

## Touring For You

By: Craig Nicholson



**E**nvious snowmobilers often wish for a job like mine. Anything's possible. After all, I nailed it, so the job was obviously out there to be had. That said, you could pretty much count this country's employment opportunities for snowmobile print journalists on your fingers. So unless you plan to start your own publication, don't hold your breath for a position to come open any time soon...unless you are an exceptional writer who knows snowmobiling inside out. Then, if you can survive as a freelancer, selling articles to whomever will take them (probably for peanuts, I might add), you might get a foot in someone's door and work your way up the food chain.

So what does this so-called job of mine entail? As National Tour Editor for Snow Goer Canada Magazine, I am responsible for four feature articles, including photographs, to showcase various Canadian riding destinations. Each is accompanied by sidebars and Tested on Tour product reviews. Plus, I write this column in every issue and contribute other articles occasionally as needed. I spend most of my winter on tour and some of my off-season writing the content.

As with most consumer products, it takes a lot of behind the scenes work to deliver the finished version to you. Each fall, I explore possibilities to tour for the upcoming winter. I'm looking for snowmobile-friendly experiences that will interest you and provide a tour your group could do on your own. So my tours are full saddlebag rides, normally either a week or two long, because that's how long you typically go on vacation. Any article based on a brief two or three-day overview of a region (as you will find in most other magazines) is of limited value to you, except as a teaser. My tours are intended as complete templates to follow from day one to the finish, with all the details you need to make it work for you.

That's why I rarely use guides or support vehicles. I actually discourage any locals from riding with us, because if we can do it without help, so can you. It's also why I ride a Ski-Doo GSX Limited 600 HO ETEC...a trail sled in the most popular engine size for touring. Yes, it's a 2009 model, but that's part of my product review mandate: I report after putting 10,000 clicks or more on the one sled I ride all winter.

I try not to repeat a tour for at least five years, unless something new and noteworthy has happened that you should know about. Nor are my tours based on who advertises or not in the magazine. I go where I want without interference from or obligation to anyone. But I do need a willing tourism

host on the ground to help organize details in the region being profiled, to act as liaison with participating services and amenities...and to be my backstop if something really major screws up during the tour.

Recently, completing tours has become more difficult. Basically, you and I can count on good riding from about the middle of January to the second week in March (many northerly and mountain destinations excepted). Before and after is bonus time, unknowable until the last minute and therefore, impossible for planning a tour with certainty. Besides, most of you want your snowmobiling vacation in February, usually the "sweet spot" of winter, so that's when I try to tour for you.

By early December, I'm booked for the winter...back-to-back tours with only enough downtime between to wash my underwear. So if Mother Nature doesn't cooperate in one location, I don't have much manoeuvrability for rescheduling. Sometimes, I can manage to swap two existing tours, but that's a challenge once I'm on the snow and riding all day, often in locales with no ready communication facility. I spend most tour nights making notes and reviewing that day's photos.

And what if something goes wrong on tour? No matter the sled breakdown, storm closure, meltdown, detour, sickness or other surprise, my tour must continue and finish on time, or one issue of Snow Goer Canada may have a few blank pages!

That's a good reason for riding reliable sleds and for taking savvy companions with me. So far, we've had enough bodies, sleds and expertise to finish each tour regardless of unexpected occurrences (and we've had our share). But normally, we finish without incident and my buddies have some fantastic rides. So here's a hot tip: maybe you should be wishing to be one of them, not to replace me!

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**Add ICE to Your Cell Phone:** ICE (In Case of Emergency) is a method of contact during emergency situations. All you need to do is store the number of a person(s) that should be contacted during emergency under the name 'ICE'. In an urgent situation, emergency services personnel and hospital staff can then quickly contact the right person by simply dialling the number you have stored as 'ICE.' For more than one contact name, simply enter ICE1, ICE2 and ICE3 etc. Now we can all ride with much greater peace of mind!