



ANDREW MCLEAN EXPOSED

Forget the Archangel Ridge of Mt. Foraker or the steep, constricted slots he haunts in Utah's Wasatch. If ski mountaineer Andrew McLean wanted exposure last season, all he had to do was go to the newsstand. First, there was the mid-February Sunday edition of *The New York Times*, whose wedding column highlighted his on-snow Alta wedding to Polly Samuels.

Then *The New Yorker* ("Yes, The New Yorker") came out with an April 18th issue whose half-fold faux cover with story leasers included one called "Death and Skiing." Which turned out to be in the Sporting Scene department, a section that once brimmed with golf and horse racing. But here it was: "Dangerous Game: A Ski Mountaineer and a History of Tragedy."

Shortly after, a full-page photo of a snow-flocked McLean—more on this to follow—occupied

the left side of an *Outside Magazine* spread with a remarkable title: "Thrill Daddy Dreams of Powder Dawn." The sub-title does a better job of orientation: "Andrew McLean is a shaggy-haired, left-brained industrial designer whose inventions are revolutionizing the world of adventure skiing. He's also found the perfect guinea pig to take his gear to outrageous new heights: himself."

So what's with all this, Andrew?

No matter that your fiancée, a Utah assistant attorney general, is also a rando-racing champ, whose parental insistence (she's got a lawyer-father, who was a former Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and a mother well-connected in Manhattan real-estate) insured that a wedding announcement went to *The Times*. Which assigned an Aspen-based writer to cover it—with the couple's compliance—for the "Vows" feature, sketching the courtship and the ceremony on the wedding announcement

pages. Predictably, both were photographed on skis. "I'm amazed at how many people—skier types—saw that," McLean says.

"I'm saying, 'You

read *The New York Times*?'"

McLean was even more surprised at how many people read *The New Yorker*. Nick Paumgarten's sizable piece is as much a meditation on the toll that skiing the wild side has taken on his family—his Austrian-born, ski instructor grandfather was killed in an avalanche in St. Anton; another took his aunt, skiing out of bounds in Aspen thirty years ago; and as an adolescent, he watched his father emerge from a burial. Paumgarten is an experienced skier, but McLean chuckles when reminded of his response to the writer's fearful anticipation of a Wasatch outing: "Don't know what you think you signed up for, Nick. You're here with the wrong guy."

Paumgarten skis the south face of Mt. Superior with McLean. *Outside*'s Bruce Barcott bails on the nearby Suicide Chute. ("He's primarily a climber," McLean says of the veteran Barcott, whose approach is more gear oriented. "But he's a better skier than he lets on.") But while McLean is working pretty much the same Little Cottonwood ground with them both, it becomes known to each writer that they are writing about the same subject (check the publication dates). "I had no idea both [magazines] would do features," McLean says. A *New Yorker* reader, he thought it would be a short item in the "Talk of the Town." "I started to get uncomfortable," he says.

The level of discomfort manifestly ramps up when "the godfather of all things off-piste," as Barcott calls him, poses for a full-page *Outside* portrait.

"I got a good laugh," McLean says of Barcott's assertion. McLean recalls that the photographer had been directed to shoot him in "a raging storm." Not likely to happen that spring week in Utah, and The Canyons Resort had long shut down its guns. But money spoke and got a snow gun running for "fictitious snow," as McLean puts it. Of McLean, Barcott writes: "A wiry man, he has an oversize noggin that rides on his lean 145-pound body, so that he vaguely resembles a five-foot-ten-inch-sunflower." Paumgarten's take: "McLean has the trim and sinewy build of a Sherpa...and a rubbery, slightly hunched posture, but his bright-blue eyes, bobblehead proportions, and anachronistic helmet of light brown hair give him an impish appearance."

Well, McLean's mug—flocked in white like his skis, clothes and pack—doesn't look so impish under a snow gun that wasn't arcing flakes, but shooting a barely frozen slurpee point blank and horizontal. Call it a rime job—as McLean says, "In two seconds every bit of my clothing was soaked. I was hypothermic."

Just another day in the writing trade. Says McLean, who liked both pieces: "I enjoyed the process of working with those guys. As a fledgling writer, I look to see how the pros did it. And I didn't mind spreading the gospel."

Neither the tabloids nor women's mags have called yet. "Not much has changed," McLean says. "No movie contracts. I'm not starting a singing career."

—John Dostal



Andrew McLean, hot off the presses.