

35 tram laps in one day

Local ski tuner sets new record

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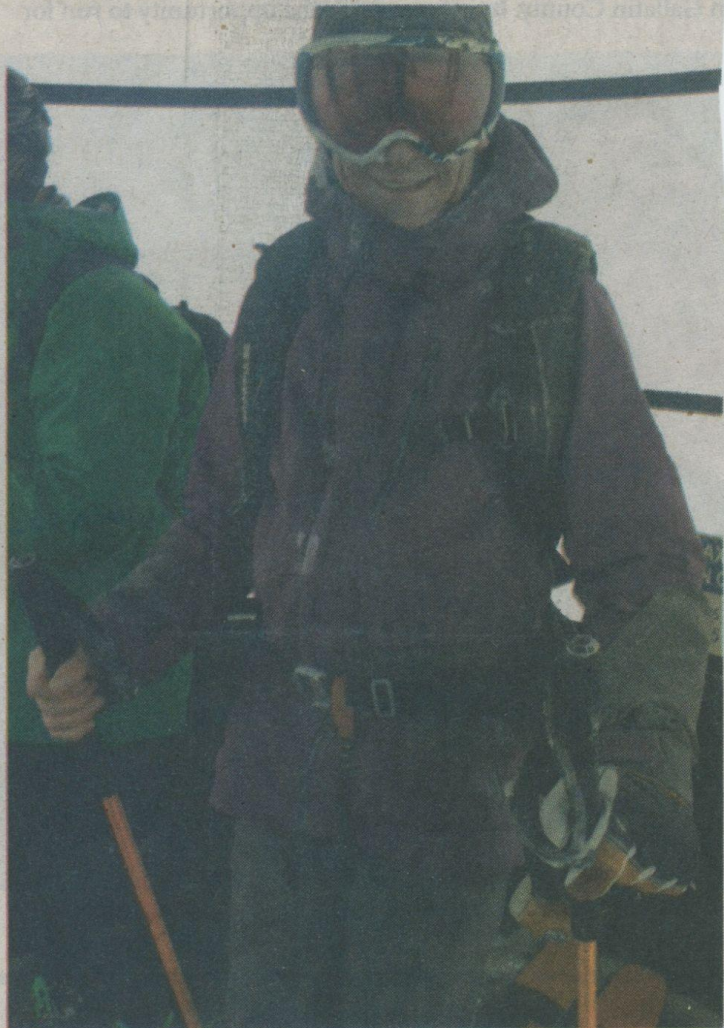
Valentine's Day began as just another aggressive ski day for 50-year-old Butte native Rob Leipheimer. Clouds continued to move in and visibility at the top of Big Sky Resort was more pea soup than blue bird, so there was hardly a wait in the tram line.

By 1 p.m., Leipheimer had skied a couple dozen tram laps, dropping across the Yeti Traverse into First Gullies and then down Cron's.

"It may be a bit monotonous to do the same run over and over, but it's the fastest way to get back to the tram," explained Leipheimer, who realized he was on course to beat his personal record of 27 tram laps and had a shot at beating the current record of 31 laps done during regular ski hours.

"I reached 24 and it was only 1 o'clock and I had two more hours. It was like, 'Oh, I'm going to break my personal record,'" said Leipheimer, who's known by the nicknames Switchie or Switch. "I continued to keep going. It was not planned. It was just kind of organic. It started out as five laps in an hour. Then there was a period where there was a two-car wait. But every other lap was a hot lap so other than that waiting period, I was always on my same tram car."

That means Switch was skiing off



Record setter: Rob "Switch" Leipheimer pictured here while pulling off 35 tram laps on two cups of coffee. His new record is for laps done during regular ski hours—9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Switch said another local lap-obsessed skier—Stuart Butterworth—"Did like 47." But that was with more time and no interruptions from the general public, said Switch.

PHOTO COURTESY OF ROB-LEIPHEIMER

Tram Laps from 1

Lone Mountain faster than the speed of the tram car returning to the tram base. For a few runs, friends acted as “rabbits”—like at a dog race—giving Leipheimer someone to chase as he tucked it across Gullies.

“The Yeti Traverse was really difficult that day, but First Gullies was really good skiing, wind-blown, chalky, fast,” said Leipheimer. “It was just poor visibility. But after you do it 35 times, you know where you’re going.”

And that’s where the current Big Sky Tram lap record now stands: 35 laps.

“No vis was my hero that day,” continued Leipheimer. “My last five cars were by myself. I had my skis on in the car and skied out of the car with my skis on.”

The thick clouds kept the crowds away, creating what

Leipheimer described as a kind of “Tram Island.” This rare phenomenon occurs when the access lift to the tram—used to be the old triple, now it’s Powder Seeker—shuts down and a small group of skiers is left with “Tram Island” all to themselves. To keep lapping, they must ski either Big Couloir or First Gullies to Cron’s and they’re rewarded with crowd-free turns lap after lap.

Throughout Leipheimer’s record-setting day—which lasted from 9:30 a.m. to 3:06 p.m.—the tram crew “were my witnesses” as Switch stomped inside the tram car wearing his Rossignol Super 7 RD 190s and blasted out at the top, wasting no time.

In a cellphone video, Leipheimer is seen heading out for another run as a voice tells him to “Get after it!”

“I ran on only two cups of coffee for the whole day,” said Leipheimer, who finally retreated down Mr. K to the base area after

racking up 50,750 vertical feet of skiing. He then tuned skis and snowboards at the resort until midnight and awoke the next morning to a powder day.

“I had no legs under me. I fell over a few times. The tram crew were really awesome the next day. They couldn’t believe I was skiing,” said Leipheimer, former owner of The Outdoorsman in Butte, who used to work as a sales rep and product manager for Rossignol and Nordica. He’s been skiing in Big Sky since he was 12 and his recent tram marathon reminded him of “my days when I was a ski racer and did a ski-a-thon at Bridger Bowl and did like 40 laps, so 40,000 vert.”

Summing it all up, Switch said, “I got a little tired at like lap 30 and it started getting rough and I started slowing down so I didn’t hurt myself. But it was fun, just like, kind of a novelty—just how much you can push yourself?”