

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS THWAITES

# Downhill defined

## Winter is best spent outdoors



*Kim Roberts, Alpine Program Manager, Alpine Ski Club*

Even in the middle of a Canadian summer, we know winter is coming. What divides us is whether that fills us with dread or excitement.

For the founders of the Alpine Ski Club of Toronto, and those who have come after them, winter is a season to be anticipated, and then embraced.

Today the Alpine Ski Club is known as a premiere private ski club, home of some of the finest skiing in the province. But in the 1950s, it was something a bit more modest.

“It started as a travelling ski club,” explains Kirsti Suutari,

marketing director of the club. “Members would meet up in Toronto, car pool to different hills to ski all day, then drive home again that night.”

Members eventually bought 120 acres of prime skiing terrain, then spent summers felling trees and jury-rigging rope tows.

The love of skiing and boarding remains strong among the spiritual – and in many cases, literal – descendants of those club founders. “We have second and third generation members here,” says Kirsti, “people who grew up at the club.”

The runs and the tows are considerably more sophisticated now. There are five lifts that could whisk 9,000 people an hour up the hills. The 36 runs range from beginner greens all the way up to true double-black diamonds (in a set of runs known, fittingly, as The Steeps), with shared access to even more runs at the ski club next door through a long-standing reciprocal ski-across program.

There’s a terrain park with a half pipe, something many clubs don’t have. It’s one of the reasons the Ontario Escarpment Snowboarding Team trains at Alpine.

The club’s own ski and snowboard racing teams regularly reach the podium – Alpine’s snowboarders took the top four spots in their age category at this year’s nationals in Mt. Tremblant, and one of

Alpine’s racing graduates was recently named to the Canadian women’s World Cup Ski Team. But it’s not just a racing club, Kirsti explains: it’s a club with a strong racing component.

In the same way, it’s a club with gorgeous indoor spaces, including a stunning new clubhouse at the base, a two-storey chalet at the peak, and a warming “hut” at the north slopes; but the focus of the club isn’t about being indoors.

At its heart the club remains what it began as, a place where people who love to ski can make friends and share a love of winter. “People who come here for the first time are astonished to find that members chat with them on the ski lifts or in the clubhouse,” Kirsti says.

“That’s just the way it is here.” **DS**

BY ANDREW WAGNER-CHAZALON



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