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Ernest Dion

Born: 1916 Died: 1999



Information submitted in a nomination letter to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame by Doug Dion

Between 1935 and 1940, Ernie was among the best American-born ski jumpers in the country.

Ernie was born in Irasburg, Vermont, on December 10, 1916, and started skiing at ten years of age. His illustrious competitive career spanned 40 years. In 1932, when he was sixteen years old, he won his first Class "A" races – two downhill and two slalom events at Mt. Washington, New Hampshire. He also took a 2nd place in slalom at Berlin, New Hampshire, and a 2nd place in jumping at Mt. Washington. In 1934 Ernie won the United States Eastern Interscholastic Ski Championships in both jumping and combined events.

In 1935, Ernie became the first American-born skier to win the Class "B" Eastern Championships at Lake Placid, New York; in 1936, he placed second in Class "A" for the same title; in 1937, he dropped to 8th place, but the following year he was the second American after the Norwegians Rudd and Kotlerud; and in 1939, he tied the Olympic skier Ottar Satre for the honor of being runner-up. Ernie placed 2nd in the Olympic tryouts, virtually assuring himself a spot on the U.S. Olympic team, but the 1940 Olympic Games never took place because of World War II. In 1946, Ernie traveled to Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and placed 5th in the Nationals. These achievements are truly remarkable considering the dominance of the Scandinavians skiers in the skisport during this period of time.

During Ernie's career, he won 19 state jumping titles, including the Massachusetts, Vermont, Maine, New York, Connecticut, and New Hampshire Championships as well as the Canadian Regional Championships at Lac Beau Porte, Quebec, in 1949 and 1950. His jumping career ended in 1972 in Rumford, Maine, after 40 years of competition, when he placed 2nd in the Super-Vets Class only five years before undergoing a complete hip replacement.

A long-time top-caliber jumper, Ernie was also an outstanding coach. Among his first and most famous students was Lowell Thomas Jr., who was a student at Dartmouth College when Ernie taught him to ski jump. In 1951, he started a junior ski team; eight of its original nine members represented the East in four disciplines at the Junior Nationals.

Throughout the nation, there were articles on Ernie's accomplishments; *Collier's* magazine did a feature on him in December 1952, as did *Boy's Life* in February 1954. In 1956, the Dion family was featured on Arthur Godfrey's "Winter Wonderland" television special held in Lake Placid, New York.

In 1960, Ernie accepted a position with Dartmouth Skis, Inc., and was a charter member of the Ski Industries of America (SIA). Ernie's knowledge of skiing and his extraordinary ingenuity were soon tested when he was tasked with the responsibility of manufacturing a synthetic laminated ski. This necessitated building a ski press based on a hydraulic jack system, heated molds and a pressure equalization system. It also required experimentation with a variety of materials and epoxy glue compounds to withstand stress, differences in material porosity, and temperature extremes. The result was a product that was tested, tried, and proven as one of the forerunners of the present-day ski. The skis were manufactured at the Dartmouth Skis plant and distributed nationwide by Sears Roebuck & Co. for two years under the brand name E-Z Ski.

During the early 1950s, Ernie started a new venture. He built Snow Crest Ski Area, with a 1,500-foot T-bar, warming hut and seven trails. Ernie's major contribution, however, was his progressive program for the area's youngsters. He founded a Ski Week Program to be held during the school's winter vacation periods. Ernie sold Snow Crest in 1970 as the demands of the ski area outgrew his ability to manage it as a sideline business.

In 1972, two years after Ernie sold Snow Crest, still another challenge presented itself. For several years Storrs Hill, Lebanon's town-operated ski area, had been unused. The rope tow was beyond repair and the slopes were overgrown, and almost unusable. As president and project officer for the Lebanon Outing Club, Ernie devoted himself to the Storrs Hill restoration project. In a single day he raised over \$12,000 and collected enough pledges of time and materials from local businesses to build a new warming hut, put in an electrical system sufficient to light the slopes, regrade the trails and put in a drainage system.

In 1973, Ernie was asked by Governor Thompson to serve on the first Governor's Sportsman's Advisory Committee, where he contributed, much time and effort over several years to further the skisport in New Hampshire.

Ernie D. Dion was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1984.