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# SUPER SLIDER

It all started in 1884 in St. Moritz when two eccentric Englishmen decided to slide down a one-kilometre course at speeds of 129 kilometres an hour on a wooden sled. Now, 120 years later, Canada not only dominates the sport of skeleton but in Calgarian Lindsay Alcock we have a world champion.

By LOUISE HODGSON-JONES // Photography by EWAN NICHOLSON

**A**LTHOUGH LINDSAY ALCOCK'S FIRST attempt at the skeleton didn't have the fanfare or the publicity that her predecessors received, it was a memorable occasion in her life. "I just did it for a lark with some friends, just to see who was the most brave," she explains. That lark in 1998 got Alcock hooked, and in just six years she is now top of her sport, having been crowned World Cup Champion in the 2003–2004 season.

Last season started off with a bang with a gold medal placing in Calgary—the third time she had defended the title. Then she won silver at Lake Placid and gold at Lillehammer. "Last year everything fell into place," she says. "My worst finish was fourth." Despite losing the gold at the World Championships in Germany by 6/100ths of a second, she wasn't disappointed. "We have four heats at a World's over two days, as opposed to two heats at a World Cup, so it is a little more mentally challenging. Competing in Germany as well meant there

was a lot of competition. I couldn't be disappointed losing by such a small margin."

Finishing the season in the top position was a gratifying result after the previous year when an injury cost her the World Cup title, which went to teammate Michelle Kelly. The 2002–2003 season saw her make two new start records (she currently holds the fastest push on the team at 5.31 seconds), and she was part of the Canadian sweep with Kelly and Melissa Hollingsworth at two races—Lake Placid and St. Moritz.

Competition in women's skeleton has intensified since it was introduced at the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002. Germany is the county to beat, but the United States and Switzerland also field strong teams. Then there is the competition from within. As this is a qualifying year for the Olympics, all of Alcock's teammates will

be vying to make the team that goes to Turin. The qualifying criteria have yet to be decided. "From my experience at Salt Lake we needed four top-six finishes; for Turin I believe we are looking at five top-six finishes over two seasons, which is doable." This could prove to be an internal battle among the Canadian team as all are in the top ten; so with Canada only sending two women to the Olympics, the final selection may come down to World Cup points or a race-off.

Turin in 2006 and Vancouver in 2010 are Alcock's ultimate goals. Finishing sixth at Salt Lake City has wetted her appetite for achieving more at the next two Olympics. "I was 10 when the Olympics were in Calgary,





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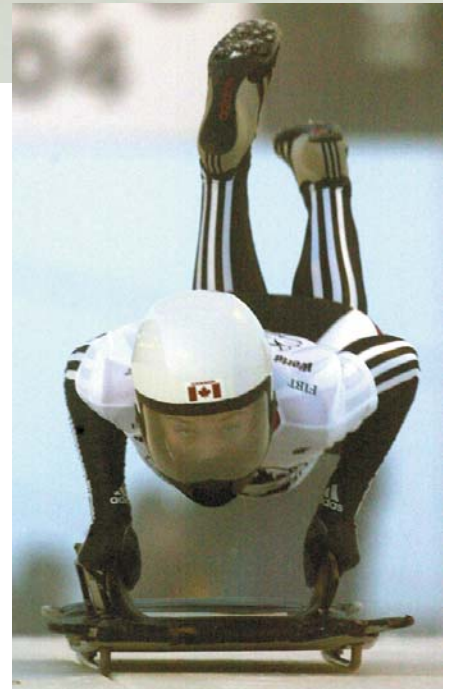
## For the Record

### 2003-2004 SEASON

World Cup Overall—1st  
World Championships—Konigsee, Germany—Silver  
World Cup: Altenberg, Germany—Silver  
World Cup: Sigulda, Latvia—4th  
World Cup: Lillehammer, Norway—Gold  
World Cup: Lake Placid, U.S.A. —Silver  
World Cup: Calgary, Canada—Gold

### OTHER RESULTS

2002-2003 World Cup overall—2nd place  
2001-2002 World Cup overall—3rd place  
2002 Winter Olympics: Salt Lake City—6th place  
Calgary Push record: 5.31 seconds  
Calgary Track record: 57.81 seconds



and I remember the atmosphere and electricity, so to have it again in Canada is outstanding. I never dreamt I would be in this position.”

Alcock’s goal setting reaches beyond the sport of skeleton. With a degree in kinesiology behind her, she is studying for her certification as a cardiovascular technologist with the British Columbia Institute of Technology. Although it is a two-year full-time course, she is doing it by correspondence, hoping to finish it in five years by the end of 2006. Juggling training and course work is hard, and after trying to combine the two last season she now realizes that she has to set realistic timelines for herself.


Even off-season when she can study, she still has to maintain a structured fitness regime to prepare herself for the next season. Her conditioning coach puts her through a balanced program that includes lower-body exercises, such as squats and power cleans, and upper-body exercises that emphasize strength. “When you are loading you have to have strength, but you don’t want to get too bulky,” Alcock explains. “There is a fine line between being fairly lean to having strength and power.” She works out four times a week—twice for the upper body and twice for the lower body—and sprints—“my secret weapon”—three times a week. During the summer months she is also on the track in the icehouse at Canada Olympic Park (COP). Massage, A.R.T., and chiropractic sessions are important supplements to her training.

Like a lot of her contemporaries, Alcock undertakes speaking engagements in and around Calgary. Her Olympic status and her enthusiasm and dedication for the sport are making her a popular choice to speak at schools, seminars, retreats, and community events. “There are a lot of parallels between sport and the business world, and I feel that I have a unique story to tell. I am also build-

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ing my path for the future.”

Alcock takes pride in whatever she undertakes whether it is for herself or for the team. Teresa Schlachter, high performance director for skeleton and women’s bobsleigh, comments that she is very focused. “She is not complacent when it comes to results. If she identifies gaps in her performance, she will fill them,” she explains. “She is interested in all aspects of the sport and wants to be an expert in everything, so she will do well this year, particularly on her home track.”

The 2004–2005 skeleton season will finish in February when Calgary hosts the World Championships, an event that is sure to be one of the highlights of the season for Alcock. Choosing what some still regard as an unconventional and dangerous sport makes the thrill and excitement of skeleton even more appealing to her. Not the most comfortable piece of equipment to work with, the sled prompts her to wish for one thing: “I want it to be comfortable as a Cadillac, fast as a Ferrari, and reliable as a Toyota.” 

## The Cresta Run

The skeleton dates its origins back to the Cresta Run in 1884, an event that still occurs every winter in St. Moritz. In the fall of 1884 British winter residents George Robertson and Charles Digby-Jones built an ice run, three-quarters of a mile long, with 10 testing corners that started at St. Moritz, cruised past the hamlet of Celerina and finished in the village of Celerina. The first run, completed in January 1885, took nine weeks to build and had a drop of 514 feet with a one-in-2.8 to a one-in-8.7 gradient. Thus started a racing tradition that has been broken only by two world wars. The Cresta usually opens two or three days before Christmas and continues for nine weeks until the end of February with over 30 highly competitive races.