



#161

Sven Johanson

Born: 1924 Died: 1976

Sven Johanson represented two countries, Sweden and the United States, in international competition in multiple sports, cross-country skiing, speed skating, bicycling, speed walking, and military ski patrol. The variety of his athletic ability is phenomenal.

Sven Johanson was born in Neder-Kalix, Sweden, on November 25, 1924. With seven brothers, three sisters, and a former ski competitor for a father, competitions came naturally and early for Sven, who won his first regional cross-country ski race at the age of eight. From that point Sven's cross-country success progressed through local, district and regional championships until he won the Swedish National Junior Cross-Country Championships at the age of seventeen.

During this time Sven did not ignore other sports, winning district and regional championships in bicycling and speed walking.

At the age of nineteen Sven moved to Stockholm to further his education and became interested in another sport, speed skating. After nine months in Stockholm, Sven found himself in the Swedish Army. He remained in the Army from 1943 to 1948. Army life however, did not terminate Sven's athletic progress since the Swedish Army was quite interested in athletics. If anything, Sven's athletic activities picked up in 1943-1948. During this time he won the Swedish Army Cross-Country Ski Championship in 1944 and 1945, the Biathlon Championship in 1945 and 1947 with a near second place finish in 1946. Additionally, he won the National Bicycling Championships in 1948, the 10,000 meter track championships in 1946, and the National Championship Speed Skating in 1948, fourth in World Championships Bicycling, and was a member of the third place Military Ski Patrol at the 1948 Conseil Internationale du Sport Militaire period was when he and three of his brothers won the Swedish National Speed Walking Championships in 1947. On this occasion his mother, a long-suffering supporter, was honored for her boys' accomplishment.

His tour of Army service ended, Sven returned to Stockholm in 1948. In December 1950 he migrated to Astoria, Oregon. It was in Astoria where Sven was stopped by a traffic policeman for speeding in a 50 mph speed zone on his racing bicycle. Astoria was not for Sven and in July 1951 he arrived in Anchorage, Alaska.

Skiing, especially nordic skiing was just getting started in Anchorage of the early 1950s. Sven immediately got involved, first joining the Anchorage Ski Club, later the Alyeska Ski Club, and finally the Anchorage Nordic Club. Competitively, "the Speedy Swede" started off with a bang, winning the Alaskan and Pacific Northwest Championship in 1951. Sven dominated Alaskan skiing in the early 1950s, winning the Alaskan Championship in 1951, 1952, 1953, 1954, 1955, and 1956, and the Pacific Northwest Championship in 1951, 1952, 1953, and 1954. During these years he also won the John Craig Memorial Race in 1952, 1953, and 1954, and the Donner Memorial Race in 1953, 1954, and 1955.

The years 1954 through 1960 marked Sven's high point in United States' Skiing. In 1955, he won the North American Championship in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1956, he won a spot on the U. S. Olympic Cross-Country Team, but was not allowed to participate because of an administrative error in obtaining his citizenship papers. In 1957, he won the National Championship in Lyndonville, Vermont. In 1958, he won a spot on the U.S. FIS Team, and in 1960, he was a member of the U.S. Olympic Cross-Country Team. Other Notable accomplishments during this period include Eastern New York, New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont Championships. Sven also won the very grueling Seward, Alaska Mountain Running Marathon in 1954, 1955, 1956, 1957, 1958, and 1959.

In 1961 the United States Army established the United States Modern Winter Biathlon Training Center at Fort Richardson, Alaska. Because of his background of cross-country skiing and biathlon, it was logical for Sven to be selected as the Ski Coach of the center. Sven remained in this position from 1961 to September 1973 when the center was disestablished. His accomplishments were many during this period. He trained every U.S. biathlete to compete in the 1964, 1968 and 1972 winter Olympics. These Olympic Biathlon Teams maintained a higher relative placement than any other U.S. Nordic team during the period. He served as the ski coach for the U.S. World Championship Biathlon Teams in 1962-63, 1965-67 and 1969-71, and was the Ski Coach for all U.S. Military Ski Teams to attend Conseil Internationale du Sport Militaire (CISM) Ski Weeks from 1962 to 1973. He also found time in 1968 to win the National 200 meter prone large bore Rifle Championship.

Sven S. Johanson was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1975.