

# BILLY DAY – A PROFILE

by DONALD MACLURCAN

**W**ILLIAM GEORGE DAY he was christened, but does anyone know him by any other name than "Billy"? He received this affectionate diminutive as a little child when his father and mother lived at the Chalet at Charlotte's Pass, near Mount Kosciusko, before the 1937-45 war, and it has never left him. Now at thirty years of age he is a quiet man of easy manner and peaceful disposition, lonely beyond words at times, with a deep capacity for true friendship and a lively sense of fun. Undemonstrative in public but holding firm views, easy in discussion, but implacable in argument amongst his close friends, this quiet man has had a profound influence on Australian racing skiing.

This influence is a product of personality and exceptional athletic prowess. It runs like the main stream in a wide river, not always discernible but ever present.

The first mention I can find of Billy in the national annals of our beloved world of winter sport is in the report of the 1947 Australian National Championships published in the 1948 *Year Book*. Here it is: "Possibly the best display of the match was put up by Billy Day (12 years of age) who stood once at 22 metres and fell on landing twice at 22 metres. His style until a fraction of a second after landing was typical of a veteran Norwegian jumper. Possibly he needs a little more weight."

Possibly a little more experience, too, one might have added; but the courageous approach to the jump, no less, is to be noted.

In 1948 the National Championships and an interstate teams competition were held at Mount Hotham, but Gordon Day's broken leg deprived the team of himself, Billy and Brian Davidson. Presumably, Billy, at 13, was deemed to be too young to be left at Hotham alone.

No Men's National Championships were held in 1949, but the records show Billy as seventh in the N.S.W. Championships Downhill; Gordon, incidentally, being the winner with a time of 1 min. 4 4/5 secs. against his brother's 1 min. 11 4/5 secs. Billy won the Slalom from Gordon and

Danny Collman, and was third in the jump! The report says. "W. Day ran particularly well in the Slalom . . . the feature of the meeting was the general good form displayed by the younger competitors." Billy was 14 and had won his first important race.

However, a much more formidable meeting awaited him in 1950 when he was to ski against Rudi Wurth and Oscar Hegetshweiler in the Nationals. In the Downhill off Mount Twynam he was 8th, in the Slalom at Trapyard, 9th, and his points placed him 6th in the combined Alpine title. The record does not show that he entered the Langlauf, but he jumped to be placed 9th with the comment from the reporter that . . . "Solar and Day showed form to indicate that they have to be reckoned with in future Australian Championships."

By 1951 Billy was taking 3rd place in both the National Slalom and Downhill at Falls Creek, coming second in the combination, and he was selected as one of the team to represent Australia in the Inter-Dominion Contest.

Then came Australia's first Olympic venture in 1952 and Billy joined the team that went to Oslo. In the absence of our two better skiers, Alston and Aslangul, he carried the responsibility of being our main hope for results. He was then seventeen and he beat all the representatives from Argentina, Chile, Belgium, Holland, Greece, Hungary and New Zealand, and some from Bulgaria, Spain, Poland and Roumania. Despite his experience, however, he had not yet reached the top of the competition at home and ran 6th in the Slalom and 4th in the Downhill in the 1952 Nationals.

At the end of the 1952 season he fractured a leg and did not ski in 1953.

1954 found Billy 2nd in the N.S.W. Slalom and 3rd in a Giant Slalom held off the Back Perisher, followed by a win in the National Slalom from Rudi Wurth and Toni Aslangul. He made two brilliant runs on a high standard course, establishing his pre-eminence in Slalom by simply out-skiing Rudi. In 1955 he won the N.S.W. Championship Downhill, but fell in the Slalom



Billy Day, Olympic Giant Slalom, Cortina.

and was 7th; but in this year he jumped again and was placed 1st. The Nationals were held in Tasmania in 1955 and Billy did not compete.

Then came the VIIth Olympic Winter Games held in Cortina in Italy in 1956 when he was again selected to represent us and produced results which were a decided improvement on the Oslo performances.

His absence from the family property early in the year made it impossible to get away to the Nationals at Mount Hotham, although he had been named as the captain of the Australian team to meet New Zealand. However, time allowed him to make the easier visit to the Chalet for the N.S.W. Championships, and here he entered every event with the following results:

Langlauf	.....	4th
Slalom	.....	1st
Jump	.....	3rd
Downhill	.....	4th

It was at the end of 1956 that illness intervened causing a spell of five months in hospital and no skiing during 1957.

1958 was an Inter-Dominion Year and we sent a team to New Zealand. Billy won the N.Z. Championship Slalom, skiing beautifully to be well in front with the first run. His second run was fast and accurate and the comment was "a well-deserved honour, as undoubtedly Billy is the

best skier in Australasia." Back in Australia he won the National Slalom and was second in the Downhill and won the N.S.W. Downhill, with a third in the Slalom.

Now came the years which were to show the real fruit of this long apprenticeship, the years when Billy Day was virtually unbeatable. He had become a quietly confident and charming young man, uncomplaining as a loser and a very modest winner. He weighed over 10½ stone, was fit and strong, hardly ever wore sunglasses on the snow, and always looked well dressed. Everybody liked him though he was reserved in his contact with others; thus it was obvious that he was a person of tact who kept his counsel.

The important races of 1959 were the National Championships held at Mount Buller. Billy won the Slalom and Downhill, and naturally, the Combined title, and represented his State to ski in the team against Victoria. Then he returned to Thredbo to win the N.S.W. Slalom and take third in the Giant Slalom, with the Alpine Combination a certainty on points. His skiing was a delight to watch; great speed and consistency with perfect control. Once more he was selected to go to the Olympic Winter Games, this time at Squaw Valley in California.

On this trip in 1960 he was my constant companion and I will recall only one of the many decisions with which he helped me. The matter

of who would carry the Australian Standard arose. By tradition the senior representative should be awarded this honour. But the team numbered thirty-seven persons, five of whom were skiers, and considerable argument took place in favour of the stature and bearing of Victor Ekberg, one of the numerically strong ice hockey contingent.

As we all know, feelings run high when this sort of thing comes up, and the responsibility of the choice lay squarely on my shoulders. I decided it should be Ekberg and explained my reasoning to Billy, who was the senior representative, before making any announcement. His reaction was that he said he did not mind and would support any decision I made. This was typical of his unselfish character.

Later in 1960 he maintained his supremacy by winning the Alpine events and Combination in both the N.S.W. and National races. This must have been his greatest year, one thinks; yet in 1961 we find him captain of the Australian team to meet New Zealand after again winning both the N.S.W. and National Alpine races in which the New Zealanders also competed. This, then, was his greatest year when he only just beat Bill Hunt, the New Zealand captain, in each race and

carried on to lead our team to the premiership.

Now skiing is one of the few athletic challenges where betterment is not called record-breaking; and that is exactly what Billy has been for skiing, for its betterment; as a personality and as an accomplished athlete. At the height of his career he may well have followed the custom of retirement, but this was not his approach, so that, for his own joy and to the great encouragement of others, he continued to compete though no longer keeping himself in training. This showed in 1962 when he ran second to Peter Brockhoff in the National Slalom and he was disqualified in the Giant Slalom.

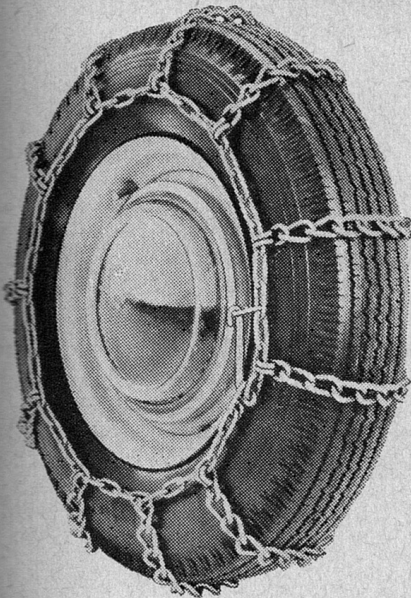
Again in 1963, though he earned the N.S.W. Alpine Combined Medal, his placings were second in each of the qualifying events. He did not visit Mt. Hotham for the Nationals but turned up for the Thredbo Cup, to win it with a 1st in Slalom and 3rd in Giant Slalom.

For 1964 the results appear elsewhere. They speak for themselves. Where there is a race Bill still turns up. Everybody knows him and he has a word for everybody; a quiet but deep influence on Australian skiing and someone of whom we are all very fond, a person of tact who keeps his counsel.

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