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## **It's All About The Speed: UNH Student Competing In Alaska's Arctic Man Ski And Snowmobile Race April 9, 2010**

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Apr 7, 2010

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DURHAM, N. H. – Todd Thibodeau likes to go fast. Really fast. As a former member of the U.S. Ski Team, the University of New Hampshire junior had been clocked at 92 mph.

Things had slowed down a bit for the 24-year-old when he left the ski team after three years to attend UNH. He missed the speed. So, when he heard about the upcoming Arctic Man Ski and Sno-Globe Classic at Summit Lake, Alaska, taking place April 9, 2010, he thought maybe he'd give it a go.

Now in its 25th year, the Arctic Man pairs skiers or snowboarders with snowmobilers in one of the world's toughest downhill races. Contestants begin 5,800 feet up and, in less than two miles drop 1,700 feet. Their snowmobile partners meet them in the narrow canyon at the bottom and hand off a tow rope, pulling them two miles up another mountain at speeds nearing 85 mph. At the top of the peak, the rope is dropped and the racers fly toward the finish line.

"I'd heard about the Arctic Man before and thought it would be great to do someday. But I've been missing racing so I decided to contacted the race director and we talked a few times and he said he had a girl capable of winning that he'd match me up with and now I'm headed to race in one of the craziest races on earth," Thibodeau said before leaving for Alaska Monday.

His partner is Carly Davis, a 20-year-old snowmobile race driver from Soldotna, Alaska. Todd Palin, Sarah Palin's husband, also is on the roster as a driver.

Thibodeau and Davis have two days to get a few trial runs in. They'll practice the tow rope handoff without Thibodeau on skis. He's going to wear mountain bike gloves instead of his ski gloves so he can get a hold of the handled more easily.

"I'm kind of an adrenaline junky. If I can go out and push my limits, I'm happy," Thibodeau said. "But everything I do is really calculated—I don't push so far that I'm out of control. I don't take big risks. One of my biggest goals when I race is to come back healthy."

The UNH kinesiology major grew up in Freedom, where during the winter he skied one day

a week in his elementary school program and then weekends with his family. At the age of four, he began racing with Nastar, a national recreational ski and snowboard race group.

When he was 16 he entered Burke Mountain Academy, a boarding school offering a college preparatory curriculum and skiing that sees many of its students compete in the Olympics. He was named to the U.S. Ski Team in 2005.

His ski team training (he specialized in the speed events, Super-G and Downhill) has taken him all over the world, practicing at 14,000 feet in the Andes where, he says, the bus ride down was the scariest part, and previously in Alaska with the limited darkness posing sleeping problems.

After graduating UNH, Thibodeau hopes to return to the ski team. His sights are set on going to the 2014 Olympics in Russia. Then he wants to open his own training facility for extreme athletes. For now, he works as a personal trainer. He is also a coach at a private ski academy in Vermont.

"Everyone has asked me why I'm doing this," Thibodeau said of competing in the Arctic Man competition that, in celebration of its 25th year, has a \$25,000 purse. "I guess I'm kind of addicted to speed. Their motto is 'ski fast or go home.' That's sort of me."

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling more than 12,200 undergraduate and 2,200 graduate students.