provide leadership to member organizations in our commitment to enable exceptional snowmobile trails and rider experiences throughout the province.

#### OFSC Vision is that:

Snowmobiling is recognized and celebrated as Ontario's premier winter recreation and tourism experience.

#### The OFSC Go Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine

The OFSC GO Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine is the voice for uniting snowmobile clubs, industry stakeholders and snowbelt communities to promote the recreational lifestyle, experience and fun that OFSC trail riding offers Ontarians every winter. Our goal is to grow snowmobiling by attracting new participants, persuading former riders to return, encouraging casual snowmobilers and families to ride more — and by urging everyone to do their sledding right here in Ontario!

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Canadian Council of Snowmobile Organizations

**WARNING:** Some of the action shown in this magazine is potentially dangerous. Almost all riders photographed are professionals, racers or experienced experts. It is strongly recommended readers do not attempt to duplicate stunts beyond their capabilities. Always wear a helmet, boots and safety equipment.

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Because of many new challenges impacting print publications, this will be the only issue of *Go Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine* published this season. The OFSC will continue to provide latest news & updates to snowmobilers through its website, newsletter and Facebook page.

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Supertrax Go Snowmobiling Ontario magazine is published four times yearly by SUPERTRAX Publishing Inc. **Undeliverable copies and change of address notices:** 1025 Rouge Valley Drive, Pickering, ON L1V 4N8. Tel. 705-286-2135. Copyright 2020 SUPERTRAX Publishing Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without the written consent of the publishers. Publishers are not responsible for unsolicited manuscripts. Subscription rate is \$14.99 for 4 issues / \$26.99 for 8 issues / \$33.99 for 12 issues (prices include HST in Canada).

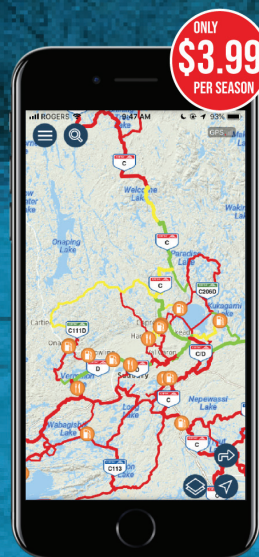
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# TRAILS TO RIDE 2021

## The **CURE** For **Cabin Fever**

By Landon French, OFSC CEO

2020 is going to be a year we talk about for a long time. Many great things happened this year, but it has also turned out to be a year that tests our mettle as employees, friends, family and snowmobilers. And in times like this, it's how we respond to the challenge that matters.

Across Ontario, snowmobile clubs are staying positive while implementing a new set of protocols to keep permit holders safe and riding as much as possible. As snowmobilers, we've always looked out for each other and that attitude will be very evident this winter.

I'm new to the OFSC and while I've been a permit holder for many years, I've always had great respect for the OFSC as an association and a brand. We represent the best in recreational trail riding and are the backbone of Ontario's winter tourism economy. I plan to bring a fresh perspective to the OFSC and look forward to working with you to strengthen our organization.

In my short time at the OFSC we have worked hard to get ready for this season. From new groomers, to flexible permit options, and a world-class pandemic response plan, we are ready to adjust as needed to deliver the best possible trail riding experiences throughout the season. We anticipate that many of you will stay in Ontario this winter and enjoy all that

our province has to offer. If that is the case and you're a returning snowmobiler, welcome back! If you're brand new to organized snowmobiling, welcome to our community of riders. You will find some great people here and we greet everyone with open arms.

The OFSC is not only planning to deliver trail riding this season. We are looking ahead as well with a new strategic planning process we're calling Future Trails. Future Trails is a comprehensive look at the direction of our federation and organized snowmobiling while considering many internal and external factors that are influencing our new world. Things like technology, trails, insurance, revenue, management and more will all be part of the conversation and we need your input too. If you have ideas about how the OFSC should prepare for the future and how we can get there together we would love to hear from you. Future Trails ideas from permit holders and others can be submitted on our web site [ofsc.on.ca](http://ofsc.on.ca) until April 1st, 2021. We welcome everyone's input and as a fellow snowmobiler, I will endeavour to pull the best ideas together to build a stronger OFSC for all of us.

This "Best Of" edition of Go Snowmobiling Ontario Magazine is special as we focus on popular articles from the past, while adding

some new ones we think you will like. I sincerely hope you'll enjoy this edition of the magazine and learn something along the way.

Finally, a sincere thank you to everyone involved in the OFSC for your efforts to keep us all riding. From volunteers, to staff, to landowners and more, there is a lot of work going on this year and I sincerely appreciate everything everyone do to keep our trails available and safe.

Overall, the best cure for cabin fever is to get outside and ride. I can't wait to do that and look forward to seeing you on the trail very soon.

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## **MAGICAL MUSKOKA**

STORY & PHOTOS CRAIG  
NICHOLSON, THE INTREPID  
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# **SUPER SLEDDING IN ONTARIO'S COTTAGE COUNTRY**

*The sight took my breath away. Ahead, the trail seemed to reach the far horizon. First down a huge hill, then up a steep incline, then rolling across several dips and rises to where it finally met the sky. I hit the throttle to surge my machine forward along that exhilarating white ribbon, feeling like the king of the snow. In my snowmobiling adventures, I've come across other primo trails like this in many faraway places, but this Muskoka trail was in my own backyard.*

**T**housands of vacationers flock to Muskoka every summer. Consequently, this region has become iconic as Ontario's ultimate cottage country playground. No wonder then, that this notoriety has also made Muskoka a magnet for winter lovers in search of memorable snowmobiling. So last season, our Supertrax crew set out to discover what makes Muskoka special among Ontario snowmobiling destinations.

### **Muskoka Snowmobiling Overview**

Of course, no sledding destination can be credible without good snow and trails – and Muskoka can deliver both. Positioned just east of Georgian Bay, the region is in a lake effect snowbelt that dumps an average 336 centimetres every winter, and often much more. This regular snowfall enables Muskoka's 11 snowmobile clubs to deliver about 1,600 kilometres (almost 1,000 miles) of well-maintained snowmobile trails, including Trans Ontario Provincial (TOP) and local club trails. For day visitors, they also provide seven Park 'n' Ride locations, clearly marked on their printed trail guide.

Our recent visit confirmed that their trail network is seamlessly connected and well signed, both on-trail and at intersections. What's somewhat surprising is that, despite Muskoka's approximately 1,600 lakes, most snowmobile trails are on land. But where traversing a lake is necessary as part of the trail, Muskoka clubs have done an excellent job of marking official ice crossings with stake lines to follow. Their land trails run through Muskoka's rugged

**ABOVE: Favourite Muskoka trails on this ride included TOP Trails D, D101B and D102B, plus local trails 37, 45, 51, 76, 77 & 95.**

terrain, rocky courtesy of the Canadian Shield, and from lower elevations near the shores of Georgian Bay to high ground in the east beside Algonquin Park. This varied topography makes for an interesting mix of trails, from some tight and twisties to many wide open logging roads,

**RIGHT: Top Trail D crosses the Muskoka River on the seasonally installed Bracebridge floating bridge.**







**Staging from Deerhurst Resort to Local Trail 78 in northeastern Muskoka.**

and everything in between. Muskoka trails also connect to other cottage country destinations like Haliburton in the east, and to both the Almaguin Highlands and Parry Sound District to the north, so there's a lot of great riding to be had staging from Muskoka, including the famous RAP (Round Algonquin Park) Tour.

#### **Our Staging Location**

That's one reason we decided to base out of one Muskoka location and ride three day loops in various directions. Another reason is that one of Muskoka's special attributes is its robust tourism infrastructure – many of the same hospitality providers that service the summer crowd are also trail accessible to snowmobilers. These vary from lodgings suitable for overnighting on your saddlebag tour to full service accommodations for your stay 'n' play day rides. Among these establishments are several of Ontario's foremost resorts that cater to snowmobilers all winter,

comparable to anything on offer in Quebec.

We chose to stage out of Deerhurst Resort near Huntsville. This classy, 400-room resort is only a couple of hours drive north of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) on four lane highway all the way. Positioned on-trail near the intersection of Local Trail 88, 78 and TOP Trail D102B, Deerhurst Resort provides on-site restaurants and fuel, plenty of parking, a myriad of outdoor and indoor family activities including pool & hot tub, plus sled rentals and guided tours. There's also downhill skiing nearby.

#### **Riding Choices**

By my observation, Muskoka includes three distinct snowmobiling areas. The western area includes trails near Highway 400 that are somewhat separated by geography. They run south to north from Port Severn and Honey Harbour along Georgian Bay to the top of Lake Joseph. Two TOP Trails, C101D and C02D, run eastward to connect this area to trails surrounding the Highway 11 corridor.

Along Highway 11, the largest Muskoka towns of Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Huntsville anchor another cluster of trails in the central area that also includes Port Sydney. They increase in number the farther north you go, all the way to Emsdale. These trails tend to see the most traffic, being closest to both the major towns and the most popular access highway to the region.

The third distinct area is in the northeast of Muskoka, where we did most of our riding. It includes Baysville, Dorset and Dwight, and extends north to Kearney (although not officially in the Muskoka Tourism Region, Kearney is as far north Muskoka snowmobile clubs groom). Benefitting from the highest elevation in Muskoka and many old resource roads, this area typically tends to get started earlier, have more snow, and go later than the others.

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## **WHERE WE STAYED**

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## **GET MORE INFO**

**Ontario Tourism** - [ontariotravel.net/en/play/powersports-touring/snowmobiles](http://ontariotravel.net/en/play/powersports-touring/snowmobiles)

**Muskoka Tourism** - [discovermuskoka.ca](http://discovermuskoka.ca)

**Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC)** - [ofsc.on.ca](http://ofsc.on.ca)

**OFSC District 7 (Muskoka)** - [ofscdistrict7.com](http://ofscdistrict7.com)







**Lake effect snow helps snowmobiling generate almost \$95M of economic activity annually for Muskoka (2019 OFSC Economic Impact Study).**

We rode three day loops out of Deerpark, two of them in the northeast. One was an official snow tour called the Lake of Bays Watch, which as its name suggests, circles that large water body, taking in Dorset and Baysville, both of which have gas stations. Another day, we rode a loop north to Kearney, fuelling at Dwight, and the other, headed south to Bracebridge, where we also topped up our tanks.

#### **Planning Considerations**

As with any destination, there are many factors

to take into account while planning your visit. For Muskoka, one is that typically, some trails take longer to open early in the season because groomers require a lot of snow to get the rugged terrain ride-ready. So don't plan to go until trails show as Yellow or Green on the Interactive Trail Guide found on the website of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC).

Second, Muskoka weekends can be very busy, especially Family Day, Valentine's and March break, so either book well in advance, include some weekdays in your itinerary, or plan

to go other weekends. Fortunately, Muskoka clubs usually groom on weekend nights to keep trails as smooth as possible, so consider starting earlier than usual on Saturday and Sunday mornings for the best possible ride.

A third factor, as in many other places, is road running. As hard as Muskoka clubs work to deliver great trails, there are some locations where private land use permission isn't possible or has been revoked due to trespass by snowmobilers or ATV riders. Detours by land or ice trail may not be possible, so the only way to get to where the trail continues is by running

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a section of road. Generally during the heart of the winter, most of these are hard packed and snow covered at least on the shoulders. But in thaws, they can become bare, so pick your time to go and choose where to ride.

My fourth consideration is that given its many special attributes, Muskoka is an ideal location for couples and families looking for snowmobiling getaways that also include other social, cultural and winter activities. What's more, Muskoka has more places to rent a sled and gear, book a guided snowmobile ride, or for novices to try snowmobiling for the first time than anywhere else in Ontario. And if you need repairs or parts, Muskoka has dealers from all four manufacturers nearby, some of whom also rents sleds.

Put it all together, and there's no doubt that Muskoka delivers the full package for snowmobile enthusiasts. As experienced snowmobilers who've visited most bucket list destinations, we were impressed by Muskoka riding and agreed that its trails were right up there with the best anywhere. And more than any other destination, Muskoka also may be Ontario's best choice for casual riders, couples, families, newbies and other winter lovers to share a very special, easy-going and stress-free snowmobiling adventure. GSOM



The Dorset Lookout Tower off TOP Trail D101B offers a scenic view of Lake of Bays.



# BEHIND THE SCENES ON FARM COUNTRY TRAILS



STORY BY PHIL MOLTO, GRAHAM SNYDER. PHOTOS BY PHIL MOLTO.

*Thousands of kilometres of OFSC snowmobile trails criss-cross agricultural Ontario thanks to permission from generous landowners. When riding on these trails through farmers' fields, snowmobilers can easily take them for granted. After all, it's often wide-open country that doesn't look very difficult for placing a trail. So what's the big deal?*

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Most snowmobilers have no idea how much work it takes to put those trails in place every winter. For example, many other trails throughout Ontario have pretty much been in the same location for a decade or more. These include forest trails, logging roads, cottage roads, municipal road allowances and rail lines that are permanent or close to it.

## TRAIL CHANGES

In farm country, the landowner situation or agricultural usage can change from year to year, making many field trails temporary or semi-permanent at best. So a snowmobile club may have to move a trail that has crossed one field in previous seasons to another location for the coming winter. This repositioning may mean that the club also has to relocate other trails to maintain connectivity.

The whole process is exacerbated when an increasing number of trails are closing permanently due to snowmobilers straying off the staked route or because of ATV trespass in other seasons. Multiple relocations at the same time can be like trying to piece together a jigsaw puzzle in a race against time to get trails ready for snow.

## PUT 'EM UP, TAKE 'EM DOWN

Here's another example of the work it takes to put farmland trails in place every winter. Because these fields revert to their primary agricultural purposes come spring, clubs have to dismantle most farmland trails at season's end, only to rebuild them again for the next winter.

In practical terms, this means volunteers installing (fall), then removing (spring), and then re-installing (the next fall) the field stakes and signs that mark the designated trails



for snowmobilers to use while crossing private property. Sounds easy, eh?

### STAKING IT

Well, consider that the stakes have to be close enough that a rider can spot the next one ahead even in blowing snow or a blistering storm. Also, so that snowmobile headlights can pick up the next stake's reflector after dark. In addition, most fields are double-staked so snowmobilers can ride between them (and some hills are even triple staked). At the same time, there is typically enough space between the two stakes in each pair for a fairly wide trail. That broad trail surface reduces issues of trail fatigue such as moguls, bare spots or ruts, because sleds can spread out more and not have to ride in the same groove as everyone else.

So how many field stakes do clubs install in farm country? At two per every 100 metres, a conservative estimate suggests that the number of field stakes installed in the OFSC's eight main farm country districts easily exceeds 220,000. Their replacement value would be upwards of a million dollars. In addition, the number of field signs can be guesstimated at about 70,000 with a replacement value of almost half a million dollars.

So that three-step installation, removal and re-installation process for stakes in farmers' fields involves handling each one three times - that's 660,000 stakes placements! How many could you install in an hour? Where do you even store 290,000 stakes and signs when not in use? By the way, the number of stakes does not account for a significant quantity of in-season replacements for stakes broken off or run down by careless snowmobilers each winter. Nor does it include the large number of stakes installed each season on snowmobile trails by clubs that are not in farm country.

What's more, this massive annual staking job has recently been disrupted by variable weather conditions courtesy of Mother Nature. Every time there's a major meltdown in farm country, thousands of fallen stakes have to be repositioned properly to get the trails ready again.

### ACCESS & AVAILABILITY

If that's not already enough work to put farmland trails in place, what about this? One characteristic of fields is that they are often exposed to prevailing winds. In winter, this means that all but the heaviest fresh snow can blow away. To combat this, many clubs "pre-groom" the trail corridor before the ground freezes. This levels it lower than the surrounding surfaces to better hold snow in place to help build a good base.

But pre-grooming and pounding stakes into pre-frost earth are only possible if the club can get access to the land before it gets too cold. And that depends on when the landowner(s) is finished using the fields for agricultural purposes which can vary from property to property and year to year. If there's access uncertainty, getting all the trails properly prepared becomes even more of an effort for club volunteers, because everything has to be ready before any trail can be declared available to ride. But if some sections are late getting underway, that may mean other trails can't be declared available yet because you can't yet ride from here to there until all are ready.

### STORMS & BOGS

What's more, the trail that was clear last March may be a woodsman's nightmare seven months later. Summer storms can create a huge headache for trail crews. Half fallen trees are a real challenge, and sometimes even in farm country, whole sections

of trail are impassable with downed branches. Heavy rains may also make access an impossible task because of flooding in low-lying areas. This includes bogs that are also a big challenge in farm country because many don't ever freeze.

So clubs install "bog bridges". These structures are often "floating" on the bog that the trail goes across. Without them, groomers would be stuck on every pass, so these wooden structures are essential to having trails through wetland areas. The trail over a bog bridge will seem smooth and perfect in the winter, but the structure underneath may not win any awards for architectural beauty when seen in the off-season!

### GENEROUS LANDOWNERS

Of course, none of this happens without considerable planning, legwork and effort by club volunteers, plus good relationships with landowners. In fact, the relationship with farmland owners often goes back to the beginning of snowmobiling. Before the OFSC, many scattered clubs made arrangements with local property owners for trails for local sledders to ride.

One need only to look back to gain an appreciation for how important that relationship is between landowners and local clubs. For several decades, landowners have allowed complete strangers to access and ride on their property, free of charge, year after year. It's an openness one rarely sees in urban neighbourhoods. How many city folk would approve of seeing cyclists riding bikes through their back yard every summer?

Our landowners are typically very generous people and great to work with. They meet with the local club representatives to review what crops will be in which fields and that will decide where the trails go for the upcoming season. This is why you will see trails moved and highly visible signs saying "WHEAT FIELD" with a notice stating to not trespass on that field.

### STAY ON THE STAKED TRAIL

This has been a great arrangement, but things can easily go sour. It only takes one snowmobiler to undo years of a solid partnership. Farmers and club members don't like dealing with trespass situations such as where a sled taking a short cut across a field causes crop damage. But if not resolved properly, the club may be looking at a reroute and that sometimes means another section of road running when no alternative is available.

Nobody wants that, not the club and not the landowner. If every snowmobiler stays on the trail, one of the biggest headaches for farm country clubs would be eliminated. It boils down to this: if you want good trails in farm country, keep your sled and your friends' sleds between the stakes. And if you really want good trails, why not give your club a hand putting up stakes one Saturday this fall?

*Phil Molto is a club volunteer, and powersports journalist, videographer & photographer for Molto Motorsports. Graham Snyder is an OFSC Governor and the District Board President for District 5 (Southwestern Ontario).* GSOM



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# SLEDDING TIPS: FINE TUNING YOUR NEW SLED MAKING IT RIGHT FOR YOU!

STORY BY CRAIG NICHOLSON WITH JOHN SHARRARD & CRAIG IRWIN



CREDIT: PHOTO BY WAYNE DAVIS COURTESY OF ISMA

**M**any variables can affect your enjoyment of snowmobiling. While you can't do much about snow or trail conditions, you can help your sled deliver the most enjoyable ride possible from the get-go.

Your enjoyable ride starts with a brand new or new-to-you snowmobile that best suits your physicality, experience and riding style. Too basic a sled may not provide good enough suspension or adjustability. Alternatively, you may not need (or want to pay extra for) the bells & whistles (or power) of the latest hi tech marvels.

## Choose Your Model Carefully

Today's model offerings are category specific – mountain, crossover, trail and sport-utility – but even within these categories, there's a range of alternatives. For example, while crossover sleds are positioned somewhere between mountain and trail, some models lean closer to mountain than trail and vice versa. Same within the trail category, where models go from performance

oriented (harder suspension range) to luxury touring (softer suspension range). So do your research to make sure you end up with the right sled for you, because you can't change its basic characteristics easily or inexpensively.

## Orientation Walk Around

However, operating within the basic characteristics of your sled, you can fine-tune for your most enjoyable ride. After all, its manufacturer has made some components adjustable so that you can optimize your ride, so why not take full advantage?

Unfortunately, many owners bring their new acquisition home from their dealer unchanged, never touch it themselves, and then put up with a sled that never feels quite right for them. So make sure a dealer rep knowledgeable about your model does a thorough walk around with you, explaining how everything works and adjusts, and how to change the belt. This orientation should also include information about any break in procedures including when your sled's due for first service. Both factors play a major role in your sled's future reliability and longevity.

## Tweaking Your Sled

This is also the opportunity to have your dealer do a set up customized for you. This is especially important if you aren't mechanically inclined or knowledgeable about various adjustment options. Here is some of the tweaking that should be included...

- Adjust handlebar & throttle position for your height and arm length.
- Set suspension right for you. It's best if you are on hand for

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suspension adjustments (with your partner if you usually ride double). If you typically ride with saddlebags or other gear like a fuel caddy on board, fill them up and bring them along as well. This will help arrive at the proper suspension sag, setting range and optimal interplay of the various components for your best possible ride quality.

- After suspension is set...
- Set track tension, which may change after suspension adjustments.
- Ensure skis are aligned correctly.
- Set ski pressure. This affects steering and handling control, including cornering grip and how much steering effort is required for turning.
- Make sure headlights are properly aimed so you can see well at night.
- Check traction products. Is your track already studded and what kind of shape are they in? If not, do you need studs? Are the carbides on the sled aggressive enough to work optimally with whatever studs you have?
- Check windshield height. How much wind and cold protection it gives (or doesn't) will significantly impact your riding comfort. Proper height can also affect whether or not your helmet visor freezes up while riding in cold temps.
- Other Items. Talk to your dealer about adding mirrors, handlebar muffs and hardware for saddlebags or a gas caddy. Make sure your sled has an extra belt and spark plugs as per manufacturer specs and that the heated grips and thumb warmers work properly.

#### Test Ride It

Even if you get everything adjusted or added at the dealership, the only way to know for sure if your new sled's comfortable for you is to ride it on a trail. If you're handy with a wrench or know someone who is, you can probably do any final tweaking as you test ride it. If not, then make notes about what doesn't seem to be as comfortable as it should be and go back to your dealer for more fine-tuning. Otherwise, you may end up hating that sled more every time you ride it. Worse, this could diminish your overall love of snowmobiling – and that's the last outcome you want! GSOM

*John Sharrard is a former motorcycle racer and now owner of Accelerated Technologies, the performance suspension specialists. Craig Irwin is a former snowmobile racer and experienced motorsports mechanic.*

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## GROOMING A WHITE RIBBON

STORY BY LISA STACKHOUSE

*Groomer operators are the unsung heroes of organized snowmobiling and here's what happened when an OFSC staffer went along to try her hand at trail grooming...*

Having worked with the OFSC for five years now, I must admit that sometimes I can't tell if I work for a grooming or snowmobiling organization. I've come to the conclusion that one can simply not exist without the other.

Great grooming makes for great trail experiences. So I wanted to see for myself what grooming is all about. I checked in with the Port Perry Snowmobile Club (PPSC) because it's close to where I grew up and I can visit my family while I'm in the area – or crash there instead of driving home late at night!

### BEST LAID PLANS

I had planned a grooming experience in advance. But Mother Nature can make even the best-laid plans fall apart. So I ended up throwing this together all in one day. Without much thought, I was on my way from the office to go lay some "white ribbon" and see first hand the expertise behind being a groomer operator, like Andy Faulkes.

I should qualify by saying that I'm hardly what you'd consider an expert (or even a novice) in the operation of heavy machinery. So while I'm not sure if Andy was as nervous as I was with me behind the wheel of a massive Prinoth Snow Groomer – but I'd be willing to bet on it!

Like all great experiences, having a smart, patient and fun teacher almost made me feel like an expert in grooming – or at least considerably less nervous. So I'm pretty sure the club must now be desperate to hire me as part of their grooming team – okay, maybe I'm not quite that awesome yet!

### DAUNTING JOB

I didn't have much time to overthink this grooming experience. But admittedly, I felt far more comfortable being in Port Perry close to civilization. I found myself thinking often about the groomer operators in the more remote parts of the province. They embark nightly into the dark abyss to ensure snowmobilers have the best ride possible all winter long.

In speaking with many northern groomer operators, it was quite astounding to hear just how remote they go and what can happen in the event of a dreaded machine malfunction. In my very cautious and safe "mom" voice, I had Andy confirm our plans should something unexpected happen – even though we had full cell service and could almost skip down the trail to get help.

### GETTING STARTED

We completed our pre-trip inspection and headed out from the PPSC Clubhouse. Andy fully engaged me explaining the ins and outs of grooming. These included when it's too early to go, when the snow's just right or when it's too much, and how a trail goes from red to yellow (and inevitably green). Plus of course, there's the protocol as the season comes to an end each winter.

Andy did not like talking about the end of the season. But he was firing on all cylinders when it came to opening trails and laying down that white ribbon for all to experience – including him. But I got the sense he spends more time grooming than sledding during the winter!



### IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

Once I had the basics down, Andy reluctantly gave up his driver's seat. We agreed that to start, I'd simply drive, and he would operate the drag – a good call! My initial take on the whole experience was that driving the groomer isn't really a difficult task in and of itself – until you hook up the drag. But coming across snowmobilers at night, and in the case of PPSC, finding cars actually driving on the trail (yes, it's true) got my heart racing. Thankfully, the snowmobilers we met did exactly as they should and gave way safely to the groomer. They could probably tell that a complete novice from head office was attempting to drive – a fish out of water isn't that difficult to spot!

### STUFF ON THE TRAIL

One thing I hadn't considered was debris on the trail. When something got caught up in the drag, we'd stop and remove whatever was messing up that white ribbon behind us. Our first stop was a big piece of wood (to be expected), but then, sadly, we came across a pizza box left on the trail.

We always talk about protecting our trails and taking waste home with you, so I'd assumed people did this – but c'mon, a pizza box? Kind of disappointing to see and I am hopeful it did not come from one of our own snowmobilers. I think most of us are passionate about the protection of our trails, so it wouldn't make sense to just toss garbage where we ride, and groom, would it?

### WHAT A DRAG

After my driving the groomer for a little while, Andy decided I should give the drag a try too. Let me tell you, this was one too many "things" for my brain to process and complete at the same time. It almost made me long to be back in the safe refuge of my office cubbyhole!

My already high respect for groomer operators went through the roof as Andy gently told me a million and one complicated things about lowering the drag, then bringing it up again, then down a bit and then it all became a blur for me, especially since I constantly had to look behind at the drag at the same time as watching where I was driving!

So I decided Andy was best to handle the drag - and that was after only going about 50 yards because I had so much paranoia about grooming a smooth white ribbon and not laying down some embarrassing "fish out of water" type chop job behind me.

I'm pretty sure Andy figured I could keep going for at least another 50, but I care so much about awesome on-trail experiences, that I slid back into the passenger seat. To my pleasure, Andy had a bag of liquorice with him – his "must have" for snacking while out grooming. I'm pretty sure I stress-binged most of the bag!

### PROS & CONS

As we made our way back to the clubhouse Andy and I talked about why he does this and what it is for him. First and foremost, he loves the challenge of grooming more technical trails and continually learning the best techniques to get it just right. Secondly, he finds it relaxing, peaceful and a big part of his winter experiences. Admittedly, Andy said it was frustrating to see things like automobiles and pizza boxes on the trail. But fortunately, his and neighbouring clubs are getting strong support from their local police detachment to try and resolve trespass issues.

Then I asked what he dislikes the most about grooming. Without hesitation, Andy said thaws and rain are bad, but having the trails close for the season is the part that hits him the most because it marks the end of his favourite season and pastimes, grooming & sledding. I'm also pretty sure he wasn't that impressed with some groomer wannabe eating all his liquorice either!

My thanks to Andy and the Port Perry Snowmobile Clubs for my groomer experience – and thanks to the hundreds of groomer operators across Ontario who do their absolute best to make our trail riding great! Please give them a grateful thumbs up when you see them on the trail.

*Popularly known as the "Offkilter Tourist", Lisa Stackhouse is Manager, Marketing, Communications & Partners at the OFSC.* GSOM



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STORY BY LISA JACKHOUSE PHOTO BY RICK SAUER

## THE REAL SCOOP ON DRESSING PROPERLY AND STAYING WARM!

**A**bout now, you're likely starting to think about what to wear this winter, and you have many options. But read this article before you decide, to help you make the right choice. Many first-timers have suffered from the cold during a ride because they tried to get away with wearing regular outdoor or even ski clothing. But if you dress warmly, in gear made specifically for snowmobiling, you will be as warm and toasty as sitting in your living room – especially if you eat a hearty meal before starting to fuel your body's internal furnace.

**Heat & Moisture:** When dressing for snowmobiling, there is one key principle to remember - retain the heat, release the moisture. The more heat your clothing preserves, the less work your body has to do to replace it. The more moisture your clothing moves away from your skin to transfer outside, the warmer you will be, because WET = CHILL. Your body naturally emits perspiration throughout the day and under exertion, you sweat. That's why regular fluid replacement is vital and why layering is so important.

**Layering:** While protecting against cold, wind and wet, layering provides you with optimum versatility and flexibility to vent or modify according to conditions. With layering,

you can adapt for excess heat and moisture caused by sudden exertion or for temperature changes throughout a long day of riding. Have you ever started to get a chill near day's end? Adding a layer (or putting one back on) will help.

**Base Layer:** Your base layer rests against your skin. While providing minimal insulation value, its primary purpose is to move moisture out, so this "long underwear" needs to be light, quick drying and quick wicking (non-absorbent, transferring wet away). Merino wool works great and synthetic fibres such as polypropylene are also popular.

**Mid-Layer:** Your next layer(s) provides heat retention by trapping warm air as insulation.

This is usually a mid-weight layer (or two, depending on the temperature and amount of exertion) possibly followed by a heavier one, such as polar fleece. Typically, these layers measure in grams; higher numbers denote greater warmth.

**No Cotton:** Avoid cotton fabrics in all of your layering garments because cotton absorbs and holds moisture, and provides poor insulation. When you perspire while wearing cotton next to your skin, you get that clammy feeling for the very long time it takes to dry. The trouble with being clammy is that every second means more precious body heat is being lost, making it easier to catch a chill. So no cotton T-shirts, sweats or blue jeans, please...



**Outside Layer:** Your exterior layer retains inner warmth and prevents external cold from entering. This outer shell should be a waterproof (not just water resistant), breathable (releases moisture) and windproof (protection against wind chill) material, such as Gortex™. Be sure to choose a snowmobiling jacket that also has multiple vents for flexible inner climate control. It must also be large enough to go over your other layers without being snug. Regular winter and even ski jackets won't do the job...get gear made to specifically combat the unique challenges of snowmobiling.

**Cover Your Head:** Dressing your extremities properly also contributes to your snowmobiling comfort. While riding, you may want a balaclava under your full-face helmet, the best choice for keeping your head and face warm. Since an uncovered head acts like a chimney for heat loss, always wear a hat or toque if outside without your helmet.

**Feet & Hands:** For your feet, select a name brand, lightweight, waterproof boot, made with multiple layers of insulation and removable liners so you can air them out overnight. For your hands, waterproof is also a must, and mitts are the warmest, especially combined with handle bar muffs, plus electric hand and thumb warmers on your sled. If you choose gloves, ensure that they are not too tight and have extra insulation on the back, which is directly exposed to the cold wind. A high windshield on your sled provides warmth by protecting you from wind chill.

**More Tips:** Even if you make all the right buying choices for snowmobiling and dress appropriately each day, you can still need an extra boost of heat sometimes. So always carry a selection of chemical toe, hand and body warmers just in case.

And remember, some folks are more susceptible to cold than others, so take extra care to ensure their warmth and comfort. It's also a good idea to carry a "day bag" to make it more convenient to add or remove layers and carry energy snacks and drinks on the trail. GSOM





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# RIDER INSIGHT

Craig Nicholson, The Intrepid Snowmobiler

## Coupling Up!



**C**ouples' snowmobile tours aren't the same as snowmobiling with the guys. For starters, unless your wife is also an avid snowmobiler, your couples' tour may be her first ride of the season.

You've likely already had your chance to be out with your buds to work out any bugs with your sled, gear or body and to become acclimatized to the weather and full days of riding. Everyone on your couples' ride should have the same opportunity, which will increase their overall confidence, comfort and enjoyment. Similarly, if everyone participates in its preparation and planning, your couples' snowmobile tour is much more likely to meet or exceed everyone's expectations.

It's also important for everyone on your couples' tour to have comparable quality clothing and snowmobiles. My wife rides her own sled, but doubling is okay if the sled is a legitimate 2-upper and you're both used to riding this way.

No one enjoys riding a sled with poor suspension and handling, or one that is underpowered or unreliable, can't keep up to the others or gets the worst gas mileage. Similarly, no one enjoys being cold, so besides wearing top quality snow gear, sled accessories like thumb warmers and heated handlebars, handlebar muffs combine with products like heated visors, vests, gloves & boot liners, and chemical warmers provide additional riding comfort.

The focus for a couples' ride may shift from putting on as many miles or getting there as fast as possible, to sightseeing, photo taking and enjoyment of the ride for its own sake. This can mean a change of pace, more flexible riding days and closer destinations.



Accommodations with more amenities are a good choice. A different focus may also mean planning multiple day rides from the same accommodations rather than destination-to-destination saddle bagging. This choice enables everyone to settle in to the same lodgings for the duration and enjoy the facilities without having to worry about packing up and moving on every day.

Couples' snowmobile tours may also have more frequent trail stops, preferably synched with available warm up shelters, club-houses and restaurants. Everyone appreciates a chance to stretch, warm up, use indoor washrooms, and socialize.

I've also found that a daily pre-ride briefing helps set the tone for couples' rides. It can include the day's route, pre-arranging coffee breaks and lunch stops, points of interest, and confirm the final destination and likely arrival time. That way everyone knows what to expect and can pace themselves accordingly.

The larger your group of couples, the more time everything takes from getting started to eating and gassing up. Here are a few ideas to minimize this challenge:

- Wherever possible, gas and oil sleds the night before.
- The guys can pack and warm up the sleds each morning while the ladies order breakfast.
- Eliminate the waiting and menu routines. If you are eating dinner in the same restaurant as breakfast, ask at dinner to reserve a table at a specific time in the morning and then pre-order breakfast so it's ready when you arrive.
- Save time on the trail by having a standard coffee break and lunch order so the first person into a restaurant can order for your entire group.

- When stopping for gas, have the guys fuel up all sleds while the women visit the washroom or warm up.

Meanwhile, if you're looking for easy ways to get started riding as a couple before going on your self-guided tour, I suggest connecting with other couples' through the local snowmobile club and participating in club and charity rides. You could also choose to ride a few of the shorter OFSC-Promoted Snow Tours to gain some experience. A good option for your first snowmobile tour as a couple is to call a company like Ontario Snow Cruises to arrange a fully guided and pre-packaged getaway. GSOM

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## SLEDDING TIPS:

# BUYING A USED SLED

STORY BY CRAIG NICHOLSON WITH JOHN SHARRARD & CRAIG IRWIN



PHOTO COURTESY OF CRAIG NICHOLSON, THE INTREPID SNOWMOBILER

**A**re you in the market to upgrade your older sled? Are you looking for your first snowmobile? Or do you need another sled for your growing family? Whatever the case, here's how to find an affordable, reliable snow machine that's good value with no nasty (and costly) surprises...

Sometimes you can find a dealer with a non-current (brand new, but unsold from a previous year) model that won't set you back as much as one from the current model year. But that will still be more expensive than a previously owned (read: used) sled.

Used, you ask? But is it a good deal? What kind of shape's it really in? How long it will last? While there's never absolutely certainty about the true condition of a used sled, here's some good advice to follow...

**First Impressions:** Your first clue about a used sled's condition should come from the owner, assuming you're not buying from third party. Before even seeing it, a little detective work can reveal what treatment it may have had. Have a casual chat with the seller about mutual snowmobiling experiences. You can casually ascertain how often, far and hard the seller normally rides, how well the sled was

protected while being transported, and why it's being sold.

Whether or not the seller is forthcoming and proud of having taken care of the snow machine may also speak to what shape it's really in. Be wary if there's bragging about an older sled still having many original parts, with no good maintenance records to support this longevity. Otherwise, the sled in question may have neglected original parts on their last legs.

Observe if the property you visit to see the sled is well cared for. What do other vehicles on site look like? Is the sled inside a garage or covered trailer when you arrive? How eager is the seller to help you to evaluate it? Are maintenance and service records offered up front? Is the seller agreeable to a mechanic looking at it on your dime? If so, a compression test can help indicate engine condition.

Compared to similar sleds for sale, how is it priced? A higher asking price may be indicative of a well cared for sled that the seller is really proud of. A killer deal may mean buyer beware. Finally, has the seller made the effort to spiff the sled up for sale? If not, how likely is it that enough effort went into regular maintenance? And be wary if you can't get satisfactory proof that the sled has been properly summerized every year, including engine fogging & fuel stabilization.

**Walk Around Assessment:** You can learn plenty about a sled's real story with a visual inspection. Check that the handlebars and skis are straight. And that there are no cracks in the cowling, rips in the seat, dents in the tunnel or wows in the running boards. Any of these might be evidence that the sled's been roughly used or in an accident. Take a seat to see if it feels and looks good from a rider's



perspective. After all, that's where you're going to be!

Look for signs of rust or pitting on metal parts, exposed (especially on shock shafts) or under the hood. This may be evidence that the machine has not been transported in an enclosed trailer, not been cleaned frequently and thoroughly, or been stored outside without protection from the elements. Any or all of which could spell trouble ahead.

Watch out for non-standard fasteners. If the machine is littered with miscellaneous nuts and bolts, it probably didn't receive careful maintenance. Worse, any repairs were likely reactionary and not a result of proactive maintenance. They also may not have included OEM or even new parts. Also, non-standard fasteners are another sign that this sled didn't get to a dealer very often.

Track condition speaks volumes about the overall shape of the sled. It's a telltale for not only how little snow cover the owner thought was okay for riding, but also the nature of the rider. A three-year old sled with studs ripped out, lugs missing and badly worn sliders, likely belonged to a throttle masher. The belt, clutch, engine and drivetrain would have suffered similar treatment. So expect much higher repair costs from a sled with an abused track. Plus, add an easy \$1,000 or more to replace the track and studs. By the same token, it's cause for suspicion if an older sled has a brand new track as it may be because of or to hide abuse.

The best way to check a track is to remove the drive belt (and see what shape that's in too) so the track will turn easily. Then lift up the back end (preferably on a sled stand) and rotate the track looking for any visible damage or undue wear.

**Mechanical Check:** If the sled still looks like a keeper, start it up with the track off the ground. Listen for any rough engine idling sound that may suggest dirt in the carburetors. Increase the RPM's slowly until the belt engages and the track moves. Listen for unusual sounds in chain case, track and clutch. Then apply the brake to make sure it works. If everything sounds and feels good, it's worth taking this one to a mechanic if that's your preference.

As you can see, to complete the used sled buying process properly takes time. It's always good to go with a knowledgeable buddy for assistance and a second opinion. But to be as certain as possible that a used sled will do the job for you without any regrets or expensive surprises, it's well worth making this effort. GSOM



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## RIDING TIPS:

# RIDING TIPS FOR NEWBIES AND THEIR EXPERIENCED FRIENDS

STORY BY LISA STACKHOUSE, PHOTO BY RICK SAUER

*Successfully introducing new participants to snowmobiling is something every rider should learn how to do, so here are some helpful tips to get started...*

Despite some previous rides, I still consider myself a newbie. But I'm getting closer to qualifying myself as experienced thanks to a group of helpful snowmobilers, including my friends, Rick Sauer and Marni Smith. They went out of their way to ensure my ride last winter was fun, safe, confidence boosting and left me wanting more ...

### 1. RIDE THE RIGHT SLED

First and foremost, they made sure their 'newbie' companion had a sled that matched her level of skill. For example, the group determined that the top notch 50th anniversary Yamaha Sidewinder LTX LE I'd arrived with probably delivered higher performance than I would be comfortable handling. So they switched me to a less powerful model. Even though this wasn't my first ride, I welcomed the personal orientation to this sled, including a reminder about controls and basic operating tips. This one-on-one did a lot for my confidence by allowing me to freely ask questions, no matter how ridiculous or dumb they may have been.

### 2. DO A TEST RUN

Before group riding, Rick took me out for a short test run on a rail bed. This provided an opportunity for me to get more comfortable on a trail with minimal twists and turns. This trial run without peer pressure allowed me to enjoy the group ride even more.

### 3. RIDE WITH MIRRORS

Once the group ride started, I was grateful to ride in the middle, surrounded by attentive riders. It was a confidence builder to see that those in front were using glove mirrors. Just seeing them continuously checking their rear view was assurance that should anything go wrong, they would quickly be there to help.

### 4. EASY TRAILS FIRST

Another key ingredient for a successful ride was starting out with what I consider to be relatively 'easy', wide trails with minimal turns. Only after they were confident I could handle a more technical trail did our group make the transition. But before that, I was briefed on what to expect and offered some tips on how to navigate the twists, turns and hills ahead.



### 5. STOP A LOT

Unlike my previous rides, we made many stops along the way. After the first 10 minutes, everyone stopped and had a break. I was given the low down on how I was doing, and more importantly, what I could expect next. Do not underestimate the power of frequent stops – if for nothing else, to give my thumb a rest! Stops are also an opportunity to take pics, meet other sledders and get a better sense of your surroundings. Equally important is to recharge with some water and a high protein snack.

### 6. ADJUST THE PACE

Another important tip is that the group adjusted their pace to make sure I wasn't constantly chasing those in front to catch up. Constantly being behind contributes to pushing a new rider outside of their skill and comfort zone. This can lead to a stressful experience with more potential for mishaps and a less enjoyable ride.

### 7. FOLLOW THE STAKES

When it came to crossing lakes (on a staked trail and only on safe ice of course), my companions gave me a preview of what to expect, what to do and not do. Admittedly, with all I know about ice perils, this is the one area where nerves got the better of me. So I made the one-time rookie mistake of straying too far from the group. But now I know exactly what to do – just follow the stakes!

### 8. STEERING ON PAVEMENT

Getting gas is not as simple as I thought it would be. At a very busy gas station, I learned that getting my sled to navigate on asphalt is not easy, especially for a lightweight like myself. No amount of leaning did any good, so thankfully Rick hopped on my sled and got me sorted. Then we laughed and laughed at how everyone kept telling me (rather loudly) to steer by leaning with my body weight – and there I was, practically horizontal with no traction whatsoever!

**CROSSING ROADS:** Finally, road crossings are something to be mindful of, especially busy ones. While common sense dictates the obvious – look both ways and only cross when it's clear – crossing is added stress for a newbie. So it's helpful to have the leader go first and wave newbies through. Once again, my companions provided this instruction beforehand, so I knew what to expect and what their signals would be.

If you're taking out a newbie rider to discover Ontario's premier snowmobiler trail network, keeping these tips in mind will help make it a positive experience for everyone. As a newbie, my best advice is to approach sledding with no ego and a desire to always learn and be better. After all, it's safe, enjoyable and memorable rides that will guarantee everyone coming back for more! GSOM



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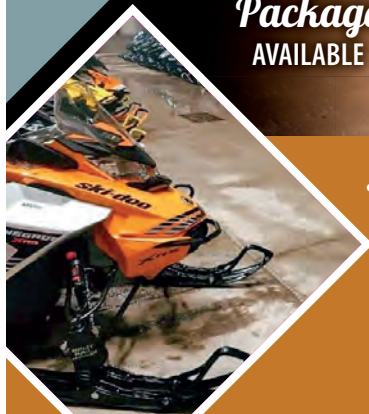
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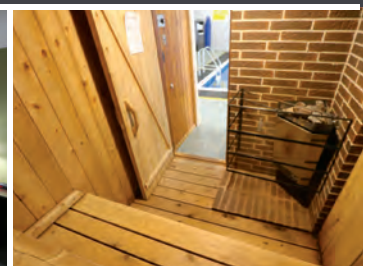
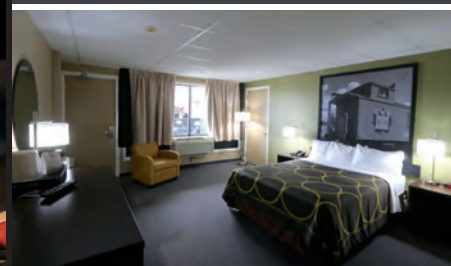


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