RACE. APRÈS. REPEAT.

Photo: City Ski Champs

The City Ski Championships attract those who party hard, race harder – and like to win. Louise Cameron-Hall takes part in the racing and revelry for the 25th anniversary event

"It was crazy last year!" said the *Financial Times* journalist, as we ascended the mountain in the panoramic electric funicular past vineyards to snowy Crans-Montana. "The race?" I asked, fearful for tales of crazy competitive racing, wipe-out injuries and reputation-ruining performances on the notorious Mont Lachaux World Cup run. "No, the first night. People couldn't stand. They were downing vodka straight from the bottle."

Welcome to the City Ski Championships, now rebranded as City Ski Challenge, where the Square Mile's movers and shakers descend on a smart Alpine resort – Crans-Montana last year; Courmayeur this year (2026) – for a weekend of downhill racing, corporate rivalry and après-ski carnage.

City Ski is not your average ski weekend. It's fast, competitive, and laced with catsuits and ego – where après prowess rivals skiing skill, sleep is underrated, and women give the City boys a race for their money.

CRANS-MONTANA: THE PLACE TO BE

Crans-Montana, once home to Roger Moore, combines old-world glamour with new-world energy, having successfully reinvented itself as a high-octane playground for ultra-wealthy families and the next-gen freestyle crowd. It has hosted the annual City Ski Championships for the past four years, marking its 25th anniversary last winter, and has seen 10s of millions of euros of investment pour in ahead of the 2027 FIS Alpine Ski World Championships.

Organised by Amin Momen of Momentum Ski, the City Ski Champs attract those who party hard, race harder – giant slalom and team dual slalom – and like to win.

We arrived a day early for a recce, experiencing the Bella Lui lantern walk and a look around the luxury new Six Senses Crans-Montana, a ski-in/ski-out Bond-lair, with a 2,000-square-metre spa, that seems to grow out of the mountainside itself.

Waking to cobalt skies, we skied quiet corduroy pistes. "It's very Milk Tray," I whispered, as matching black onesies sashayed onto heated Prada lifts. Even the skiing here is good-looking.

After a fondue lunch at Michelin-starred chef Franck Reynaud's Cabane des Violettes, we checked out the City race zone on the lower section of the World Cup course, before heading to après-ski at Zerodix. The place to be – that night.

As the City crowd descended – by plane, train, and blacked-out Land Rover, from London, Paris, Geneva, Basel and Verbier – DJ Mousse T. hit the decks. "Sex Bomb, Sex Bomb, you're a Sex Bomb," pumped across the crisp Valais air as the crowd roared their approval.

Amin was spotted on the terrace with former F1 World Champion Damon Hill, chef Marcus Wareing and BBC correspondent Frank Gardner OBE, who would later that night host the *FT* Alpine Forum panel – the official, more serious, City networking start to the weekend's antics.

Olympians Emily Sarsfield-Power and Graham Bell, the course-setter and commentator, danced in the mosh pit as bankers, brokers and accountants chanted "I'm Horny, Horny, Horny" and the sun set in a blaze of glory.

"The one to beat isn't here. He didn't get a pink ticket from his wife," said one racer, scanning the crowd as he swigged from a magnum of rosé. "Their number two is due any day."

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"Don't get too drunk," our team captain, Rob, warned. "We need to get back in time to change. No repeat of last year." What happened? "Our party turned up at the *FT* Alpine Forum still in ski clothes and Rob dive-bombed the stage," whispered one teammate.

Later, queuing for our bib pick-up at the Forum dinner, one seasoned racer leaned over: "You want a low start number - fewer ruts. It gets icy." Hopeful, I picked up my welcome pack - bib number 185 (last in pack), a toffee-vodka sachet and an event wristband reading: "Compete. Après. Repeat."

Racers mingled as trays of champagne circulated. One, shirtless in a fur gilet, swiped another glass and winked, "Still got it."

We then listened to moving accounts from Frank Gardner, discussing the war in Ukraine, and Milky and Hannah from Snow Camp – the City Ski partner charity – speaking about having had their lives transformed by discovering skiing and finding gainful employment in the snowsports industry.

City Ski competitors range from 20-somethings City newbies to industry leaders in their sixties. "Do you employ on skiing ability?" I asked one, cheekily. "Absolutely!" he responded. "Only the best!" ❯❯

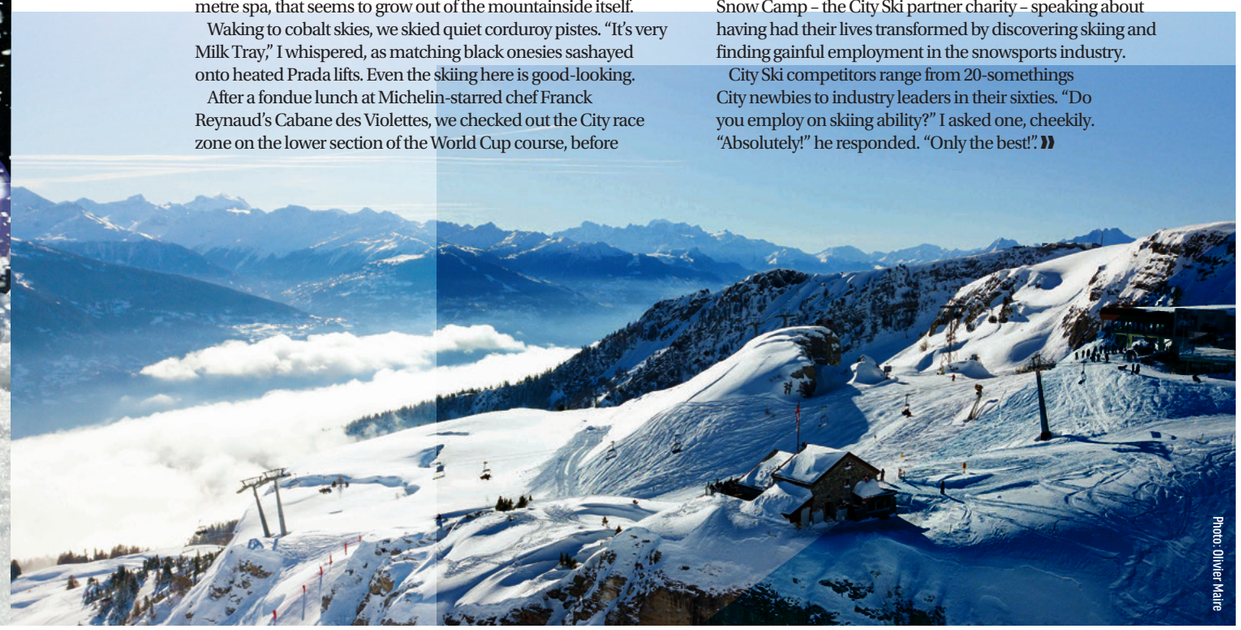

Photo: Olivier Maire

Let's get this party started! Crans-Montana, once home to Roger Moore, combines old-world glamour with new-world energy – and has hosted the annual City Ski Championships for the past four years, marking its 25th anniversary last winter

A BLUR OF ICE, RUTS AND GATES

Race day. 7.30am. The sun burst over the peaks; breakfast buzzed with strategy chat. Nerves fizzed. Meanwhile, I found myself unexpectedly crying – one eye glued shut, the other weeping – a random eye infection. Withdrawal wasn't a team option. Cue a frantic dash across town to the pharmacy and a blur of antibiotic eye drops in the lift. It worked.

We joined the stragglers' course inspection, ear-wagging strategy: "Turn tight up here, not too late, you want a high line into the next gate."

The race was off. Former Olympic giant-slalom skier Graham Bell set the course time: fast, punchy. Adrenaline surged as commentary echoed across the mountain.

I watched as a MAMIL – Middle-Aged Man in Lycra – Stig-like behind his helmet and mirrored goggles in a Team GB suit, already on his second run (everyone gets two runs), was limbering up as if on BBC *Ski Sunday*. Swinging his legs like a metronome, he huffed and puffed, planted his poles, jumped up and down, kicked into his skis and launched from the gate. Distant cheering rippled through the tannoy as Bell's voice rose with excitement. He was clearly one to beat.

Thirty eternal seconds, then, it was me. "Five, four, three, two, one – go!" A blur of ice, ruts and gates. Late on my turns, I willed my thighs to hold. A sharp last corner and over the finish line. The course was rutted and I'd had to break hard at the last corner to make the gate, but it was good enough.

The next skier – sleek, masterful, powerful – danced through the gates, glided the schuss and crossed the finish in record time, sweeping Bell and fellow British Olympic ski cross skier Emily Sarsfield-Power off the top of the leaderboard by half a second. Price Waterhouse Cooper's Tess Hoppeler in a Swiss Team race suit.

"She's done it again!" came Graham's voice from the commentary tent, reaching a crescendo, as a sea of race suits rushed over to celebrate and *We Are the Champions* filled the air.

Next came the equally competitive team dual slalom, before we headed up to Zerodix for an Alpine Revival festival DJ-set on the south-facing terrace, with a panoramic view across the Rhône Valley to Mont Blanc. Hundreds danced, arms swaying to the beat, as the Aperol-sun dipped behind distant peaks.

Then it was up the Cry d'Er telecabine to Club Altitude for a glittering up-mountain awards dinner. The atmosphere was electric. I found myself on top table with City Ski's celebrity royalties of skiing: Damon Hill, Marcus Wareing, Emily (Sarsfield-Power) and Graham (Bell).

As the weighty table of awards (35 – across all industry sectors) were distributed, heckling broke out as a stream of sparkler-lit Verve Clicquot magnums were delivered to the Verbier Team Armadillo table. Amin grabbed the mic: "Double that table's bill – and give half to Snow Camp!"

Later – stunned – I found Graham slinging a medal around my neck: winner of Women's Seniors 40+ (giant slalom). Beside me stood The Stig – Men's Seniors 40+ champion.

Then the big one: the overall winner – Tess Hoppeler – again – a clear three seconds ahead of the rest of the pack. "Fair play. She's fast. Respect," said the fastest male, one of the Knight Frank team, as the room erupted.

Champagne corks popped, cameras flashed and the music turned up: "Let's get this party started..." ▮

WE CHAT TO CITY SKI CHALLENGE FOUNDER, AMIN MOMEN

"We started in 2000. I wanted to create a winter event to bring City people together. It just took off. In 2009, we added the *FT* Alpine Forum, with guest speakers like Frank Gardner.

"We have rebranded as the City Ski Challenge to ensure the event's continued success and growth – to become more inclusive and attract a broader, challenge-oriented cohort. It's inclusive, fun, with great skiing that facilitates connections, while continuing to be the premier networking event of the winter sporting calendar for the UK's business community. We welcome all levels – and non-skiers too.

"For 2026, we are moving back to Courmayeur. The event will take place on the new Frederica Brignone piste, with a new inter-club category for members of clubs such as Queen's, Hurlingham, Lansdown, White's Club, 5 Hertford Street, RAC, City University, Royal Society of Medicine Club and more. It will be more affordable, and we aim to attract a younger audience alongside our established City skiers.

"There are prizes for all levels, age groups and genders, with annual awards across multiple business sectors – insurance, investment brokers, medicine, fintech, management consultancy, and more. Celebrities who have taken part include Heston Blumenthal, Marcus Wareing, Damon Hill, Konrad Bartelski, Tommy Moe, Steve Redgrave, Chemmy Alcott, Victoria Pendleton, Amy Williams, Graham Bell, Emily Sarsfield-Power, and others."