

Bill Gairdner National Championships 2025 FAQ

Why is this event named for Bill Gairdner, who is he and what did he do?

Bill Gairdner is a Canadian who founded the World Masters Association and initiated the Masters World Cup event that has brought masters skiers together from across the world in an annual celebration of nordic skiing since 1981. This is an outstanding achievement and tens of thousands of mature athletes have been able to benefit from the fitness, health and wellness benefits of competition for life. Bill's founding principles of safe, fun and fair are the guiding ethos for masters skiing.

I am trying to get a few friends to join me in signing up for the Bill Gairdner National Championships. We are all about 70 years old, probably intermediate level skiers, who ski twice weekly. My friends have concerns about the level of competition (i.e. too fast?), temperature (i.e. too cold?) and difficulty (i.e. too hard?).

The Bill Gairdner National Championships is founded on the ethic of safe, fun and fair. We have contingency plans for adverse weather and we will not allow races to proceed in unsafe conditions. However, if cold weather prevents us from starting races according to the schedule we will do everything we can to ensure that you don't go home disappointed.

One defining characteristic of masters competition is category starts. This means that you will be racing against skiers of your own age group and the start lists are designed to reduce the likelihood of faster (i.e., younger) skiers interfering with slower (i.e. younger) skiers or vice versa. This is a great event to do with your friends in a friendly rivalry.

Whitehorse Nordic Centre is built on the side of the hill, which means that the courses all require some climbing. However, our Chief of Course has really done a great job in keeping the courses as easy as possible given the terrain that we have to work with.

We welcome skiers of all abilities. Participation in a masters competition is primarily about goal setting for personal improvement. It is the fulfilment of a fitness goal that brings a smile to the face of every finisher regardless of whether they are first or last.

Why do I need to be a member of the Canadian Masters Association to register for the Bill Gairdner National Championships?

The Bill Gairdner National Championships is the annual championship race for the Canadian Masters Association. Your membership supports the association in promoting competition for life for masters skiers across Canada.

Why do I need to buy a Nordiq Canada Tier 3 racing license to register for each of the Bill Gairdner National Championship races when I already have an annual Nordiq Canada racing license for the purpose of getting a ranking on the Masters Points List?

The tier 3 license category fulfills two objectives: Manage risk - to comply with Nordiq Canada's insurance, events must be sanctioned and follow minimum safety requirements, all participants must sign the Informed Consent and Assumption of Risk Agreement, and there must be a record of the event and participants. And to fairly distribute costs, including administration, officials' development, and insurance

The license is \$3/participant/race day. Every participant needs a license, regardless of age, whether they have a club membership, or whether they have a Nordiq Canada race license.

The Tier 3 event license closes a gap that has existed for a long time. Tier 3 events go beyond the activities that are covered by the annual Nordiq Canada membership fee. Events that are only for club members are still covered by your annual membership. There is no change to the benefits of a Nordiq Canada Race License. The Nordiq Canada Race License still covers racers for Tier 2 events. By charging a very low fee to all participants, rather than a larger fee to only some participants, Nordiq Canada keeps the administration simple for race secretaries.

What are the advantages of buying an annual Nordiq Canada racing license to get a ranking on the Masters Points List?

Just as World Cup racers are ranked according to their race performance, masters skiers in Canada can now be objectively ranked nationally. We would prefer that all skiers meet for competition in the Bill Gairdner National Championship each year but that is unlikely to ever happen. The Masters Points List (MPL) now allows skiers who never leave their own region to see how they compare to others in their own category. This list will be used to seed racers in Nordiq Canada sanctioned races.

Is there a reason that the first two races are in the evening?

- 1. Our poster shows racing under the northern lights and although we can't promise that the aurora will be visible during the races, we can be sure that they will not be visible during the day. This makes for a uniquely northern experience.*
- 2. We expect a lot of visitors from out of the territory. There are many exciting things to see and do during the day and we want to ensure that everyone has time to enjoy their experience here.*
- 3. For our local skiers and volunteers it is a lot easier to leave work an hour early than it is to find 2 or 3 hours in the middle of the day.*

4. *Whitehorse Nordic Centre is less than a 10 minute drive from the major residential subdivisions housing about half the population of Whitehorse, which is quite unique in Canada. As a result WNC is busy 7 days a week with weekday evenings a very popular time of day. This is part of our skiing culture and if you have not skied at night before, you will be surprised at how magical it can be.*

Will I need a headlamp for the evening races?

No, the evening races are on our lit trails.

What do you mean when you talk about ‘competition for life’?

Competition in sport is our go-to tool for teaching our kids about self-improvement. Yet most adults abandon competitive sports as if self-improvement is no longer desirable or even achievable. We don’t stop playing because we get old, we get old because we stop playing.

Competition for life is as much about being an inspiration for those that are less competitive as it is about being inspired by those that are more competitive. Every skier has a role to play in this collective movement of self-improvement.

It has long been known that moderate exercise is the minimum requirement for maintaining health, wellness and fitness. What is less well known is that moderate exercise is a minimum, not a maximum and that it is not only possible to maintain your health, wellness and fitness but actually improve it, and improve it very substantially, and at any age, by using exercise to expand the capacity of the the oxygen intake and delivery system (i.e., the cardio vascular system). Not only that but research has shown that quality of social connection is one of the best predictors for successful aging.

This brings us to competition for life. Nordic skiing is an inherently social activity. It is perfectly normal that you will strike up conversations with total strangers on the ski trails. For recreational skiers some of these conversations lead to lifetime friendships but many are fleeting. It is a bit different for competitive skiers. With the higher emotional commitment that comes with competition built on a shared passion for sport there are many lifetime friendships that form before, during, and after ski races. In choosing your friends you won’t go wrong with friends who are inspirational in their commitment to a lifetime of health, wellness and fitness.

The cardiovascular system is highly adaptive. Athletes feel the effect of reduced capacity when they are inactive for even a few weeks and sedentary people can feel the effect of increased capacity after only a few weeks of structured exercise. Regressive adaptation is as simple as reducing your level of activity. If your only activity is sitting on the couch it won’t take long before you will be out of breath from trying to do anything else. Progressive adaptation requires

working harder than you normally would and then resting and recovering to allow your system to adapt to the increased demand.

The unanticipated benefit of expanding the oxygen delivery system is that it is also the transport system to convey nutrients, enzymes and hormones (needed for cell maintenance and repair) to every cell in the body as well as remove metabolic waste (some of which is toxic) from those cells. This rejuvenative power of the oxygen delivery system is, quite literally, the fountain of youth.

As miraculous as that is, the benefits of competitive skiing don't stop there. Skiing harder increases muscle strength and every major muscle group in the body is involved in skiing. Focus on improving complex skiing techniques challenges the neuromuscular system and, most importantly for aging athletes, it improves cognition, balance, agility and mobility. Nordic skiing is a weight-bearing, low impact sport which is perfect for maintaining and improving orthopedic health.

One of the most surprising things about training for competition is that there is more discipline required for the rest and recovery days than there is for the intensity days. After a while you too will complain about the easy days and how frustrating it is to go so slow, when you are feeling so strong. Be patient, rest and recovery are the key to reaching your full potential.

I'm a recreational skier who would like to improve my fitness by training for the Bill Gairdner National Championships. What do I need to do to prepare myself?

First, remember Bill Gairdner's founding principles: Safe, Fair, Fun. Second, don't overthink it. And thirdly, help is available. To explain:

The only way to expand the oxygen delivery system is to rest and recover from stress to the cardiovascular system. This formula is almost always successful but depending on your medical history that induced stress can also have catastrophic consequences. Have your doctor explain your cardiovascular risk factors and follow your doctor's advice on how to transition to a competitive lifestyle. Stay safe.

Be fair to yourself by setting goals that are both ambitious and realistic.

Have fun by inviting your friends (new and old) to train with you.

Don't overthink it. To prepare for the Bill Gairdner National Championships alternate between skiing harder than you normally would and skiing easier than you normally would. Gradually make the hard days harder between now and February 19th. Hard can be any combination of tougher, faster and longer. You will learn more training methods as you progress. We are all still learning and we are all adapting to newly learned knowledge.

If you are retired then try skiing further than you normally would one day a week, try skiing on trails more advanced than you normally ski one day a week, and try skiing faster than you normally ski for one day a week. On the alternate days in between these harder efforts either don't ski or ski at a lower effort than you would normally ski. On an easy day you should be able to keep up a conversation even on the steepest climbs without getting out of breath.

If you are still working then you will need to fit most of your training into the weekend. In this case your easy day might also be a long distance day. Ski further but slower than you normally would. This long slow distance is a great time to practice technique. Skiing well, in slow motion, reinforces muscle memory which translates into more power and speed when you are skiing at race pace.

Whitehorse Nordic has many programs that can help get you on the right track. Taking lessons is a great way to improve your skiing skills and meet new training partners. There is an advanced masters training program with professional coaching that meets on Monday nights and there are many informal masters training groups in which small groups of friends meet on a regular basis to train together. If there is enough interest we can start a training group focussed on preparing for the Bill Gairdner National Championships. Contact: masterschampionships2025@whitehorsesnordic.ca

I only ski classic technique, can I ski in all four races?

Yes, two of the races are classic only and the other two are freestyle, which means you can use either skate or classic technique. There will be a classic track set for the freestyle races. However, awards are solely based on time, not technique.

I only ski skate technique, can I ski in all four races?

This is a bit of a grey area. If this was a tier 1 or tier 2 race then for each of the two classic races we would have a technique zone to ensure that you are diagonal striding on a gentle uphill section and we would measure pole length to enforce the rule about pole length for classic skiing. However, we will not be doing these controls for this event.

A skate skier could double pole the whole distance of the two classic races. If there is a credible report of the skier skating at any time then the skier would likely be disqualified by the race jury. We rely on skiers ensuring that their equipment is legal (i.e., your pole length to the top of the strap attachment should not exceed 83% of your body height when wearing ski boots). The courses are just tough enough that a skier would have to be very strong to be able to double pole the whole thing.

A better option is to rent, or borrow, some classic skis, boots and poles. Accept the handicap of a technique you are unfamiliar with and enjoy the experience from the back of the pack. This might open up a whole new dimension of skiing for you.

