

Expo Ski Australia

PROMOTION OF AUSTRALIAN SKI PRODUCTS



THE EXPO SKI STORY

The quality of water ski racing in Australia today can be attributed to two of Australia's leading skiers of the late 60's, Mary McMillan and Terry Bennett.

These two skiers were the first top line Australian ski racers to venture overseas looking for competition. The year was 1970. Both skiers were at the top of their divisions in a sport where the first National Titles were still to be held.

Terry Bennett, who skied with Peter Ward behind Wally Hacket's Thunderbird dominated the Men's division in Australia in 1968 and 1969 and had twice set World Endurance, non stop skiing records. A team time with Peter Ward of 11 hours 38 minutes, where they covered 437 miles and a solo effort by Terry of 538 miles in 12 hours 15 minutes.

Mary McMillan was the Prima Ballerina of water skiing in Australia. Mary, while the No. 1 woman racing skier in Australia, really made her name in Barefoot skiing where she had won the Australian Barefoot Womens National title 6 times. Mary was the first women to ever ski backwards on her barefeet.

With Mary's husband Ron, Terry formed Expo Ski Australia, an idea formulated to obtain sponsorship through the promotion of Australian Marine products overseas. The trio invited leading Kite Flyers Col Sundstrom and John Hocking to join the team and to round off the promotion, one of Sydney's leading movie cameramen, Bob Pike, joined the team to film the expedition. The team, under the banner of Expo Ski Australia, visited Singapore and Greece where they demonstrated the arts of barefooting and kite flying.

Moving on to Europe, the skiers competed successfully in Great Britain with Mary McMillan winning the British Grand Prix. In Italy Mary McMillan set a new Womens record for the crossing of the Adriatic Sea between Yugoslavia and Italy. The race is a really individual race against the weather and conditions and Bennett attempted the crossing three times in six days, and when he finally had reasonable water, exhaustion caused two falls in the last 10 miles and he missed the record and \$5,000 by a little over 60 seconds.

In 1972 the second Expo Tour eventuated and this time the skiers competed both in Europe and for the first time in the U.S.A. Wally Hacket and Ron Harris shipped two Hustlers to Italy. The boats Muds and Splinter were driven by Wally Hacket and Norm Griffin. The skiers were Wayne Jones and Neil Harris, both very young. The attempt to cross the Adriatic was a disaster with bad weather giving the teams no chance for a record.

In typical Australian fashion the teams decided to make the crossing and Neil Harris succeeded but only after 4 and a half hours in which time the crew and skiers were feared to have drowned.

The U.S. tour was a great success with Grant Torrens, Wayne Jones and Craig Warren showing the potential to be great skiers. Grant Torrens set a huge crowd at Long Beach Marine Stadium alight with excitement when he won the barefoot drag against America's best.

Wayne Jones skied at 105 m.p.h. and Craig Warren ran through at 110 m.p.h. to be the first Australians to break the 100 m.p.h. barrier. On the ski racing circuit Terry Bennett became the first Australian to win in the U.S. when he won at Lake Millerton near Fresno. Fresno, California, saw Australia's first introduction to the Murdock racing ski and the locked in type binders that is taken for granted in ski racing today. Another problem the Australians encountered was the long ropes. In those days Australians skied on 70 foot lines outside the wash while U.S. skiers were running on lines from 180 feet to 200 feet.

The 1982 Expo tour came to an exciting end when Wayne Jones won the European Grand Prix. Wayne won the event by over 5 minutes from English Champion John Harvey. The race was a sensational affair with a course boat chasing Wayne with a black flag because he was skiing in traditional Australian style of holding the handles behind the back. This was against the European rules and Wayne was duly disqualified but in a great gesture Great Britain's Champion recognised the ability of Wayne Jones and presented him with the trophy.

The success of Australian skiers in the U.S. in 1972 combined with the hospitality of the Californian ski racers saw the Expo Skiers turn their back on the European scene. This was to the detriment of European skiers who because of the official attitude to the Australian ski style lost the opportunity to keep up with the standard of ski racing the Australian and U.S. skiers were about to lift to heights that were demonstrated in the World's first ski racing titles held in 1979.

The star of Expo in 1973 was Paul McManus who, together with his sister Debbie, showed the U.S.A. that a new champion was emerging. Paul started the 1973 tour with a sizzling ski run of 128 m.p.h. at Long Beach Marine Stadium. The run was 2 miles an hour faster than Chuck Stearns world record of 126 m.p.h., but Paul could not claim the record due to his ski splitting at the end of the run causing him to fall heavily and preventing him backing up the run as was necessary to claim the record. Paul went on to show his skill in the Catalina and Las Vegas races and returned to the U.S. in 1974 to be the first Australian skier to compete in the U.S. nationals as well as setting records in most of the U.S. Marathon events. The Expo tours continued each year and every skier that has figured in the Australian National Titles placings has had a background of U.S. tours. In 1973 Australia invited the first American team to Australia and the tour was led by one of the originals of Circuit racing in the U.S., Norm Wilson. Accompanying Wilson was his son Ron, Chester, and Craig Wendt, who went on to become one of the best skiers on the U.S. circuit.

In 1974 Tom Brown led the team with Jeff Wooten Joni Martini who was the women's legend in the U.S. Ski Racing scene and was sponsored by the Rothmans Sports Foundation.

In 1975 Australian skiers started winning titles at the U.S. Nationals. Robbie Woods and Bronwyn Wright were emerging as International stars and setting records in all races in the U.S. and Australia. Robbie Woods and Bronwyn Wright have proved themselves the greatest skiers in the World, due to the opportunities created by the early Expo Skiers, and Australian Water Skiing has benefited from those two skiers Mary McMillan and Terry Bennett, who first ventured overseas to ski the Adriatic Sea in 1970.



PAUL McMANUS

Paul was one of the most talented skiers to hit the water in Australia. He concentrated on ski racing, where he earned the reputation of being the greatest ever ski racer, with the most natural talent. Teaming with Col Billington, back in 1970 they became the first skiers to break the one hour barrier when they skied behind Bill Hooper's "Caroline" in the Bridge to Bridge Ski Race. In trial skiing, if you name it, you could say Paul McManus has won it. Paul had tremendous stamina and when only 16 years of age set a World Endurance record of 1 hour 31 minutes in Barefooting, and then in 1975 set a backwards barefoot Endurance Record of 15 minutes. Paul also competed in several Barefoot National Titles.

DEBRA McMANUS

Debbie McManus was a leading figure in Australian Ski Racing in the early seventies. Dominating ski racing in her division, she won an incredible eight Australian Titles.

Skiing with Bronwyn Wright, she won four Bridge to Bridge Classics in her Division. The title of Australia's fastest women's skier came to Debbie while still a junior when she skied an incredible 98 m.p.h. Debra represented Australia twice in the U.S.A. Nationals and had many exciting tussles with the great American woman skier, Joanne Martina. In her day, Debra was unbeatable, and from her first ski race at the age of twelve with the great Mary McMillan, developed a 'never give in' attitude that resulted in her claiming a position among Australia's water skiing greats.



WAYNE JONES

From Westmead, Sydney, N.S.W., born on the 5th December 1954. Wayne commenced skiing in 1962 at Pitttown on the Hawkesbury River. Wayne entered his first ski race when 14 years of age at Cabarita behind Bill Hooper's Caroline in the Junior Boys Division. After that first race he competed in over 50 races in the Junior ranks and was never defeated and never had a fall. He represented N.S.W. from the inaugural year through to 1975 and won the Australian Junior Boys in 1970 and then in 1971 and 1974 won the Australian Mens Speed Championships and the N.S.W. Titles in 1971-72 and 75.

Wayne also represented Australia in England, America and Italy winning the European Grand Prix at Dover England in 1972 and was the first person to take the trophy from Europe. In U.S.A he competed in ski drags pulling 105 m.p.h. at Longbeach, California and was made a life member of the 100 m.p.h. club being the first Australian to be given the honour. 1971 was the highlight of his career when he broke the Australian Speed Record of 90 m.p.h. with a sizzling run of 101.22 m.p.h. and was the first Australian to break the 100 m.p.h. barrier which he achieved behind Ernie Nunns famous boat Wasp II and also in that year won the N.S.W Title, the Australian Title and the Bridge to Bridge Ski Classic behind Norm Griffin's Louise J.

In 1970 he broke the Australian Barefoot Record with 75.3 m.p.h. and that record stood for three years.

He also won the Bridge to Bridge in 1973 behind Louise J and in 1975 behind Thunderbolt. Other successes have been the Bill McLaughlin Memorial in 1972, the Lion Island Ski Classic in 72-74 and winning the inaugural Queensland Iron Man race over 120 miles in 1973.