

1962-1963

The boom begins

During the late summer days prior to the winter of 1962-63, Edgar Hetteen's patience was growing as short as the four-hour nights he slept. He was financially strapped, working two full shifts in the plant and trying to run an office, too.

He had changed the name of his company, Polar Manufacturing, to Arctic Enterprises, and the manufacturing facility was in chaos as the first all-red Model 100 Arctic Cat snowmobiles began to move out the door. The 1963 Model 100 was the first front-engine snowmobile built in the United States, the first to incorporate the Bombardier Ski-Doo influence.

One day, Edgar was particularly impatient with workers who were trying to nail together shipping crates. They were working too slowly. Edgar rolled up his shirtsleeves, grabbed a hammer and demonstrated how the job was to be done.

A young man in a business suit was standing close by, watching. He had finished one year of college, wasn't too excited about it, and was walking around Thief River Falls looking for work.

The telephone rang. Edgar dropped his hammer and disappeared. When he came back, the young man dressed in the suit was nailing crates together, exactly the way Edgar wanted them done.

"What do you want?" Edgar asked.

"I want a job," the young man answered.

"Can you start this afternoon?"

Roger Skime's career with Arctic was underway.

Sparky Myers was driving through Eagle River, Wisconsin, one day early in the winter of 1962-63 with two new Arctic Cat snowmobiles on his trailer. John Alward, owner of the Chanticleer ski resort, saw him drive by. A lightbulb went on in John's head, and he quickly caught up with Sparky, buying both the heavy rear-engine machine and the sporty new Model 100. Alward used the big machine to work on the resort's ski hill, and the smaller snowmobile he began to rent out to resort visitors.

Glen Gutzman, president of Trail-A-Sled in Crosby,

Minnesota, built a rough-looking front-engine snowmobile during the 1962-63 season to supplement his product line of prop-driven air sleds and pontoon boats. He decided to call his new creation a "Scorpion."

In early December of 1962, Ski-Doo dealer Bud Weesen of Marquette, Michigan, rounded up every person who had bought one of his snowmobiles—all 15 of them—and invited them to attend a day of festive competition on a field near town.

The special event was a match race between Marquette Chief of Police Don Hermanson and Marquette County Sheriff Tom Jernstad, both on seven-horsepower Ski-Doos. Another race on the bitterly cold December 29 afternoon was between the mayor of Marquette, Fred Rydholm, and the mayor pro tem of nearby Escanaba; a sprint pitting a 65-year-old enthusiast and a state police mechanic; and, the final touch, a race between two pretty girls. Weesen donated inscribed coffee mugs as prizes, and a crowd of 400 gathered to watch.

In West Monroe, New York, the local Ski-Doo dealer also organized a motocross-type short cross-country race. At stake was a small trophy and a bottle of liquor for the winner. Memories recall 10 machines—all Ski-Doos—showing up to challenge the dealer. The dealer's machine finished second.

Late in January of 1963, the Malone, New York, New Winter Carnival Committee contracted the Malone Post No. 8 Amvets and asked the organization if it would help contribute to the betterment of the festival. Amvet members, gathered for a regular Friday afternoon happy hour in the clubhouse, discussed the proposal.

The members thought something really new and different would be in order. The clubhouse sat on the outskirts of Malone in an area which combined rolling hills, wooded and open areas, and a 20-acre flat meadow. Maybe a race between snowmobiles could be held on the club grounds?

Malone attorney Robert Walsh and automobile dealer Phil Riley owned snowmobiles, and were avid enthusi-

asts. They had never seen a race between the machines (nor had anyone else), but they spearheaded an instant organizational plan and started promoting. The carnival was going to be held two days later.

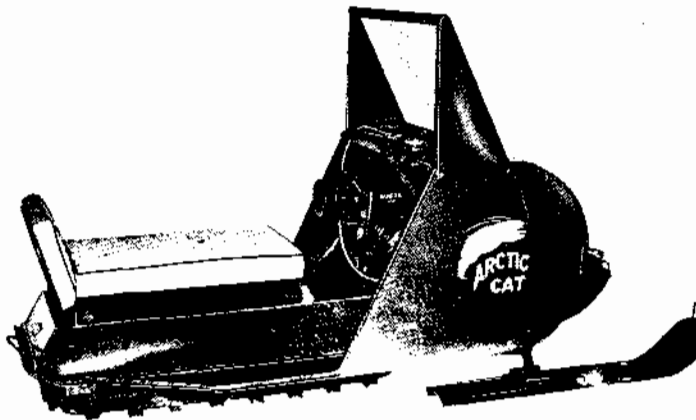
The first man Walsh and Riley contacted was Leon (Duke) Elliott, the local distributor of Ski-Doo's. They asked him how a snowmobile race should be held. Elliott, probably the first in northern New York State to ever see or ride a contemporary snowmobile, gave the Amvets information about various machines, engine sizes and models.

Next, Bill and Ben Dixon were called upon to help lay out a cross-country, oval and obstacle course. Jim Black supplied pylons and rope to mark the course. They contacted the Malone Fire Department and had a fire truck and emergency vehicle assured. Finally, calls went out to WICY radio and the *Malone Evening Telegram*, and the local media responded immediately with announcements.

Sunday afternoon, Malone held its first snowmobile race with 35 machines and nearly 500 spectators.

Jerome (Tubby) Lund went to work at Arctic Enterprises early in 1963. He recalled that one of the problems in test-driving the machines was being chased—and caught—by dogs.

Snowmobiles were showing up in increasing numbers in the snowy country around Boonville, New York, by



Arctic's 1963 Model 100, the first U.S.-built front-engine snowmobile.

the winter of 1962-63. An idea was born. The Boonville Area Chamber of Commerce proposed creation of a "winter carnival," centered around this growing new sport.

It was generally agreed that the idea was good, and talk was abundant, but no one volunteered to head up the project. It rested in limbo for a year.

In the meantime, a group in Camden, only 25 miles to the southwest of Boonville, also talked about snowmobiling and they put a race together in February. A substantial crowd and several snowmobiles turned out. Camden's success gave Boonville the incentive to get serious.



1963 Scorpion, by Trail-A-Sled.



Above photo, Marquette, Michigan, Chief of Police Don Hermanson (left) and Marquette County Sheriff Tom Jernstad prepare to race in December, 1962. Below, Jernstad, (left) and Hermanson receive inscribed coffee mugs as prizes from former Marquette Mayor Fred Rydholm.





Ladies' action in the 1963 Canadian Power Toboggan Championships at Beausejour, Manitoba.

A small group of snowmobile enthusiasts conducted an informal afternoon of competition near Peterborough, Ontario, during the late winter of 1963. The Kawartha Lakes Tourist Council noticed it, and decided to do something with this new sport.

Ronald Kinney's proposed Canadian Power Toboggan Championships became the first formally titled and well-organized race in the sport's history during the last weekend of February, 1963.

A total of 15 men and a few women showed up to compete in three scheduled events. First was the closed-course race, around the same circular course marked with bales of hay on the same Beausejour school grounds. Andy Heibert of Niverville, Manitoba, was the

winner of the short sprint.

The main event, however, was a gruelling six-mile cross-country race which took place over a bumpy course along the Brokenhead River. Larry O'Neil of Winnipeg won this title.

The "novelty race" was the third event, and it was planned as a special race for ladies around the hay bale oval. "Novelty" was quickly forgotten as the ladies turned demon, roaring around the track at full throttle, scaring the Winter Farewell officials to death. The crowd of more than 1,000 spectators loved the daring and reckless abandon of women's racing, however, so the Beausejour organizers followed up with plans to include the Ladies' Canadian Championship during the 1964 races.



Even in 1963, racers had spectators on their toes.



Jumping wasn't in the competition, but necessary in order to stay on course at Beausejour in 1963.

Beausejour's 1963 champion, Andy Hiebert.



Roy Halvorson of Halvorson Equipment also figured a rally type of snowmobile event was as good a way as any to draw attention to the machines, so in March of 1963, he helped organize the first annual Arrowhead Snowmobile Races near Duluth, Minnesota. It proved to be one of the first events forced into a radical change because of warm weather. The intended site had no snow, so the race was moved. It wasn't an overwhelming success.

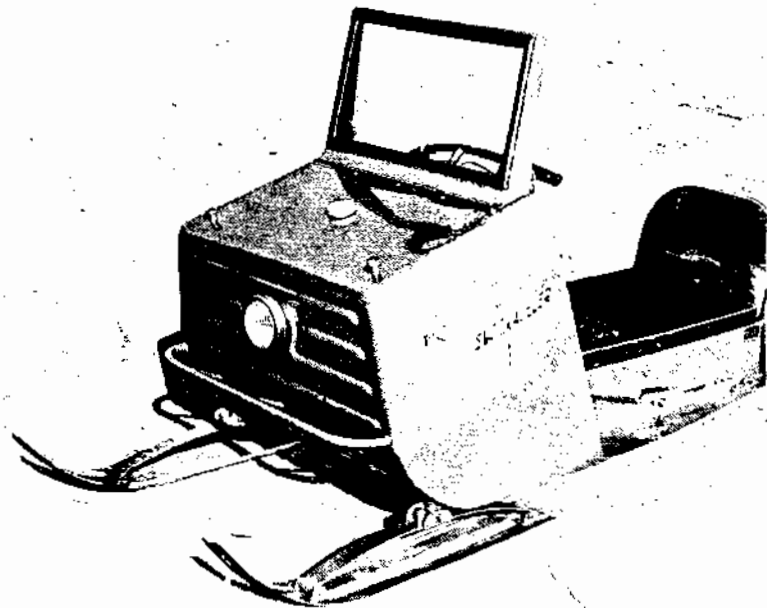
In 1963, in Quebec, Bouchard Industries introduced its new snowmobile, the Moto-Ski, and 19-year-old Rejean Houle was busy building his first 20 Skiroule snow vehicles.

During the winter of 1962-63, George Hayes, a Crandon, Wisconsin, service station owner, accepted the invitation of one of his customers to stop in Rhinelander and ride a Polaris snowmobile. George Hayes, with young sons Stanley and Doug, were in Rhinelander Christmas shopping and decided to see what the guy had been talking about.

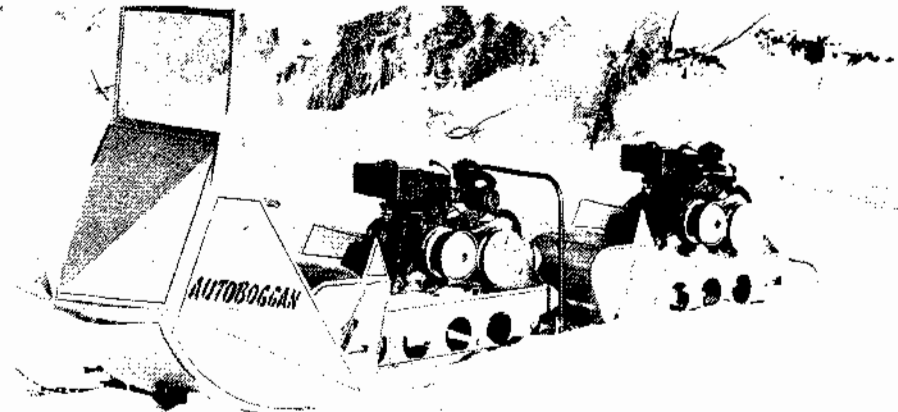
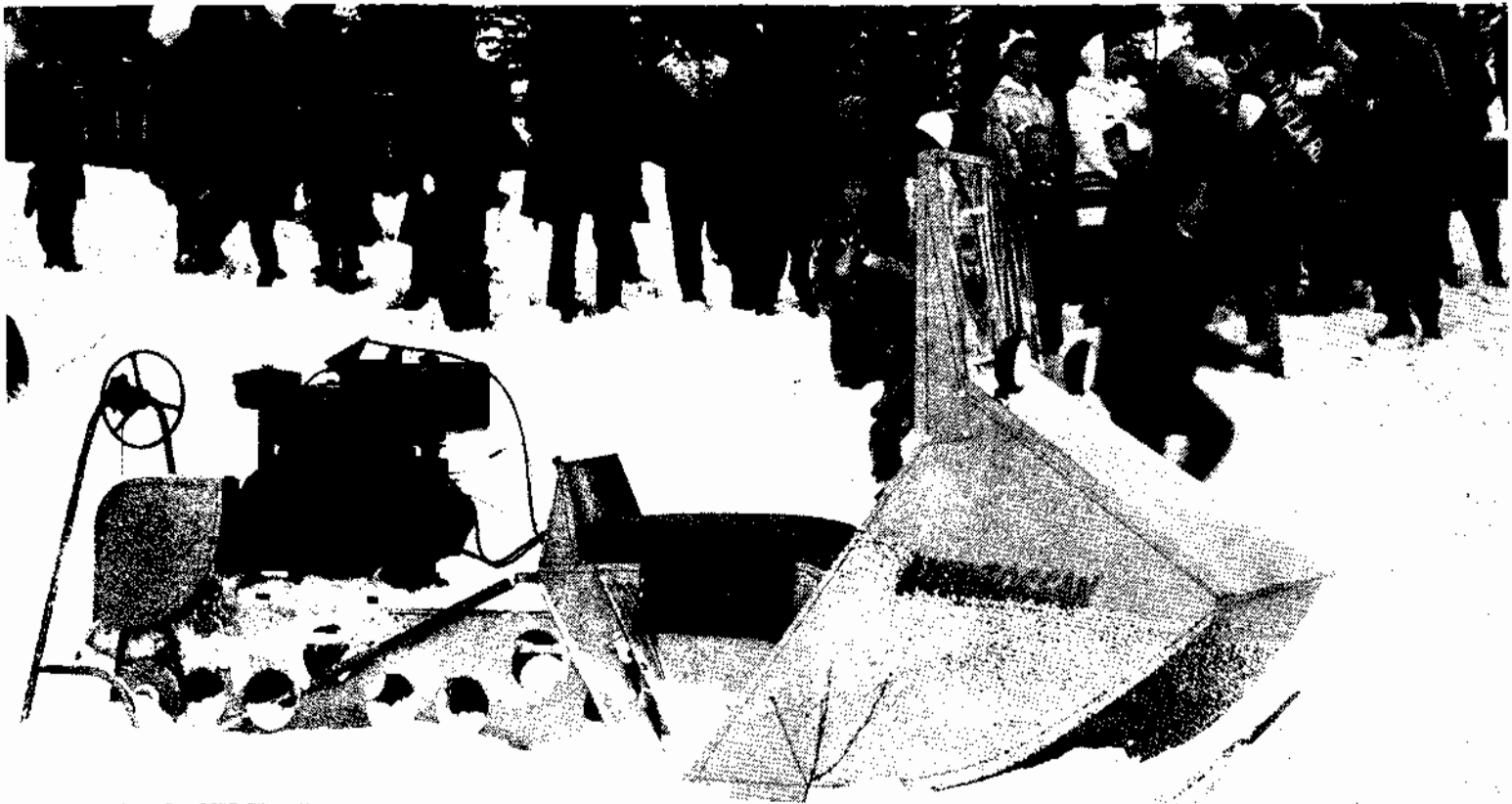
Stanley got to ride with the owner first on the Polaris L-60, with its six-horsepower Lawson engine and stick throttle. Then young Doug got a ride around the owner's motel. The boys were wild-eyed with excitement, but George needed coaxing before he'd get on. Soon, his eyes were bulging, too.

George wondered if he could acquire a dealership in Crandon for Polaris, and soon learned he could if he'd buy three machines. Well, George wanted at least one, maybe two and he knew Luther Ison would buy one, and by May, George Hayes was in the snowmobile business.

The snowmobile had made its greatest headway during the winter of 1962-63, but it was still a fragile babe learning to crawl. It was a novel toy, like the Hula Hoop and the go-kart, but it had a growing legion of believers who were convinced big things were close at hand.



Prototype front-engine 1963 Polaris.



Top photo, a crowd gathered in Lac La Ronge, Saskatchewan, to see if the Autoboggans and Sno-Travelers could out-perform dog sleds.
Center photo, 1963 Polaris Sno-Traveler.
Bottom photo, double-engine Autoboggan provided extra reliability for wilderness trappers.



Early Ski-Doo enthusiasts gathered in December of 1962 at Montreal for a day of informal snowmobile competition promoted by Bombardier, Ltd.