



Ed Chassie has had several custom made carpets for his toboggan run that can carry as many as 10 people.

Photograph: Corey Wilkinson



Photograph: Heather Douglas

Ed Hammond gives a starting push to William Morrison and Myles Williamson on the Huntsville hill (above). Chris Petterson is continually adding and changing his Huntsville slide (right). Denise Smith slides down the Chassie toboggan run in Bracebridge (opposite page).



Photograph: Heather Douglas



Dream runs

for winter fun

Article by Dawn Huddleston

A snow-covered hill is an irresistible call to winter fun. Whether it's a death-defying, heart-thumping streak down a steep slope or a quick slip down the mound created by a snow plow, kids and kids-at-heart are lured by the promise of easy adventure. It usually doesn't require much effort—find a hill, haul a sled to the top, slide down, repeat—but two Muskoka families take this favourite winter pastime to a new level.

As soon as the snow starts to fall, Ed Chassie gets to work building the type of sled run most kids only dream about. The 250 metre track snakes down the hill behind his Bracebridge home with curves that have banked walls more than a metre high in some places. He's been building

the run for 13 years, but it didn't start out as elaborate as it is now.

"The neighbourhood kids used to snowboard here and they got up enough speed that they used to fly across the road," he says. "But when I built the house, the garage got in the way. That was probably a good thing."

It wasn't long before his young family began using the hill for sledding themselves. Chassie and his neighbours decided it was the perfect spot for a toboggan party so they built a make-shift run suitable for small children. They had such a good time that they did it again the next year, this time adding a curve to make the run a bit more

Photograph: Corey Wilkinson



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Chris Sicorella and Garth McIntyre ride the wall to the fright of onlookers while sliding down the Chassie toboggan run in Bracebridge.

daring. The third year, Chassie used the entire yard to build the run and an annual tradition was born.

There's still a toboggan party every Family Day weekend, but now kids come from all over the neighbourhood to use the hill throughout the winter. "They start knocking on my door as soon as it snows

to see if the hill is open yet," says Chassie.

It all depends on the snowfall and Chassie works on the run for the entire winter – whenever it snows, he shovels. Fifteen centimetres of snow gives him a good base to start with and he begins building from the bottom of the hill, adding twists and turns as he

goes. Once it's built, it takes Chassie 60 to 90 minutes to clear new snow from the track. "At 8 p.m. when it's quiet and the stars are shining, it's really pleasant being out there."

He keeps an array of saucers and carpets by his back door for the neighbourhood kids to use. There's even one that seats up to six at once. The kids often challenge each other to see who can go the farthest at the end of the run or who can get highest on the banks, which are actually a safety feature to keep kids from flying off the track.

"One year, this little 4-year-old girl – she was just a featherweight – came flying down and ended up skating along the top of the bank yelling 'Woohoo' the entire way."

Chassie may have started the run out of a desire for fun, but he keeps going for the memories it creates. "When I was a kid, we went to my uncle's for a Labour Day party every year and I have fond memories of them. It may be a different time of year, but our toboggan parties are reminiscent of those times. It's free fun and it's something everyone can do."

In Huntsville, Chris Petterson takes a slightly different approach to building his snow run. The treed hill behind his old farmhouse offered up the perfect straight-away for tubing. "About three years ago I noticed that there was a clear path going up the hill, but there was a lot of dead brush on it. I started cleaning it up and there were piles of it everywhere – it started to look a lot like a sled hill. I couldn't wait for the snow to fall so we could try it."

Since that first year, Petterson has learned what adjustments are needed for a smooth ride. In the sum-



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mer, he starts to plan the path the runs will take and his wife Michelle provides design guidance. When fall comes, he gathers sticks to build up the walls and then rakes leaves up and over the piles to cover the branches. He has also begun using hay bales left over from Sandhill Nursery's fall maze to build the sides up even more and make them smoother. After the snow falls, he and his daughters walk up and down the hill in snowshoes to pack it down.


There are now two runs more than two metres across that join together part way down the hill, but they differ in how steep they are at the start.

"I had to move some huge rocks to get the join of the runs smoother. Some friends helped and we did a lot of digging and backfilling to get it right. And I kept building the sides higher and higher until it started to look like a luge run. I'm not sure what made me do it. It's not good for toboggans – the walls are too curved – but it's perfect for tubes. Every year it gets bigger and better and safer." The walls are more than a metre high and Petterson estimates that it takes more than 20 hours to prep the run for the season.

He has added floodlights and Christmas lights in the trees for night tubing. "It's so much fun at night. The tree boughs full of snow hang over the run in certain parts and it's almost like going through a tunnel. I'm really hoping we have a lot of snow this year."

He's also trying to set up a pulley system to haul the tubes up to the top of the hill. "I have some design ideas in my head, but I'm not quite there yet. And there are always lots of little details that I want to change. I don't know if I'll ever perfect it."

The hill is visible from Brunel Road, especially at night, and cars will often stop to watch the fun or to ask questions. He's amused by the attention it gets, but he continues to build it for his two little girls who are now seven and nine years old.

"I started it because I was running out of things to do with them, while my wife was at work on the weekends, that didn't cost money. But now it's become something we do all the time. They love it and it puts a smile on my face." 



Ava Williams enjoys a run down the sled hill built by Chris Petterson.

Photograph: Heather Douglas

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