

by EZRA BOWEN

## SOME SPICE FOR THE SUGAR

A glittering Vermont ski spa called Sugarbush has carefully cultivated an aura of jet-set snobbery that makes the insiders who ski there feel way out and the outsiders who have never dared the place feel out in the cold

While prosperity in most Vermont ski areas is indeed a thing called share-the-wealth, there is one resort that does a marvelous business by seeming to want to share nothing. This is Sugarbush, whose management has persuaded a fair slice of New York's café society to come and play on winter weekends. By creating special little welcoming enclaves for the *haut monde* and indulging in some artful semisnobbing of nearly everyone else, Sugarbush has made itself absolutely irresistible to all the people whose secret dream is to be allowed to pass under the rope.

Everything about Sugarbush has a special style, from the brightly colored cars on the Italian-designed gondola lift to the jet-set clientele that swept in

when the resort opened in 1958 to the scribbles under the phone just outside the men's room: instead of the usual information about Gloria, one scribble says, "Fight Mental Health." For skiers who live in New York there is even a special way to get to Sugarbush. This is a private bus and, like anything else connected with Sugarbush, the bus, coyly nicknamed the McIlbus or Sugarbus, has little chic overtones that make the occasional Outs who ride the bus feel Outer, and the Ins, Inner.

The idea of a private bus, chartered from Greyhound every weekend from New Year's Day to the end of good skiing, was started by East Side Architect Alexander (Sandy) McIlvaine, who has since turned the running of it

over to such gold-plated stewards as America's Cup Crewman Buddy Bombard and Dolph Cramer, a New York ore dealer. It loads up in midtown Manhattan every Friday at 5 p.m., and McIlvaine, who also has his architectural paw in numerous Sugarbush houses, charges \$15 (\$22 round trip), including what is called the lunch. This is really supper, a sandwich washed down with white wine. It may be preceded by a crude cocktail if one is smart enough to have brought a bottle—or can get a bottle owner to share. The various goodies are served by two stewardesses—Cramer's wife and Bombard's chosen morale officer for the current weekend—who get a free ride or a cut-rate ride in return for chores. The bus driver is a

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very attractive white-haired man named Johnny McBride, who does TV and fashion modeling when he is not driving the bus.

The last time I rode up, a strict no-flirting-with-driver-while-bus-is-in-motion rule was reiterated for the benefit of one of the stewardesses (a society-type predecessor of the present incumbents). She had become bored with the trip, which took about six hours despite the fact that McBride pulled over at one point to remove the governor on the throttle.

On this same ride, I am happy to say, there was very little group singing. (On an earlier trip there had been much *Down by the Old Mill Stream* done in not very close harmony.) There was, however, much congregating in the aisle of the bus, drink in hand, and a fair amount of seat-hopping. The fraternizing continued, at a rising decibel rate, for the entire 290 miles. I was surprised at so much jolly chatter. A great many of the passengers are repeaters, and I had thought they would give it the old Oyster Bay, "Hi, how are you? God,

wonderful to see you," and then lapse into a six-hour coma. Not at all. The single ladies, of whom there are always several, do some vigorous spadework on the journey as insurance against a lonely weekend. And although a few of the males tend toward silence, they are basically party-oriented. The only professional travelers are the stewardesses, who may at any moment swing themselves up into the baggage rack and snooze the miles away.

Until this year the Vermont terminal for the bus was the parking lot of the Sugarbush Inn, which is always just about two degrees warmer than McMurdo Sound. It has since been changed to Elwin Kingsbury's thriving Shell station, which is just a little colder. From here the troops disperse. A fair number go on to Stowe or Mad River by taxi or in cars that usually won't start.

My own experience with local transport was fairly typical. I was staying with the late Peter Estin, a postwar-vintage Dartmouth racer, who, despite mountains of evidence to the contrary, swore he always went to bed at a quarter of

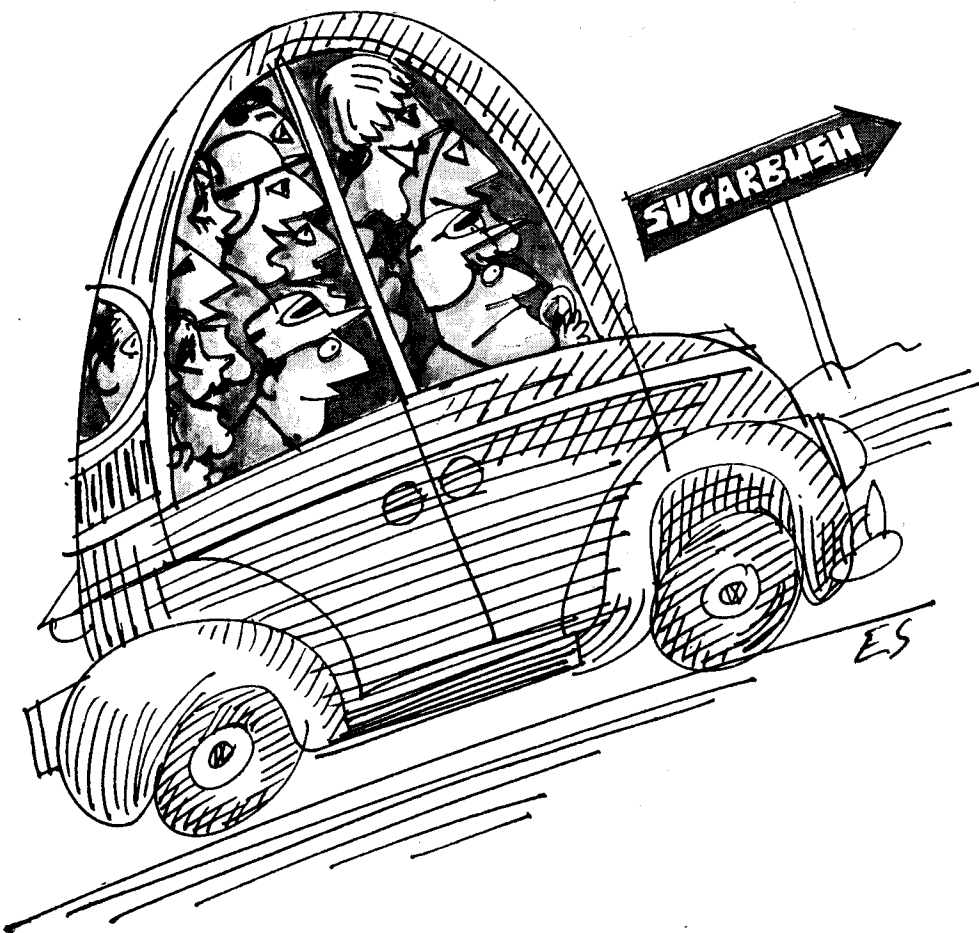
10. My car, which had broken down in Sugarbush President Damon Gadd's impossible driveway the week before, had been undergoing the cure at the Shell station and was supposed to be waiting in the parking lot. It wasn't. Therefore I tackled Sandy McIlvaine, who agreed to give me a lift. By the time I got my baggage to his car every cubic inch was filled by utter strangers who had piled themselves and their impedimenta into Sandy's car, pleading for a ride to an inn called the Inferno. I picked up everything (the temperature this late March night was a certifiable 5° below zero) and galloped over to a Volkswagen that had been snowed in and had a dead battery. In return for promising to push it out of the parking lot, I was allowed to load my equipment aboard. My body could follow if the car started. So I pushed the car out of the lot, and it started rolling down the road that winds along the hill to the inn. It rolled and rolled, over a rise, around a corner and out of sight. Fifteen minutes later (temperature still 5° below) it had not returned.

My next move was into Sugarbush Inn, there to buttonhole a friendly native who volunteered to drive me to Estin's. First we toiled down the hill to find the Volkswagen, which was standing at the side of the road, lights out, engine dead as a smelt. After more transloading, we muddled along to Estin's.

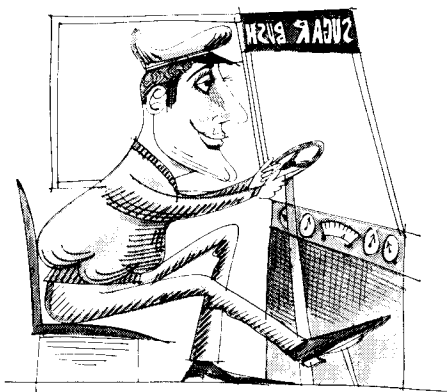
Twenty minutes later McIlvaine, white with rage, stomped through Estin's door. McIlvaine understood I had a brown bag. Could he see it, please. I showed it to him. "Oh, damn it!" Seems that of the six passengers he had taken to the Inferno, five had decided they really weren't going there at all and had demanded a ride back to the Sugarbush Inn. Once there they had piled out, bag and, apparently, everybody's baggage. McIlvaine had pursued them, found nothing, and then by some odd process, concluded that it was I who had made off with his bag. Not having his suitcase, we offered instead a mild sedative (brandy), which he grumpily refused as he headed out once more on his frozen quest, followed by his wife (now former wife), clad in galoshes and despair. Having failed in our charity toward McIlvaine, we drank the brandy ourselves and shuffled off to bed. Time: 2:20 a.m.

Next morning no one seemed terribly ready, at least in my dim eyes, for the

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day's skiing. Outside it was still cold as the ninth circle; the snow was like white brick, and the wind was blowing a good 20 knots. The others seemed to gather strength as the day passed. Bolstered by a fistful of chocolate bars and the prospect of a self-imposed 5 p.m. collapse, I held on through the afternoon. I was just preparing to execute the collapse—into Estin's bed—when I was told to get ready for the party. This turned out to be a birthday celebration at Ski Club Ten for Igor (Ghighi) Casini, who, until a recent bit of stickiness, wrote a regular society column under the pen name of Cholly Knickerbocker. Ski Club Ten is the heart of Sugarbush, a tastefully rustic building full of marvelous wines and equally marvelous girls, such as Fashion Model Cindy Hollings-



worth (*see cover*). This is where the Sugarbush people go to feel distinct from the herd and to eat lunch. Usually the place closes before supper as a favor to club member Armando Orsini, whose Sugarbush branch restaurant does all its business at night. But on this night Club Ten stayed open for Ghighi.

I went with Estin, who swiftly vanished into the party, while I vanished into obscurity, finally fetching up against a plump, freckled, 40ish lady who felt about as relaxed in this swift company as I did. This was a costume party, a fact that most of the males had ignored but the women had not, a surprising majority of them appearing skirtless with black silk stockings and high heels that gave you lots of leg. The best of the legs belonged to Skeeter Werner, who had recently retired from international ski racing, and Faith McIlvaine, who had by now shed both her galoshes and her despair.

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At first there was a photographer scurrying around snapping pictures with a battery of flashbulbs which, in this dim cave, left one's eyes with a Hiroshima halo for some minutes after each firing. The party finally ended when a fat stockbroker, who shall remain nameless, became weary and went outside to rest his eyes. As a resting place he chose the frozen mud beneath his Jaguar, where he lay, feet protruding into the dark road. Harcourt (Bill) Amory went to the rescue of his good old friend the stockbroker, a charity to which the good old friend responded by leaping up and punching Bill in the face. This made everyone feel fairly morose, and we all went home.

The day after the party I staggered up the mountain with Peter Estin and

### BOOK OF AMERICAN SKIING

*This account of a weekend at Sugarbush, the poshest resort in the newly rich Vermont ski complex, is adapted from The Book of American Skiing, to be published this week (\$15).*

his mountain class. This is a regular crew of Club Ten people who used to take a long lesson with Peter on Saturdays and Sundays. They are a very El Morocco-looking lot—cool, but among themselves very jolly, quite good-looking, extremely sophisticated, foreign or quasi-foreign in accent, and all very good skiers. Their vitality is amazing. The previous night's do for old Ghighi had been, apparently, just the restful interlude they needed to prepare them for a day on the mountain. And, I understand, on any weekend neither red wine nor black morning takes one second from their skiing.

The group this day included the Count Vittorio Camerana and his wife Cristina, Armando Orsini, Peter Estin and one or two svelte camp followers. Also in the group was a stocky, lank-haired young man, clad entirely in lemon yellow, who was smoking a cigar rather awkwardly and chattering in French and Italian as we rode up in the gondola. We skied the lift line fairly fast, and the young man kept bubbling in various Mediterranean tongues as he flashed in and out of the moguls on the hard-packed slope.

"Ah," I said to myself, "a friend of Orsini's from Italy."

Halfway down the lift line we made a left onto a hairy trail that winds along

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through a lot of birch trees. The snow was deep, cut up and a little crusty. The young man still skied fast, but now not so steadily. I stopped at the first turn and looked back just as he spun in a cloud of snow. He arose, smiled, said something in French and came down another 20 yards. Suddenly he went down again in another cloud of snow. This time he arose silently, lurched another few feet and almost fell again. The next word he spoke was pure Anglo-Saxon, delivered with pure New York inflection, and that was the end of the Romance languages for that afternoon.

When the young man was reorganized, we set out after the main body of the expedition. It was just around the next turn, observing the top of a small aspen whose trunk had suffered some recent bark peeling. Clinging to the top of the aspen, bending it with his weight, was a porcupine. Vittorio began tugging at the tree, apparently to get the porky close enough to grab. Cristina slid over toward me. "How do you call that—that anneemuhl?"

"A porcupine," said I.

"Ah," said she, "*un porc-épic*."

"Oui," said I, "*un porc-épic*."

"Oh," said she. "It would make a divine hat."

At this point Vittorio decided not to grab the porky and risk a swat from the prickly tail. Instead he contented himself with shaking the anneemuhl down into the snow. Once on the snow, the porcupine set off into the woods with a marvelous, rolling gait. "Aha," said Orsini, "he has a good backside, I think, for merengue." And with that the mountain class swept off through the trees once more.

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