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Richard "Dick" Buek

Born: 1929 Died: 1957

Richard Buek was counted among the world's most daring Downhillers. He was dubbed "the madman of Donner Summit" because of his "go for broke" attitude in nearly everything he did, from skiing to motorcycling or flying.

Dick Buek, whose spectacular ski career gained him the title of "The Madman of Donner Summit," was rated among the world's most daring downhill competitors. In times when downhill was known as "the straight race" he always went full bore because he had no fear and it was his favorite event.

Born November 4, 1929, in Oakland, California, Dick was first of all a skier's skier; then a motorcyclist, high diver, airplane pilot and parachutist. For him life always was a risky adventure; he took everything "straight" and, like many other downhillers of his era, lived it up because he never seemed to count on what tomorrow might bring.

He entered competition in 1947 as a member of the Sugar Bowl Ski Club in the inaugural of Sacramento Bee Silver Ski Team Trophy competition on Mt. Disney, registering the fastest time of the day. Ten years later Dick ran his last race, the

1957 Silver Ski down Mt. Disney in Sugar Bowl and placed among the top ten. He was on the comeback trail, already named an alternate to the U.S. Ski Team for the 1958 F.I.S. World Championships; this despite two broken backs and other numerous ski and motorcycle accidents.

Dick Buek died 200 feet off shore in Donner Lake on November 3, 1957 – the day before his 28th birthday – in an airplane crash. With a fellow skier, Dick Robarts of nearby Truckee, Buek had been practicing stalls when the plane suddenly nosed down and went in straight. Both were beyond aid when the wreckage was pulled ashore.

From beginning to end the Buek ski, motorcycle and airplane career was an epic of all-out speed action. He had many triumphs and many setbacks, the latter include a first-time-ever straight schuss from the top to flat run out of Mt. Lassen; this during the 1948 Inferno Race which saw the next and only other competitor to accept the challenge, Yasi Teramoto of Donner Ski Ranch, clipping Buek's time by a split second.

For the 1949 season, Buek joined the newly-organized Donner Summit Ski Racing Club. He climaxed the winter by winning the Silver Dollar Derby and Far West Ski Association Downhill Championship at Reno's Slide Mountain and Mt. Rose Bowl. From this Nevada triumph Dick moved to the Sun Valley Ski Club, sponsored by U.S. Ski Team Manager Corty Hill. He became a top downhill contender in 1951, going on to win the 1952 National Championship at Stowe, VT, this soon following his return from the Olympic Winter Games in Norway, where he placed 12th in downhill despite a fall on the way down.

A motorcycle accident almost ended Buek's ski career in May of 1953. Coming back to Donner Summit from Oakland, his machine collided head on with a wrong-side-of-road driver. Sheet-covered and left for dead, Buek's unconscious form was recognized by a highway patrolman to be that of the 1952 National Downhill Champion. Rushed to a hospital, Buek soon was planning a comeback.

Wired and pinned together, right knee and left shoulder, the "Donner Summit Madman" went on to win the 1954 National Downhill at Aspen, Colorado, but was by-passed when the 1954 F.I.S. team was picked. Officials did not wish to "take the responsibility." Then Dick suffered his first broken back – a 1955 ski accident during a practice run at Stowe and the second the following summer while employed as a power company lineman. Even so his record includes National Downhill seconds twice, third once and fourth once.

Dick wound up his racing career as a member of the Soda Springs Ski Club. It was at Soda Springs that his dad, the late Carl Buek, operated a ski shop, and along with mother Pic and sister Jeannie, the family group combined into a fearsome ski racing team. Often they entered top alpine competitions of the Far West Ski Association and each of the Bueks won divisional snowflake pins during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Richard "Dick" Buek was elected to the National Ski Hall of Fame in 1974.