

SPORTS

You Bobsleigh Me in Calgary

Satisfying the need for speed in Western Canada.

BY JEFF FUNNEKOTTER



For the first three turns on what's essentially an open-top tunnel of thick ice, I'm relieved. *Hey, this is great*, I think. Then the intensity shoots up as my stomach drops down. Turns four through 14 are essentially a blur. Every now and then, my helmet bangs into the side of the bobsleigh as the velocity presses my head, neck and shoulders down. I seem to have pretty much lost my motor control, and I'm very thankful that our experienced driver hasn't. At 120 kilometres an hour, this is like the fastest roller coaster in the world - except here, of course, there's no set track.

Half an hour earlier, when I entered the start house to [WinSport Canada](#)'s bobsleigh facility in [Calgary](#), where Canadian Olympic bobsleighters and skeleton and luge racers train, the setting couldn't have been more serene: a crystal-clear day, -10°C. After signing a waiver (participants are sent hurtling down an icy track, after all), my turn comes, and it's go time.

Sarah Monk Paes - our pilot, to use the lingo - is an energetic, cheerful world-class bobsleighter who was one of the first women to compete internationally for Canada. She briefs us on what to expect as she hands us our helmets. "If the sleigh overturns, keep your head and arms inside or you might lose them," she advises. I am not comforted.

Standing at the top of the track, looking at the spartan, red steel-and-fibreglass rocket on blades, I feel the first butterflies. In my mind's eye, I saw myself sprinting down the track and nimbly jumping into my seat at just the right moment, Olympic-style. Um, no. The sleigh weighs 220 kilos and looks only big enough to fit me and maybe the Olsen twins. It takes tremendous muscle and flexibility to first get this thing moving and then get seated safely.

So we start in a seated position. Nestled between two strangers, perched on a small pad with knees bent and supporting the person in front of me, I watch cautiously as our two pushers (each the size of a small SUV) do a full-out 25-metre dash while shoving our bobsleigh down the track.

After those 59.05 seconds that zip by like 10, we glide to a stop on an upslope and gingerly unfold ourselves from the sleigh. Prompted by a smiling "How was it?" from Sarah, I try to recover enough to formulate words. The closest I come to this: "Go team!" From now on, though, I think I'll be cheering on the Olympic bobsleighters from the safe confines of my couch.

Write to us: letters@enroutemag.net



Build your trip through our [Calgary City Guide](#).

Amazing Race

Where else to go for a sleigh ride.



Italy

Take a four-person bobsleigh for your own Olympian experience at Cesana Torinese, near Turin, where the track, sleighs and helmets (in other words, everything but the initial push from the pros) come from the 2006 Winter Games.

Torino Olympic Park Via Giordano Bruno, 191, torinolympicpark.org

USA

Led by an experienced pilot, the three-person bobsleigh ride at Utah's Olympic Park is for bona fide thrill seekers. Called the Comet, it reaches speeds of 128 kilometres an hour. You're in for one of the most exhilarating moments of your life.

Utah Olympic Park 3419 Olympic Parkway, Park City, 435-658-4200, olymparks.com

France

Nestled in a valley in the Savoy, La Plagne offers three different bobsleighbing adventures, from group to single runs. And if Annecy wins its bid for the 2018 Winter Games, you can say you tested the track for the athletes.

La Plagne Macot la Plagne, La Roche, 33-4-79-09-12-73, la-plagne.com