

Starlite Most Like Trails Of Colorado

By DAVID McCARTY

Ski Starlite, with its 504 foot vertical elevation, liquor-licensed lounge, the longest skiing trail and longest chairlift in the state, is the sleeping giant of Indiana skiing.

The only Indiana ski resort with trails steep enough to deserve honest "black diamond" expert rating signs, Starlite, on paper, is the state's most attractive ski area.

But for many skiers, the Clark County facility is an empty shell, especially on weekends and holidays.

The problems experienced by the developers there are twofold.

First, the terrain that has been developed for skiing covers two radical extremes with only limited middle ground.

Second, the resort's finances, by its own admission, have not been handled very well.

The second problem is in the process of being corrected and with a decent skiing season, which is quite likely, Starlite should make enough money to put itself on a firm financial footing for next season. This also would allow some badly needed additions.

The first problem is the killer, however.

For beginning skiers, there is no ski resort in lower Indiana with more starting and low-intermediate terrain. Expert skiers also find super-steep skiing here.

But anyone in the vast category of "not a beginner but not an expert skier" has little room to ski here compared to other Indiana ski areas.

The chairlift rises 504 feet in two stages. The two righthand side chairs of the unique "double-double" quad chairlift allow skiers the option of disembarking either at a mid-station halfway up the hill or riding to the top. The two lefthand chairs must be ridden to the top.

From the mid-station, where most beginning and intermediate skiers depart, the hill provides a decent grade at first, but levels off so sharply that unless one has well-waxed skis or drops into a racing tuck, the skier has to skate or pole across the flat to reach the lower section where it splits into three trails.

For skiers beyond the struggling first season on skis, it is a bore.

Continuing to the top, one finds three potential runs, which will be upgraded to five for next season, said spokesman Steve King. Trails 4 and 8 are by far the steepest, scariest skiing trails in Indiana — expert skiers' paradise. Skiers should practically be issued parachutes before attempting these descents — non-experts, back off.

Trail 2 is the longest skiing boulevard in the state, measured at about one mile. Lined with evergreens, it is most like the cat track trails common at Western resorts like Steamboat.

But at its widest, this trail is only about 20 feet wide, with extremely sharp drop-offs at either side. Most of these drops are protected by snow fences, but in several places on the day Skier's Edge visited, the snowpack



was higher than the fence — a dangerous situation where a careless skier could fly right off the hill.

This serpentine trail is absolutely perfect when uncrowded, providing the best intermediate skiing anywhere in Indiana. But on weekends or holidays when it is wall-to-wall with slower skiers, everyone is forced to ski with the pack.

Pending the installation of lights and snowmaking, two new trails will diverge from this main trail next season to lessen traffic, but for now, it is "ski at your own risk" when crowded.

Little can be done to recontour the flatter trails because the bedrock is so close to the surface, according to Don McKay, general manager. So if Starlite is going to substantially increase its intermediate terrain, other sections of its broad ridge will have to be developed, an expensive proposal that doesn't appear likely soon.

Much of this problem goes back to the decisions made by the original developers when planning where to cut the skiing trails and cannot be blamed on the current management, which is doing all it can to make corrections within a highly limited budget.

Starlite, drawing on the large population of Louisville, has had 41 skiing days this season, attracting more than 25,000 skiers. Despite competition from the newly opened Ski General Butler and from long-standing rival Ski Paoli Peaks, Starlite is making money.

One reason for this upsurge is a major decrease in lift ticket prices from last year's inflated fees. Holidays, weekdays and weekends, the skier pays the same price for a ticket, a welcome change from exorbitant weekend prices.

Day and twilight session tickets are just \$12, a bargain, and half day, night and midnight sessions are only \$8. Adult ski rental is \$9 for full sessions, \$7 for half sessions. Ticket prices and ski rentals for juniors are reduced by \$2 for all sessions.

Ski Starlite is easily reached from Indianapolis. Situated just 110 miles south on I-65, take the No. 9 exit (Ind. 311 — Sellersburg and New Albany) to the right and follow Ind. 311 south to Ind. 60. Turn right there and take Ind. 60 exactly five miles west to the entrance of Ski Starlite.

Ski Starlite is one of the most enjoyable and attractive skiing resorts in the state when uncrowded. Week-day and night skiing here is as close as one can come to Colorado skiing in Indiana.

But the word from Skier's Edge, especially if one is not an expert or beginning skier, is to ski elsewhere on the weekends.