

## **CJ MUELLER** (Breckenridge, Colo.)

One of the dominant Americans in the pioneering days of speed skiing of the 1980s and early '90s, John "CJ" Mueller was the first man internationally to break 130 mph on skis and eclipsed three world records. In his career he won three events including a U.S. World Cup, was the fastest American from 1987-92 and a top-10 finisher in his sport's Olympic demonstration event at the age of 40.

Most of all, Mueller (nicknamed Crazy John, or CJ) was a pioneering voice for the sport at a critical period, helping it in its formative years and boosting it into the 1992 Olympics.

Mueller was born in Denver, moving to Breckenridge in 1970, when he was 19. He didn't get into skiing until the ninth grade when he joined a friend on a trip to Ski Cooper in Leadville, Colo.

He tried college at the Colorado School of Mines, but what he really wanted to do is live in a ski town and connect with the mountain. Within a year of moving to Breckenridge, he earned the Crazy John moniker. He soon became THE skier in Breck, skiing every day, organizing a town racing series and later U.S. Ski Association events. His '70s-vintage Noah & The Arc's rock and roll air band (with guitars made of skis) became legendary. And his Ridge Street Rowdies motorcycle 'gang' were known for their high revs downtown.

On snow, he loved speed. At first he sought to become an alpine ski racer, competing in downhill at the U.S. Alpine Championships when he was nearly 30. A 1981 knee injury curtailed his traditional racing career, but set him up well for the next phase.

His life changed when a community exchange program organized by Jean-Claude Killy led him to Val d'Isere, France in February, 1981. There he met a speed skier who encouraged him to join her at nearby Les Arcs where they were testing a new speed skiing run. He never looked back clocking 103 mph in his first speed skiing competition on Valentine's Day.

He found quickly that he had a natural feeling for the snow and the skis that allowed him to go fast – very fast! To get a feel for the speed, he would serve as a forerunner at World Cup and U.S. Championship downhill races. On snow, he and buddies would catch the last ride up chair 2 every day then rocket down Four O'Clock Run to the bottom!

In 1978, American Steve McKinney set a standard eclipsing 200 kph (124 mph) for the first time. The next milestone was 130 mph. For nearly a decade, no one could match it. Until Mueller.

In the 1987 speed skiing season, Mueller won the opener in Yllas, Finland at 100 mph. Two weeks later he clocked a personal best of 125 mph at La Clusaz, France. That set the stage for his world record 131.74 mph at Les Arcs, April 17, 1987. He eventually finished second that day to Great Britain's Graham Wilkie. Mueller would hit 131.45 mph that October in Portillo,

To support himself, he also connected with SWIX as a service technician helping with World Cup support and doing clinics at shops. He quickly became known for his innovative ski preparation with a focus on speed.

With the new FIS World Cup starting in 1988, Mueller was one of the top athletes. Coming back to Les Arcs in April, 1988, Mueller hit 136.31mph as the fastest American but was fifth behind Swiss Michael Pruger, who set a new record of 139.02 mph.

His best World Cup season came in 1990 when he won at Willamette Pass, Ore. and was named USSA's Speed Skiing Athlete of the Year. In a 13-year speed skiing career, he recorded 29 top-10 finishes with 11 podiums including three victories. He missed the 1990 World Cup title by a thousandth of a second in the final race.

With over a half-century skiing at Breckenridge, he became a legend on the mountain. He has one run named after him (C.J.'s on Peak 7) and played a role himself in the naming a dozen more. Mueller was also a leader in supporting other athletes in the community through the Breckenridge Elite Athletes Foundation. He was inducted into the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame in 2014.