

# 3 DAYS in... **LIVIGNO**



Hopefuls on practice runs. Below: our writer throws a shape or two on the mountain

ANDREA GIORDAN

ALTITUDE, ADRENALINE AND ALCOHOL COLLIDED LAST MARCH WHEN THE ITALIAN PARTY TOWN PLAYED HOST TO SNOWBOARDING COMP THE BUDRIDERS' RIVER JUMP. EXTREME SPORTS FILMMAKER **NIKKI MCLEARY** REPORTS FROM THE FRONTLINE

## Thursday 08 March

### 10.00H

Breakfast time in Livigno, and the River Jump is on everyone's lips. From the toasty safety of the bakery I gaze out at the Spöl's icy waters. On one bank is a massive jump – four snowcats have spent the last 72 hours shaping the snow produced by four snow cannons on perma-blast for a week – followed by a choice of a smaller take-off ramp or a 5m rail spanning the water. Safety net? Maybe they put that up later. For a split second I think how cool it would be to enter the competition – 12 wild card places are still up for grabs for a chance to

compete with eight pros from all over the world including Americans Eddie Wall and Yale Cousino and Sami Sarenmaa from Finland. But then I remember I'm about as useful on a snowboard as my great aunt Doris. Meanwhile, the locals are taking bets over their coffee on which riders will get dunked.



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### 11.30H

I hit the Mottolino Snowpark as the qualifiers are kicking off, and watch 80 amateur riders battle it out for the wild card places. Everyone has baggy pants and looks cool except me, as I lug a ton of camera kit and tripod into the heart of the action. A kid of about 14 flies over my head, spins more times than Linda Blair's head and lands without a backward glance. I shoot some wicked footage before getting sucked into the hyped-up vibe – TV crews, helicopters, VIPs, riders and thousands of spectators all add to the scene, and a DJ cranks up the volume.

### 14.00H

Inspired, I go for a ride, taking care, obviously, to avoid anyone better than me. Even at the end



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of March, high-altitude Livigno is delivering the goods, and today, all three ski areas – Mottolino, Costaccia and Carosello 3000 – are blanketed. I spend hours carving wide-open curves into groomed runs and off-piste powder until my rumbling stomach threatens to start an avalanche. Over homemade pasta and dry red wine at the excellent, well-priced Camanel di Planon at the top of Mottolino mountain, I confer with the piste map for the most direct route to the après.

### 18.30H

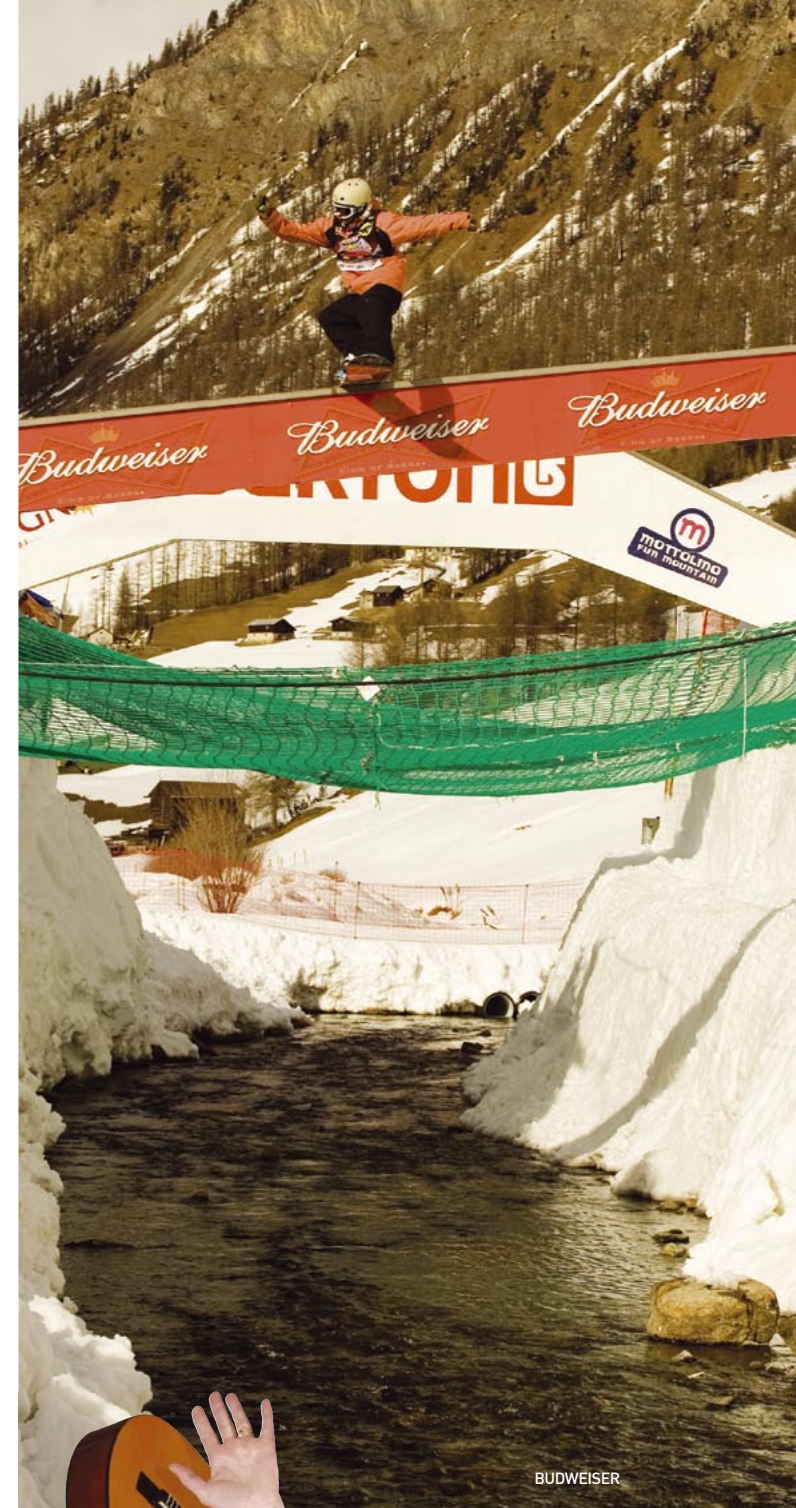
The Swedish reps are already dancing on tables by the time I arrive at Tea del Vidal, egged on by a crowd of singing Irish dressed as nuns who look suspiciously like guests of the holiday company my partner Rob and I run here, Livigno Snow. In the middle of it all, the DJ is rocking out big time – hmmm, is dancing like that completely appropriate around holy sisters? A few of us peel off to sample the fantastic aperitifs and nibbles at Diva Café.

### 21.00H

Seems like every rider in town is at Bivio's, one of Livigno's most popular haunts. With a dead-central location, it has an outstanding gourmet restaurant, a lively bistro bar, a well-stocked wine cellar, dangerous cocktails and live bands most nights in its Kuhstall pub. The resort's wealth of across-the-board dining and accommodation options, not to mention its tax-free status, draws a diverse and international crowd of party-minded skiers and boarders, and that's well represented tonight – a group of 40-something Germans line-dance to ABBA while the Irish nuns (you know who you are) have infiltrated the stage and are playing air guitar alongside the band. Elsewhere along the town's 10km strip of bars, restaurants, music venues and clubs, Marco's and Daphne's throb with UK and Irish visitors while an awesome live band belts out a set at the Homelywood.

### 01.00H

Whееееееее! I tumble off the end of the slide strategically positioned at the entrance of Miky's Pub, while another band delivers old favourites to a rocking crowd. The owner here has established a tradition of putting Viking helmets on his customers, offering them enough shots to sozzle a small elephant, then grabbing them by the horns to give their heads a good shake. I'm told it has the desired effect and nobody walks out in a



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straight line. By now my chances of that are limited anyway, so I give Miky and his horns a wide berth.

## Friday 09 March

### 10.00H

Fresh morning air and several strong coffees have blasted away the hangover and I arrive with a group of friends at the top of the gondola with a couple of hours to spare before the final competition qualifiers. The snow is great, the sun is out and the slopes are deserted. One more coffee stop in



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LIVIGNO, ITALY  
[www.livigno.it](http://www.livigno.it)  
[www.livigno.eu](http://www.livigno.eu)

Ryanair flies to Milan Bergamo ([www.ryanair.com](http://www.ryanair.com)) easyJet flies to Milan Malpensa ([www.easyjet.com](http://www.easyjet.com)) and British Airways flies to Zurich ([www.ba.com](http://www.ba.com)). Transfers by bus, taxi or snowtrain depending on arrival airport

**Mid-range:** Inghams ([www.ingham.co.uk](http://www.ingham.co.uk)). resort-based Livigno Snow ([www.livignosnow.com](http://www.livignosnow.com)) tailor-makes holidays at local prices including transfers, accommodation, ski pass, equipment hire, and lessons as required **Budget:** Airtours ([www.airtours.co.uk](http://www.airtours.co.uk))

**Vertical drop:** 3,000-1,800m  
**Terrain:** 110km  
**Pistes:**



**Snowmaking:** 70 km  
**Lift Passes:** £122.60 for 6 days in high season, £103.50 in low season

**Mountain munchies:** On-slope restaurants M'eating Point and Camanel di Planon are both excellent, and as good value as anything in town. The bakery at the foot of Mottolino serves wicked cakes and coffee **Guiding:** Livigno Snow (free of charge) **Snowpark:** Yes

**May I have an ice cream please?:** Vorrei uno gelato per favore?

**Highlight:** Lots to do, day and night  
**Bummer:** Long transfer (three hours plus)





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the bakery wouldn't hurt, we decide, and cruise the gentle beginner/intermediate terrain all the way down to the bottom, under bridges, over simple jumps and through woods.

heading back to Bivio's where we take advantage of their steam room before tucking into steak and venison with wine from Sicily.

atmosphere is electric which is just a well because the night is getting cold... if any of the riders take a spill, they'll be very glad of the safety nets now stretching over the Spöl's inky water.

**Saturday  
10 March**

**19.30H**

The contestants took their practice runs this afternoon and by now music has been pounding out for hours and thousands swarm around the DJ booth, open air bars and food stalls. The

**21.00H**

We find a prime spot on the slope, close to the base of the mountain police who drag the riders on skidoos 500m up above the first jump, which looks far, far bigger up close. Medics stand by. The crowd suddenly falls silent as the first rider hits

the lip – he soars skywards, flapping his arms like a bird and hangs in the air a moment before hitting the landing perfectly and carving towards the take-off ramp on the edge of the river... but chickens out at the last minute and slides over the rail instead. One pair of dry feet.

For two hours we're treated to increasingly courageous charges down the course, and as the mid-air manoeuvres of 20 riders from all over the world grow ever more rockstar, the spectators roar for more. A few take a tumble, which only winds the crowd up further as they start to appreciate just what a daring stunt this is. One hits the water, and people rush to help him out, while the man who bet on this guy being the one to make a splash waves his winning ticket in the air.

In the end it's Yale Cousino's run, a silky smooth backside 1080 over the kicker, frontside boardslide over the river rail and a frontside blunt 270 out of the down rail, which wins – and the lion's share of the £20,000 prize money. And as he's crowed 'King of the River' at the after-party at Miky's, the betting opens among the locals on River Jump 2008.

[www.riverjump.it](http://www.riverjump.it)

**13.00H**

Lunchtime at the top of the mountain, and from our sun-drenched seats outside the M'eating Point restaurant the snowpark takes centre stage among panoramic views. The work of four pro shapers, it's creatively designed with features including a half-buried car, kickers, rails, boxes, half-pipe, jumps and boarder-cross stretching the whole length of a piste, and it's proving quite the crowd pleaser. The final qualifiers are underway and bodies soar into the air above a growing mass of cheering spectators.

**17.00H**

The qualifiers' names are out and 12 very happy bunnies go off to celebrate. We opt for a quieter evening and debate where to eat – top-quality pizza, pasta, meat and game restaurants here cater to every palate and budget – before



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