

Sandblast champ won't defend title

The coveted Sandblast trophy — adorned with the icon of a blue-furred Sesame Street character on skis and in a cape — is making its way back to Prince George after spending a year outside its hometown and in the possession of 2000 sandblast champ and Prince Rupert native, Jud Rowse. But it's coming back alone, making this Sunday's competition a race to see who can claim the title of king of the cut-banks.

"Jud is in training for a marathon and doesn't want to risk an injury," says race organizer Scott Bilbrough. "His friends are bringing back the sandblast trophy so we'll have it with us on during the race."

This year is the 30th anniversary of PG's most extreme summer competition. Skiers first carved a path down the sandy banks of the Nechako River in 1971 and Bilbrough says the anniversary race will try to capture the spirit of that first sandblast.

"We've got a retro theme going this year. There will be prizes for best late '60s and '70s costumes," he says.

There's no guarantee yet that any of last year's champs will return to defend their titles — but past winners like Canadian National Freestyle team member Jennifer Simms, two-time winner Chris Ghee, and the consistently strong



Blast the banks in style this Sunday.

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fun, not winning. "There's really only a handful who are in it to win. The rest are just there for fun."

Recent highs in the high 20s and even 30s could push this year's sandblast far above the 55 entrants in 2000 when over-cast skies and the threat of rain conspired to keep some racers at home.

Sandblast registration begins at 10 a.m. Sunday, with first runs starting at noon. Race organizers are also battling bad crops and a poor hay season — meaning they need free straw to pad the the racer's finish. For more info or to donate hay, call Scott Bilbrough at 564-9791.

Dave 'Skid Row' Withrow — who hit the slopes last year despite a concussion in 1999 — are all possible entrants.

Last year's fastest time down the bank — and the fastest sandblast time to date — was set by youthful mountain biker Kenney Smith, who made it to the straw at the finish in 11.12 seconds. Bilbrough predicts this year another cyclist could again set the pace.

"The mountain bikes are getting crazy lately with suspensions and wider tires. And with a bike you have better control over your direction and speed," he says, adding that for most racers the sandblast is about

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