



The Spectacular SKIJORDUE

More than 50 horse, rider and skier teams. Twenty-five kilos of cheese. Polo club style and cowboy grit. Welcome to the fantastical world of skis, spandex and supersonic horsepower.

By JENN WEBSTER & INGRID SCHULZ

It might be the sport of all sports to propel equestrian activities to the stratosphere. Riders and skiers or snowboarders looking for a day of velocity and extreme horse sport (and some sweet prizes) took to the powder-laden fields of the Calgary Polo Club on February 11 in honor of Skijordue 2017. Skijoring, anglicized from the Norwegian ski-kjøring, refers to the sport of “ski-driving.” The activity can involve dogs, motorized vehicles or horses, however, south of cowtown, and in the epicenter of horse country there was little question the equestrian version was the only towing option of choice on this day.

Skijordue was conceptualized by Sam Mitchell of Millarville, Alberta, after she and her husband, Graham, settled in the foothills south of Calgary. Craving the après-ski vibe scene of Zurich they had left behind, the pair decided to fuse their love of winter riding with their passion, of yes, cheese fondue.

Skijordue in Calgary had a “choose your own adventure quality,” where the intrepid rider was rewarded with bragging rights for the fastest, surefooted pony. Skiers and boarders along for the ride could contend in circuit, long jump or sprint events. Meanwhile, spectators were treated to cheese fondue and bratwurst sausage. Entertainment was provided by members of the Calgary Swiss yodeling club, the mad disk-jockey skills of Graham, plus the snow riding antics of trick rider, Alanna Nolan. *Western Horse Review's* own Sally Bishop also sent her matched Paint steeds over a jump with two expert skiers in tow.

With so many possibilities for radness at every turn, the event was likely one of the most photographed events in our recent western culture, including a drone operated by Calgarian Aidan Pettigrew, which captured video footage and was viewed more than 38,000 times, after only a day following the event.

Summoning a bonfire of love from the community in an outpouring of spectator, sponsorship, volunteer and participation support, the day surpassed anyone's expectations for a winter fun day, and put a fresh twist on the modern West's obsession for horses. And dare we say it – in these complicated times, Skijordue 2017 reminded the horse industry how to have fun.



Tara Mackenzie

The RULES

Like many horse sports, the key to a winning team is all in the partnership – in this case, the horse, the rider and skier. Rules are designed with a high regard for safety.

- Horses to be ridden in western saddles, with a horn.
- Ropes to be dallied (wrapped) around the saddle horn – no tying of ropes to any part of the saddle, horse, rider or skier.
- Ropes must be minimum 30 feet in length and a maximum 50 feet in length.
- Handles and loops are not permitted, but knots are.
- All skiers must wear approved snow sport helmets. Helmets and protective vests recommended for riders.
- Traction shoes and protective boots are commended for horses.



Skijordue 2017 was in support of Prairie Sky Equine Assisted Therapy. Dusty Wigemyr on left, Mike Bishop on right.

Tara Mackenzie



Chad Rowbotham



Chad Rowbotham

THE VICTORS

ABOVE: Long Jump Champions Riley Harvie (rider) on Denny, and Jean Louis Frank (skier).

LEFT: The winning circuit team, Claire Perks on Nellie, and Matt Penner. Credit: Chad Rowbotham

BELOW (LEFT): The overall champion team, Logan Hodson on Scottie, and Daniel Masur, was determined by point placings across all three events. Credit: Chad Rowbotham

BELOW: Sprint champions Dusty Wigemyr on Tommy, and Adrian Watters. Credit: Chad Rowbotham



Chad Rowbotham





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COMPETITIVE SPORT

Skijoring's roots are in Scandinavia. Skijoring, anglicized from the Norwegian ski-kjøring, refers to the sport of "ski-driving." The English word is pronounced with a hard j (skjôrng); whereas in Norwegian, the j is pronounced like y.

Skijoring has been a competitive sport for over a century and was included on the program of the Nordic Games (an early version of the modern Winter Olympics), hosted by various Scandinavian countries, in 1901, 1905 and 1909. Skijoring was also a demonstration sport held in St. Moritz, Switzerland, in 1928. Unlike modern equestrian skijoring in North America, there were no riders on the horses, it was as translated a "ski-driving" event. Therefore, no jumps on the course and athletes competed simultaneously, sometimes on a frozen lake as the "track."

Nowadays, a rider mounted on a horse pulls a skier at a fast pace through a course that may contain gates, jumps and even rings for the skier to accumulate as he or she whizzes by. Additionally, springs and long jump classes may be held. The World Skijoring Championships have been held in Whitefish, Montana since 2009, as a part of the annual Whitefish Winter Carnival. The 2011 World Skijoring Championships boasted a purse of just under \$20,000 and 91 teams. The city of Leadville, Colorado, has organized an equestrian competition since 1949, with a much higher emphasis on speed.

(For more information on next year's event stay tuned to www.skijor.ca)



CONSUMED

- 9 flats of beer
- 25kg of Gruyere/Emmentaler
- 50 loaves of Pane di Casa
- 300 bratwurst

SKIJOR STYLE

What's this you say, "skijor style"? Indeed, for spectators the significant question of the day was not whether or not to attend, but rather, what to wear. Skijor fashion as it turned out was a spectacular mix of fur, fringe, colour, spandex, sunglasses and of course, cowboy hats, sometimes all on one body. Schmalzy? Oh yes, perhaps, but it was a divine additive to the "sporting life" flavor of the day.



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