



Bellissima! Reece Bell attacks the slopes in Colorado

Paul Bussi

## Eleven PLUS!

**Two 11-year-old racers with UK backgrounds are setting a cracking pace on either side of the Atlantic. Martin Bell's daughter Reece is fast becoming a chip off the old block as her father – once Britain's top downhill racer – steers her towards ever-increasing podium places. Here, Martin's wife Laura provides a snapshot of a daughter with a seriously promising future.**



Burni Zubaly

**H**oping to follow in the tradition of her father Martin and uncle Graham (these days the Ski Sunday presenter), Reece Bell, who's 11, has some fairly big ski boots to fill. For many years, Martin and Graham dominated the UK ski scene: Martin came a brilliant eighth in the 1988 Calgary Olympics and Graham's career covered no fewer than five Olympics.

Reece, born in London but raised in Vail, Colorado and Big Sky, Montana, where we live now, has already made a splash in the US 'racing pond'. Last winter she topped the podium in her age division with five GS, four Combination and two slalom victories in her home state. Looking forward to the coming winter, in which she hopes to compete in the British Children's Championships in Méribel, France, Reece reflects on her love of the sport: "I like the feeling of skiing and accelerating my skis. I'm also very competitive, so if I want to have those feelings, all I need to do is ski race.

"Most of my best friends are on the Big

Sky Ski Team, and I have good friends on other teams too. It's a great experience to be on a ski team and have each other to turn to when someone falls or disqualifies. And even when it comes to individual races, we all cheer for each other."

In addition to training with the Big Sky team, Reece trains with the Cascade Winter Sports Club at the Mount Hood summer ski area in Oregon, but her first forays on snow were with the Vail/Beaver Creek Ski School.

Martin works closely with both teams and oversees her general training.

"The most important thing for Reece at this age is that she becomes a skilled all-round skier, rather than just a ski-racer," he says. "She gets lots of opportunities to ski in differing conditions: powder, moguls, trees, steeps, chutes, you name it. We also do lots of the typical exercises, such as short swings (thank you Hans Kuwall) and skiing on one ski. She is well on her way, but she still has a long road ahead of her to reach international level."

Echoing her father's comments, Reece says: "I know it's tough to make it to World Cup level, but it would be an honour for me to ski for Great Britain, and I'll keep training hard."

Reece began skiing by walking on plastic skis in the carpeted hallways of our condominium in Vail. We would open the

door and she would toddle out into the hall on them, strapped over her wellies and yell 'skiing!' - much to the amusement of our neighbours. Her first proper skis, when she was three, were Atomics, and she has stuck with the brand ever since.

When she's not skiing, Reece is hardly idle – she likes playing soccer (she's part of the local league) and tennis, and trains with her father. In the summer she enjoys trips to the UK to visit her big sister Imogen, her godparents, grandparents and other relatives. "It's cool to be in the country I was born in" she says. During these trips back to the UK, she's experienced skiing both on plastic and in an indoor snowdome, but she's yet to sample the snows of the Scottish resorts.

Reece is in sixth grade, a middle schooler by US standards. Her favourite subjects are maths and science, and her favourite school activity is competing in the school's science fair. Last year she and her partner won first place at the regional competition for a snow study on avalanche testing.

In the not-too-distant future, a day will come when Reece will beat Martin on a race course. It will be a bitter-sweet moment for all of us, but for the time being, she is happy to follow her father both on and off the slopes.





Breton Photo, Alpe d'Huez

Go Flo! Florence Seaton takes no prisoners in Alpe d'Huez

# Mon Dieu! She's the fastest 11-year old in France

**Florence Seaton's father Mark, a British high-mountain guide based in Chamonix, describes her spectacular progress**

It might seem strange, particularly if you were born and learnt to ski in one of the world's most famous resorts like Chamonix, that you would end up travelling all the way to Belgium to ski in a Snow Dome. Yet this is what Florence did, a week before she started secondary school.

She began skiing when she was three. At five she was accepted into the 'pre' club for Le Club des Sports du Chamonix, where her training began in earnest. Her trainer, Fujiko Sekino, was ranked eighth in the world in giant slalom at the time. It was rather like turning up at soccer training in the UK to find your coach was Wayne Rooney.

The next year she progressed into the Club proper, and was provided with a very smart ski suit. It's ironic that children in France don't have to wear school uniform - but woe betide them if they turn up for skiing without their ski suit: they are sent home immediately.

For the first two years, the children are taught technique and a little ski racing. At the end of the season (she was now seven) we knew she was potentially comfortable on her skis because she accomplished Chamonix's celebrated Vallée Blanche in difficult snow in half an hour. It's the best part of a day's trip for the majority of skiers. Then she went to play tennis for the rest of the day.

Incidentally, Florence's sister Andrea

skied the Vallée Blanche and then went to school for a 10.30 am lesson (she was eight at the time).

In addition, Florence won the Chamonix giant slalom race for her age - and the next age group above her.

During the next couple of years Florence continued to ski and race a lot, and then last year she was selected for the race-training team. This was a big thing in the life of a Chamonix 10 year old. For a start, you go into a specific class at school called '*sport-étude*', and everything is geared to your training.

But before school and during the summer holidays, she was off for two weeks' skiing on the glacier above Val d'Isère.

She also had a week's physical training, involving big mountain walks and lots of cycling (up hill). Plus what appeared to be an insane amount of work on 'core strength' - ie 400 sit-ups a day!

The young racers are provided with four pairs of skis: one pair of slalom skis for training, another pair of giant slalom skis for training, and then the same again for actual racing. The skis are serviced every night by their race trainers.

Oh, and there's a pair of skis for skiing around with her mountain guide Dad (that's me)... although he can't keep up!

Then finally a trip to that Snow Dome



E.A. Weymüller

I mentioned. The thinking is that the children need to work on technique, and the best technique is developed on very gentle slopes - because you need to maintain your speed through the turn. This is to say that if you don't turn well on gentle slopes you come to a stop - whereas on a steep slope, the error won't be as great, because gravity will compensate.

It'll be interesting to see how Florence likes the intensity of all this skiing. Time will tell. As the Chamonix Club told her: It all starts now! Florence is officially the fastest 11-year-old in France, after competing in the French national championships in Super Giant Slalom in Alpe d'Huez, and getting first place in her age group. 🇫🇷