

The editorial

The editors have their say

THE SNOW IS GETTING LATER

It wasn't a good year for snow in Europe, let's face it. But the sensational stories in the media about lack of snow didn't paint a true picture. We had the best powder of our whole season in France, in February, despite a pretty thorough sampling of what Canada had to offer. We had excellent piste skiing in France and Switzerland in March, too. Down the page, there's a balanced review of the season.

But the start of the season in the Alps is a problem. If we were booking a ski holiday in Europe, we'd go for March. The snow seems to be arriving later now than it once did; you can no longer be sure of good snow at Christmas and New Year, even in the highest resorts. And the first half of January has been dodgy in parts of the Alps in some recent seasons (including last season). By March, you can hope that snow will accumulate. An example: Zermatt's Triftji-Stockhorn free-ride area never opens early, but last season it didn't open until mid-March.

Last season's poor snow also emphasised the importance of snowmaking – very noticeable in the reports we got from readers. From the Sella Ronda area in Italy: 'Snowmaking is everywhere and highly effective – there had been no real snow for a month but the piste coverage was impressive'; 'nearly 100 per cent of the area was open'. From Grindelwald in Switzerland: 'virtually no snow below 1400m'; 'a long weekend where we did not ski as there was insufficient snow – just a few bare runs were open'.

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A LOOK BACK AT THE 2006/07 SEASON

We have again asked our tame snowfall expert, Fraser Wilkin, to review the last season. Here is his report.

Not since the infamous snow droughts of the late 1980s and early 1990s have conditions in the Alps caused such a stir. The winter of 2006/07 will rightly be judged a poor one – it was, after all, one of the warmest winters in living memory – but snow conditions were not as bad as the media suggested, particularly at higher altitudes. Low resorts had a tough time, but it's worth remembering that low Austrian resorts had one of their best ever seasons the previous year.

Autumn was the warmest since records began, and it stayed mild into December, with many resorts struggling over the festive season and into January – again, the warmest since records began. Still, there was enjoyable skiing to be had. Towards the end of January a colder interlude brought some welcome snow, particularly for the southern Alps. February was changeable but mild, with Atlantic storms bringing rain, not snow, to the lower slopes. Many resorts still struggled below 1500m/4,920ft, but conditions improved higher up, and by the end of the month snow depths above 2000m/6,560ft were close to the seasonal average. March continued in much the same vein. April often brings heavy snowfalls, but this year it was the warmest, driest and sunniest on record (just as in Britain). In the whole month, Courchevel recorded just one day of snow.

In North America, fortunes were very mixed. There were below-average falls across much of the southern and south-western Rockies, including Utah. Most of Colorado had an average season overall.

Western Canada enjoyed the best conditions, with early snowfalls at or near record levels in many areas. Warm spells affected the snow, but overall Whistler had 40 per cent more than its average snowfall.