

Harry Leonard

Ski Show Pioneer

H

Harry Leonard is skiing's impresario, visionary and cheerleader. An irrepressible fellow who first appeared onstage in the 1950s, Leonard was the man alpine skiing absolutely had to have in its infancy to become a healthy, fast-growing and mature national sport. It was Leonard who invented that irreplaceable kick-off to the ski season known as the ski show, recruiting thousands to the sport.

A newspaper ad representative, Leonard was first introduced to skiing at the age of 30 at Pine Mountain, in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Hooked, and finding not a single guide to ski areas in the Midwest, Leonard produced the first regional directory, a 64-page booklet called "Ski Faring."

Soliciting ads for the booklet opened a lot of doors, and the Chicago Ski Council asked him to organize its annual preseason party. Leonard saw that it could be much more than just a party. The result was America's first-ever consumer ski show, held in Chicago in the fall of 1958. It drew over 2,000 people!

Leonard saw that this first effort had the makings of a new industry

event. He added Detroit in 1959, New York in 1960 and was coast-to-coast by the mid-1960s. Between shows there were smaller displays at college campuses. His sidekick was fellow showman Jerry Simon, the ringmaster, and American skiing had its promoter extraordinaire!

Harry Leonard understood that if the shows were to work, they



needed entertainment and skiing demonstrations. He was a pioneer in the use of ski decks. The Ski Dek moving carpet was invented in 1961. Top racers and freestylers used them to entertain in a way that wowed. He added dancing, fashion shows, a beer garden, stage lectures and film shows.

He also brought in "headliners": Stein Ericksen, Penny Pitou, Jean-Claude Killy, Roger Staub, Art Furrer, and Wayne Wong, to name a few. Making these gods and goddesses of the slopes accessible was essential to getting the public to show up.

It was Harry's creative genius that imparted such enthusiasm to an ever-growing audience of skiers throughout America. Harry was there from the late 1950s to the 1970s, when the sport needed him, playing a major role in accelerating Americans' interest in the still-unique sport of downhill skiing.

He was the man alpine skiing absolutely had to have in its infancy to become a healthy, fast-growing, and mature national sport.

1958 — LAUNCHED THE FIRST CONSUMER SKI SHOW, HELD IN CHICAGO

1961 — PIONEERED THE USE OF SKI DECKS FOR SHOW DEMONSTRATIONS

MID-1960S — EXPANDED THE SHOWS TO A NATIONAL AUDIENCE, BRINGING IN CELEBRITIES, AND ADDING FASHION, DANCING AND OTHER ATTRACTIONS



Harry Leonard pioneered the modern ski show with his innate understanding of how to capture the attention of the mainstream consumer, including entertaining attractions such as ski decks.