



What's cooking?

Downhill champion Bruno Kernén swapped the World Cup race circuit for a hotel in Gstaad. **MARK NICHOLLS** tells his story...

As I walk into the Hotel Kernén, the host is moving effortlessly from table to table checking that diners are enjoying their food, pausing for a friendly chat, and greeting regular customers.



CHAMPION: Bruno during his racing days

This is Bruno Kernén, a man destined by birth to be a hotelier and restaurateur, but also with a steely determination to first be a champion ski racer.

In the wood-panelled interior we talk about his upbringing and the hotel and restaurant, but also about that great day in January 1983 when he won the downhill in Kitzbühel.

Located at Schoenried-Gstaad, Hotel Kernén has been offering traditional Swiss cuisine since 1904, and he is the fourth generation to run the restaurant.

"My mother, Olga, taught me to ski," he tells me. "She was also a racer. My father, Heinrich, wanted me to learn to cook and run the family business, but I only ever wanted to be a ski racer."

His father relented and allowed him to follow his passion, but seemingly with the proviso that when his ski racing career was over he'd be in the kitchen.

Bruno, who turns 61 this year and is originally from Rougemont near Saanen, seized that opportunity with vigour.

Ski racing fans will know that there are two ski racers named Bruno Kernén, the younger born in 1972 and winner of the Lauberhorn in Wengen in 2003, and the older Bruno Kernén, now restaurateur and winner of the downhill race on the Streif in Kitzbühel in 1983. They are distant relatives, but as the senior racer tells me with a smile: "I am Bruno Kernén number one."

When we met in late January, Dave Ryding

had just become the first Briton to win an Alpine skiing World Cup race with his victory in the classic Kitzbühel slalom.

In the bar, another race from Schladming is live on TV, and while Ryding finishes 20th he retains Bruno's admiration.

"I tip my hat to Dave Ryding," he says. "It is one of the great ski stories."

Referring to Ryding honing his early technique on a dry ski slope in England, he humorously adds: "I think maybe more Swiss should now go to learn to ski in the UK!"

Bruno made the Swiss team in December 1978 but sustained injuries. As we speak, he points to various parts of his body where he's had surgery over the years.

In 1981 he served in the Swiss military, and the following year qualified for the World Cup. He began posting good results against contemporaries such as Franz Klammer, Erwin Resch, Ingemar Stenmark, Pirmin Zurbriggen, Steve Podborski and Marc Girardelli.

As it turned out, the Lauberhorn in January 1983 in Wengen was cancelled and moved to Kitzbühel the following weekend.

After fast runs on the Wednesday and Thursday, he won in snowy conditions on the Friday (21 January) in a time of 2.06.68. The second downhill race of the weekend, on the Saturday, went to Todd Brooker.

Wearing bib 29, and elated with his victory, that

IN THE PICTURE: Bruno Kern in front of a painting bearing the number 29 bib he wore in his World Cup race win in 1983



number continues to have resonance to this day and is the label – Kitzbühel29 – on the bottles of house red and white wines at the restaurant.

From that high, he performed consistently well before retiring from ski racing in 1989, having married his Brazilian wife, Dudu.

Today, as well as running the hotel and restaurant, he continues to ski, taking his guests on to the slopes above Gstaad, as well as offering culinary tips back in the restaurant.

I met Bruno during my visit to the Gstaad region. The ski area is extensive, accessed by a string of base lifts spread along the villages of the valley – from Zweisimmen to Schönried, Gstaad, Saanen and Rougemont – and covers wide, varied, and challenging terrain across 200km of piste with a balance of blacks, reds and blues, plus fabulous off-piste opportunities.

Having checked into the four-star HUUS Gstaad Hotel at Saanen, I took the Eggli lift up from 1,050m to slopes which offer sunny relaxed skiing and

CHEERS: The number 29 house wine on offer at the Hotel Kern



TRAVEL FACTS

Accommodation: Mark Nicholls stayed at the four-star HUUS Gstaad Hotel with restaurant, pool and spa. Rooms start from CHF 300. Visit: www.huusgstaad.com/en

Ski passes: The Gstaad region adopts 'dynamic' ski pass pricing, but a day pass ranges from 49-77 CHF. For more information, visit: www.gstaad.ch For Switzerland Tourism, visit: www.myswitzerland.com

Flights: SWISS fly from London, Manchester, Birmingham and Edinburgh to Zurich or Geneva. One-way fares start from £76 to Zurich and £54 to Geneva including luggage, with free transport of ski or snowboard equipment and boots.

Transport within Switzerland: The Swiss Travel Pass offers unlimited travel by train, bus and boat and admission to more than 500 museums. For details, visit: www.swisstravelsystem.co.uk

tree-lined runs, and on to the high point at La Videmanette at 2,151m.

For those seeking a specific challenge, the Tiger Run, located on the Wassergrat, is the Saanenland region's steepest slope. Black, and with an average gradient of 45 degrees, it starts at 1,940m, down to 1,280m, but there are also easier runs from this point, too.

There are also trails for cross-country skiing plus snow-shoeing, winter hikes, and ski touring opportunities, as well as horse-drawn sleigh rides.

The season runs from mid-December to mid-March, though Glacier 3000 is not far away with a longer season from October to May.

But if you do find yourself in the area, pop in to Hotel Kern for traditional Swiss cuisine, have a friendly chat with the affable host, and don't forget to raise a glass of Kitzbühel29.

VALAIS: This Swiss canton – the home of several popular ski resorts including Crans-Montana, Verbier and Zermatt – has introduced additional measures to minimise the danger posed by avalanches.

During the 2020/2021 winter season, 11 people were killed by avalanches here, so around a dozen bodies involved in mountain safety, guiding and tourism in Valais came together to revisit existing measures to see which could be strengthened or better publicised, with Verbier agreeing to act as a test resort.

The group noted that the number of accidents linked to avalanches has stayed the same for 50 years, and believe part of the reason for this is that the European 5-level avalanche danger scale is not always well interpreted by skiers.

Three initial actions have been announced:

- 1) Broadcasting messages related to danger levels 3 and 4, with avalanche forecasts broadcast across social networks under the hashtag #freeridesafer
- 2) Reinforcement of signage: Prevention messages related to danger levels 3 and 4 will be visible to skiers on screens, posters or flyers at the departures of the ski lifts and from Verbier.
3. The *avalanche-check.ch* website: A fun and simple way for everyone to test their knowledge of avalanche danger management via an online questionnaire free in three languages.

ST MORITZ: Whisky lovers will now want to make sure their visit includes a trip to the top of the Corvatsch mountain to visit ORMA – 'the highest whisky distillery in the world'.

Orma means 'soul' in the local dialect of Romansch, and since October 2020 the distillery has offered a taste a single malt that has been gently maturing in the cellars of the top station over the last 10 years.

According to co-founder Rinaldo Willy: "At this altitude (3,300 metres), the distillation process takes place at around 10 degrees lower temperature than at sea level. This means more aromas and greater complexity are preserved."

Tours must be booked in advance either by calling: +41 81 868 82 81 or by emailing: info@orma3303.ch – and more information can be found at: www.orma3303.ch

VERBIER: The destination has been voted 'Switzerland's Best Ski Resort' for the third time in four years and, for the first time, the 'World's Best Ski Resort 2021' at the World Ski Awards™. These awards also honoured the W Hotel Verbier, which for the sixth consecutive year won both Best Ski Hotel in Switzerland and Best Ski Hotel in the World.

CORVATSCH: Visit the ski or snowboard areas of Furttschellas, Corvatsch and Corviglia all in one day on a snow safari. There are 350km of slopes across Upper Engadin, and the organised trip takes you to the most beautiful slopes with the best views.

DAVOS: The annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) will take place in Davos from 22 to 26 May. The motto will be 'Working together, restoring trust', and topics will include recovery from the pandemic and the fight against climate change.