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## CRESTA RUN

### Extract from the Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the SMTC, held on 16th February 2018, at the Kulm Hotel, St Moritz.

#### Transcript of the discussion on ladies riding.

[The President, James Sunley, said:] “The issue is that of Ladies riding the Cresta Run. I know there is not unanimity, so let me say immediately that any long-term changes to the existing *status quo* will require an EGM to clarify our existing Rules which I believe prohibit ladies from riding the Cresta Run.

“What I would like to achieve this evening is:

- a) To remind everyone of the Club’s governance and historical background to this issue, so far as I have researched and understand it,
- b) To set out the Committee’s current feeling about this Season’s experiment,
- c) For those present to express views on the subject,
- d) To explore an approach for the future; the next steps.

a) **Governance of the Club**

“The SMTC was founded on 19th November 1887, its aim being to ‘encourage tobogganing generally’. There was no mention of gender bias, unusual at a time of male dominance in all walks of life. The Club is governed by three sets of **Rules**:

- 1. The Rules of the SMTC
- 2. Rules of Racing
- 3. Cresta Clubhouse Rules

“There are additional Notices published in the Annual Report and in the Clubhouse; it is important to appreciate these are **not** Club Rules.

“If a Rule is to be changed it requires a motion at an Extraordinary General Meeting that is carried by at least two thirds of those present and voting (or of those voting in a postal ballot). All General (including Extraordinary) Meetings require at least 21 days’ notice. Non-Active Life Members may vote only on matters that may affect them. The Committee, chaired by the President, has sole control of the management of the Club, the day-to-day executive being delegated to the Secretary. The Committee may form sub-Committees to assist its management. There are various Rules about Committee appointments.

“Active Members may use the Run including Life, Full, Honorary Life, Honorary Full. Non-voting temporary SL members may also receive instruction and ride. There is no reference in the current Rules to ladies not riding other than in Rule 6 “Honorary Members” where it states ‘Save that ladies may not use the Run, all Honorary Members shall, for the purpose of these Rules, be deemed to be Active Members.’ In the Notice (which is not a Rule) about SLs riding it is categorically written: ‘Women are not permitted to ride the Cresta Run.’

“I am sorry to sound a bit long-winded but I think it’s important to condense the background. I shall now move onto the historical context:

“For the first forty years of the Club’s existence (1888-1928) ladies rode the Cresta alongside the men, six winning their Colours (including two Botts and Miss Robertson). Whilst ladies raced against the men, they also had their own Grand National (1900-1921). The Ladies had a separate Top start just above Church Leap.

“After the Great War, fewer ladies seemed to ride and at a small AGM of ten Members on Saturday 12th January, 1929 the unanimous decision was taken to ban ladies from riding; no reason was minuted. Thus, Rule 7a (later Rule 13) came into existence that **“Ladies are ineligible to become Ordinary Active Members.”**

Four years later, on Wednesday January 18th, at a rather larger AGM attended by 37 (of whom 8 were ladies) Jack Heaton, silver medal winner in the 1928 Olympics, (who previously had been against ladies riding) proposed, and Harry Hays Morgan (who became President the following year) seconded, a reversal of the 1929 vote. Lord Grimthorpe was a supporter, provided the ladies did not ride from Top. The great aviator, Amy Johnson, (the first woman to fly solo England to Australia) made a well-reasoned plea, given that in almost every sporting test ladies already competed on terms of equality with men. Moreover, the previous year, all ages of adult women had had their first democratic vote in Great Britain.

“The President, Lord Curzon, was ambivalent. However, Col Thoma-Badrutt, the original proposer of the 1929 motion, and on this occasion, ably supported by two eminent doctors who opined the Cresta was too strenuous for ladies and could result in serious injury, again won the day by a 15 to 10 vote, with 12 abstaining.

Subsequently, the Rule 13 that “Ladies are ineligible to become Active Members” was published each year in the Annual Report until between 1957/58 and 1961/62 when it was omitted, probably accidentally.

A similar clause in Rule 3 reappeared in 1962/63 AR deeming Ladies to be Non- Active Members, but disappeared in 1975/76, and has not been included ever since. Throughout, the Honorary Members Rule 6 already referred to has continued to state “Save that ladies may not use the Run, all Honorary Members shall, for the purpose of these rules, be deemed to be Active Members.”

“Whilst the current Rules could be described as ambiguous, for they do not specifically prohibit a Lady applying to be an Active Member, it appears that the spirit of the 1929 and 1933 decisions should still be in place that ladies are banned from riding. Thus in order to legitimise ANY of the existing Ladies events an Extraordinary General Meeting needs to be held. It cannot be tonight because of the requirement for 21 days’ notice.

#### **b) The considerations of the Committee**

“In the past few years a number of Active (and of course Non-Active) Members have been politely pressing for a greater amount of ladies’ riding opportunities in addition to the last weekend. Everyone seemed happy when the then Secretary suggested a lady ride in each team in the first International Match in 2015. More recently at the May 2017 meeting the Committee agreed, as an experiment, to run a small extra Members and family ladies event before the Childrens’ Race on January 2nd 2018. There were thirteen participants who had around 30 rides.

“The matter of ladies riding during the Services was broached by senior officers last winter. Subsequently in August 2017, the Services Captain asked whether each of their teams could include two lady service members to ride. Without some female participation, the Services would not continue to receive Government funding to participate on the Cresta Run, nor be allowed time to take part in what constitutes Activity training. They come to St Moritz on active duty. Therefore, the inevitable outcome would be an end to the Services event. Apart from being an important part of the Club’s history, the Services generate circa 10% of riding revenue during what is otherwise a very quiet period in St Moritz.

“At the November 2017 meeting, the Committee debated the request whether it would be acceptable for the Services to allow a few of their riders to be ladies (all SLs by definition) when other Non-Active Life Members and SL ladies cannot ride except during the last weekend (and this year, before the Children’ Race.) The Committee agreed that the two Services’ weeks in January 2018 presented a good opportunity to trial ladies riding, and the Committee would further discuss the issue at their May 2018 meeting following the inevitable feedback from Members. This, and the January experiment, was communicated to the Membership in my November Newsletter.

“Inevitably, there has been a variety of reactions among the Membership, which is why it is important to discuss the matter of ladies riding this evening. It seems to me Members’ views have varied from *gently supportive, bit by bit* on the one hand; to *shock horror, over my dead body, the Membership was not consulted, this is the thin end of the wedge and will ultimately mean 50% less riding for men, and the spirit of the Club will be destroyed*. Further, *why should Services SLs be given greater riding opportunity than long-standing supportive Non-Active Lady Members? Or what about interested residents of the local Community which makes such a significant financial contribution to the Club?*

“I apologise if it was not clear, or you did not read my November Newsletter, but the extra ladies events this Season were a trial in response to what your Committee believed were reasonable requests in the year 2017/18.

“There cannot be any vote tonight, but as I said at the outset, a future EGM will be organised, quite probably this year.

“Before I welcome contributions from the floor, or indeed any members of the Committee, I’d like to ask the Secretary if he has anything further to add about the two experiments from a practical and safety point of view?” The Secretary confirmed that there had been no problems with either event and that the trials had gone well from an operational point of view.

The President continued: “As to a Committee consensus - to be honest, there is a broad range of views, as you would expect; however, it is clear the Services ladies acquitted themselves extremely well and that the January event was low key, but the Lady Members who took part were extremely grateful for the extra opportunity.” He then invited comments from the floor.

### **c) The Views of the Membership**

**Marc Fischer** said that he had made his views clear in a letter to the Committee. The pros and cons [of ladies riding] needed made clear. He personally did not believe in more women on the Run. There was a unique spirit in the Club. The trial with the Service riders might have gone well, but there was an incident in the camion when the lady Service riders objected to the content of a conversation – this was indicative of potential future problems and discord between the sexes. He would accept the result of a vote by the Membership. It was important to make a clear proposal on how to handle any changes and to consider different options. *[Applause]*

**Adrian Keller** said that he thought that most people had watched the development of #MeToo campaign which had led to many people losing their jobs and sparked a vicious debate, particularly in Northern countries, which in many cases had gone beyond what could be considered reasonable. He did not fall either in the ‘yes’ or ‘no’ camp, but the Committee had to consider the ramifications – that it was part of a larger movement that had nothing to do with the Cresta Run. If women were admitted, then it would be important to ensure, for example, separate changing rooms and to be scrupulous to avoid any suggestion of harassment or inappropriate behaviour. *[Applause]*

**Hugh Malim** said that while he was in favour of allowing ladies to ride, they would have to accept the *mores*, customs, spirit and ethos of the Club. How that could be communicated or enforced was rather difficult. *[Applause]* The President said he took his point. Existing lady Members understood the Club and its spirit. Those less familiar with its ways might struggle.

**Claudia Ziros** read out an email from **Carina Evans** as follows: "Ladies and Gentlemen. Firstly, thank you for allowing us ladies to be able to ride the Run this season; we really have enjoyed something very special indeed, you have helped us, made us feel welcome, supported us and, I think, may have even enjoyed our company a little bit as well! Times are changing, we all acknowledge that. The question, I guess, is how to handle that in the spirit of this special Club.

"Having consulted with other Lady Members and fellow riders, I feel it important to express the views of those I have consulted. Firstly, we welcome more riding, as much as you decide to give us but we realise that 'Rome was not built in a day'. We don't believe 'women only' riding is needed, we only seek to be allowed to practice with you for perhaps a couple of weeks during the season so that the one day a year we have historically been allowed to ride does not take a full year to come back around. We seek to be allowed to ride during normal practice, we value your guidance and support.

"Secondly, you have a problem that needs to be addressed. By giving British Forces girls 10 days riding in 1 year, you are in effect giving them 10 year's riding in two weeks. That is difficult for passionate and loyal Lady Members and riders to come to terms with. I think that the total rides they achieved over those 10 days was 97. We believe that statistic needs to be put onto more of a level playing field.

"Lastly, since women are simply a fact of life and as their presence 'on' the Run as opposed to 'at' the Run looks likely to increase over the years, we long-term Members and lady riders ask that you allow **us** the chance to put down our best times and perhaps even have the opportunity to become Cresta Riders. We want to be the game changers and the first women in modern times to make Cresta history and believe that we have been loyal and passionate supporters for long enough to have earned this right. It was Oscar Wilde that said 'Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness.' We just want to be a little more like you.....that's all." [Applause]

**Claudia Ziros** added that traditions needed to change, little by little, otherwise they would just atrophy. [Applause]

**Alexandra Bott** said that she did not expect to ride alongside men every single day. She had ridden in 3 Ladies Days and the wonderful event that season in January. Speaking for herself, she would like the opportunity for one or two practice days before the event in March or the one in January so that women did not have to wait a whole year for the opportunity to ride again. It was wonderful to ride alongside her brother and sister. She did not want to impinge on riding time for men, but there had only been 13 ladies in January, 9 after scratches, and she felt that allowing women greater opportunities in low season would not affect riding opportunities for men. [Applause]

**Karin Kuhn** said that she loved riding the Cresta. In her riding career she had had 79 rides and 1 fall. With opportunity to ride only on one day, (before she had been invited to ride in the International Match), she was normally not only excited but nervous. It was difficult to achieve your best performance with only one day of riding. Even though she was not extremely competitive, she, like all riders, dreamed of getting an "Hello Hello". In all the years of the Ladies Events there had been some with snow, and some even on America toboggans, which meant waiting for two years before a proper riding opportunity came round again.

She thought it should be possible that ladies have four to six days of practice which would not change the tenor of the Club. She believed that many riders would not even realize women were riding when there were far fewer riders generally in early January and at the end of the season. Firstly, it would be extremely nice to have more rides and secondly, the chance of days with good conditions would increase. With more practice days women also could experiment more to improve

their riding skills. She felt that the Cresta was a place where men and women mixed easily and had fun in the Clubhouse, and this was also possible on the Run. *[Applause]*

**Alexander Hoefer** said that it was important to understand the consequences of changing the Rules. He suggested promulgating a series of scenarios and possible solutions for consideration and putting these to a vote. *[Applause]*

**Hans-Jurg Buff** said that the unique feature of the Club was that it was a men's domain which meant that a special spirit had evolved over the last ninety years, and was still going strong in the present. He was not sure that this would survive in a mixed Club. In an ever-changing world it would lose its USP (Unique Selling Point). He asked, "Who would give up a Unique Selling Point?" *[Applause]*

**Raymond McKenzie** congratulated the Committee for addressing the issue and for realising that things had changed and moved on. He believed that family Members who had loyally supported riders and who understood the spirit and ethos of the Club should have the opportunity to take part. He said that if we are allowing military female SLs to ride then we should extend the same privilege to our female Non-Active Life members as well during the same time frame. As this season's Shuttlecock President, he was delighted that the Shuttlecock Dinner was taking place after the Ladies Event this year. He had helped at Ladies Events in the past and seen the passion and love they had for the Run and the Club. They deserved a good party afterwards. He asked that, if an EGM was convened, that it was possible to vote electronically or by post so that the entire Membership could have their say. He would not want a repeat of the 1929 vote when 10 people decided the direction of the Club. *[Applause]*

**Ed Weston** said that we lived in a different world to that when the Club was first created. As such, men-only Clubs were now an anachronism. He highlighted that, in the modern workplace, it was not possible speak about the Club given the fact it was men-only and argued that the inclusion of women would help to boost the currently low numbers of young riders. *[Applause]*

**Dieter Streve-Muelhens** said that as everyone knew, we lived in times that were changing very quickly. As the President had mentioned, in the early years of the Club, there had been very prominent lady riders. They had no vote, but were able to ride the Cresta if they were physically and mentally able. Then, in Great Britain, they were given the vote, but the Rules of the Club were changed by a small minority. Nowadays, women not only had the vote but they were surgeons, operating on people and taking life and death decisions. We had had women astronauts, women Prime Ministers and in many armed forces, women in the front line, giving their lives for their country. He thought that this was primarily a cultural question not a practical one. Taking the larger view, even in Saudi Arabia women were now permitted to gain driving licences. Over the years he had seen the pleasure, excitement and thrill that lady riders experienced during the Ladies Event. It was a matter of throwing our hearts into the future and saying; "We can't live without them. We don't want to live without them. Why shouldn't they ride along with us?" *[Applause]*

**Angus Robinson** said that he had been extremely fortunate over the last few years and had had over 350 rides. One day would stick in his memory for a very long time, and that was in January when he managed to join his sister (who had just ridden) in the Camion. It was one of his happiest moments on the Cresta during his time riding. He was a member of Five-0 Club and had won his Colours – but even these did not rate as highly as the happiness he felt being able to ride with his sister. *[Applause]*

**Murray Brown** said that this issue was not unique to the Cresta and was prevalent in many golf clubs in the States where men objected to having to curb their language and conversation and

admit women. The solution was to build a second Cresta Run for ladies. It would generate additional revenue for St Moritz and could be funded by ladies' Life Member fees. He warned, however, that the problems of liability and potential court cases in the event of a woman being injured would have lawyers salivating at the prospect. He was against admitting women. *[Applause]*

**Brad de Hond** said that he thought the views expressed by Alex Bott and Karin Kuhn were reasonable and it was right for women to be allowed more practice. However, he felt it important that outside influences (using the example of golf clubs and Muirfield, where the decision had been dictated by sponsors and corporate pressure) should not be taken into account or allowed in the Club's case. He agreed with Raymond McKenzie that any vote should be full and open, but the opinion of the wider world should have no bearing. *[Applause]*

**Henry Child** said that ultimately the decision would be about what the Club looked like in the future. It was not a question of allowing one or two practice days over the next few years but what the Club would be like in 20 years. A halfway house was not realistic. If women were allowed to ride, the end point would be total equality in riding and people needed to be very conscious of that when making their decision. *[Applause]*

**d) The Next Steps**

The President thanked all those who had expressed their views for their valuable and helpful contributions. He said: "The Committee agreed yesterday to appoint a sub-Committee of five (plus the Secretary as a practical observer) to take on board the views expressed tonight, to explore and discuss a variety of options, but to reach an accord that can be translated into one or more resolutions that can be put to an EGM. The five on that sub-Committee are: Peter Achenbach, Fritz Burkard, Patrick Diethelm, Rollo Hoare and Clifton Wrottesley who represent a good cross-section of views on the issue. The main Committee will debate their findings at our upcoming May meeting and then communicate further with Members. Any vote will be Membership wide. Meanwhile, if you wish to write to the sub-Committee I suggest doing so to Peter Achenbach who will collate responses and share them with the rest of the sub-Committee for consideration."