

“Rodeln”

A popular winter sport

History

It was in 1904 when two runners were found somewhere around the Oslofjord. They were an early indication that sledges were already used in Scandinavia as far back as 800 B.C.! Numerous paintings and wood cuts then show us that all through the Middle Ages splendid horse-drawn sledges were common means of transport for the well-to-do. Finally, in 1532 a German book about traditional costumes comes up for the first time with the expression “Rodeln”, i. e. “tobogganing”.

Still, it was a long way from those horse-drawn sledges and simple toboggans to the streamlined equipment used by daring athletes nowadays to race down some icy bob-runs. The first races heard of seem to have been dog-sled races. Those simple sledges already showed the basic components, namely two runners with thin steel-shoes connected by beams and a seat.

The first sledges, but we should better talk about “toboggans” now, which were used in downhill races, were totally rigid as the typical toboggans for little kids still are today. But then, in 1913, two Bavarian brothers constructed a toboggan with runners that were slightly tilted and without a front beam. This construction made it much easier to steer the toboggans and this basic principle of flexible design is still common today. A further development followed when constructors began to design models for professional racers. But if we look at those modern racing equipment we no longer talk of toboggans, we rather use the term “luge”.

In the late 19th century tobogganing became more and more popular. Clubs were founded and races were organized. The first toboggan race took place in Davos, Switzerland and soon the enthusiasm of those early participants began to spread to other European countries. The first race in Austria took place in Absam, a village near Innsbruck, in the year 1890.

In 1959 the International Federation of Luge (FIL) was founded and in 1959 it even became an Olympic discipline.

Tobogganing – sport and fun for everyone

On the one hand, tobogganing is a respected racing discipline, but on the other hand it is a winter activity especially popular among kids and – more and more so – for adults looking for a satisfactory winter activity far from the crowded ski lifts and downhill slopes.

All you need to have fun with your kids is a slope or – even better – a snow-covered road that leads up onto a hill or through a mountain forest. A growing number of people discover the positive effects of such a healthy walk through a wonderful wintry landscape before sitting down on the toboggan and enjoying the ride back home.

But where can we find those attractive sled-runs? Numerous authors have reacted to the growing popularity of this winter sport and have published a large variety of books and brochures for almost every region where this sport is practised. These publications give sufficient information on the individual runs (location, length, difficulty and, not to forget, the possibility of enjoying a comfortable rest in a mountain hut).

Some of those sled-runs lead upwards rather gently and are good for beginners. Others can offer steep passages with tricky turns and bumps and obviously need some practice. Those with little practice will use their feet to break and thus slow down their speed. The better trained will speed down the sled-runs and slow down only before the turns or during steeper parts. If not, they will quickly find themselves somewhere off the road between bushes or trees in deep powder snow.

Thus, tobogganing can be much more than a racy competition on icy sled-runs. It can be a wonderful winter experience that combines a healthy hike with a class more so in the company of your family or friends.

The different types of toboggans:

The popular toboggan:

The runners are solidly connected with beams. They are good for younger kids or beginners. You steer them by breaking with one foot or the other.



Steering (turn left):

Popular toboggans have no flexible beams. Therefore you better break hard before the turn. Then press down your left heel to get around the turn.

The touring toboggan:

Their runners are more or less tilted. They have no front beam which makes them very flexible and easy to steer by pulling on the leather belt or pressing one foot sideways against the front end of the runner. There are lots of different models, but their common feature is the high flexibility of the runners. They are extremely comfortable and a must for everyone who has made it beyond the absolute beginners stage.



Steering (turn left):

Touring toboggans have flexible beams and therefore allow higher speeds. However, steering properly needs a bit more practice. To turn left press your right foot against the front beam. Lean back and with your right hand pull back the left beam. You might also use your left hand to make it around the turn more elegantly.

The luge:

They are mostly heavy and flat constructions but generally just reserved for the really professional racers.

Rules that should better be respected:

In most cases you will walk up the sled-run all the way to the top. This can be dangerous as those before you may already be on the way down. To avoid "unfriendly confrontations" always keep your eyes open, look ahead especially when there are turns. In case you walk upwards together with friends, don't stop for a casual chat in the middle of the sled-run. Step aside or walk up in single file.

On your way down always try to control your speed. There may be tricky turns and bumps. There is also a common practice to call out loudly before turns and thus warn those walking up that you are coming. Always keep in mind, that there may be children behind the turn who usually don't jump aside so quickly!

Most sled-runs are closed for any kind of traffic for certain times of a day. Read the signs carefully! In case you stay up on a hut for too long, be especially careful when you ride down later than the assigned times.

Those who are more ambitious or practicing for an upcoming race should only use sled-runs which are exclusively reserved for them. These runs have separate roads for the way up!

You want to go tobogganing with your class?

- Inform yourself about the type and present condition of the sled-run.
- Walk up in single file! Keep on the same side, so that those coming down can pass easily.
- Check whether the belt is hooked in properly.
- If two people sit on a toboggan, the smaller one should sit in the back.
- Kids should use a helmet.
- Make sure everyone wears a good pair of shoes.
- Always keep a safe distance to those riding in front of you.
- If possible an adult should make the lead and another one should follow the group.
- Tell your kids to call out "**Hopp!**" to warn those who walk up the sled-run.

Follow these rules and your pupils will enjoy a wonderful day of physical activity. Of course, your kids will always find a reason to start an exciting snowball fight – and you might end up as their favourite target!!!!