



**Example of J-Bar Lift**  
*Lieni Fopp rides the Bogen lift in Davos in 1934.*

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## **Ernst Constam**

**Born: 1888    Died: ?**

*In 1934, Ernst Constam became the first to invent a lift with a continuously circulating overhead cable, which later became the heart of the T-bar, Pomalift, chairlift, and gondola lift. Constam initially designed a single-passenger J-bar, and installed it for the 1934-35 season on Bolgen Hill at Davos, Switzerland. The project, financed by Lieni Fopp, a Davos hotelier, was an immediate success.*

Constam became busy installing dozens of J-bars in Europe in the next two years, unaware that there were copycat J-bars being built in America. The Dartmouth Outing Club built the first successful overhead cable lift in North America from photographs of the Constam lift and set it on Oak Hill for the 1935-36 winter. Americans found the J-bar infinitely easier to ride than the notoriously difficult rope tow, and they became magnets for attendance. U.S. ski entrepreneur Fred Pabst, inspired by the Dartmouth lift, quickly built three copycat J-bars in Vermont and New Hampshire for the 1936-37 season.

Back in Davos, Constam had taken a giant step in improving his lift for the 1936-37 season by making it a two-passenger T-bar – the final form his lift would take.

In his private life, Ernst Constam was a passionate ski mountaineer. Born December 16, 1888, in Zurich, he had made his own skis by 1900 at age 11. By the time he had graduated as a mechanical engineer from Zurich's Federal Technical University at 17, he had made first ski ascents of several Swiss peaks. In 1940, he moved his lift company to Denver, and installed North America's first T-bars in Pico Peak, Vermont, and Mont Tremblant, Quebec, for the coming season. He visited Dartmouth and Pabst, and they agreed to license fees for using his patented lift.

The chairlift was invented in 1936 at Sun Valley by making use of Constam's circulating

overhead cable, but Constam's T-bar was a thriftier buy. By the 1947-48 winter, Constam had installed 47 T-bars in North America, nearly doubling the total number of chairlifts installed in the same period. Many ski areas relied on it almost exclusively.

Ernst Constam's lifts were thus a most important factor in the rise of alpine skiing in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. His lifts played a crucial part in skiing's great gain in popularity during those decades.

Ernst Constam was elected to the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 2003.