

SNOW SKI SPECIAL SECTION

If November's weather is any indication, Michigan is in for a splendid season of skiing

By ELLEN CREAGER
FREE PRESS TRAVEL WRITER

K eep your fingers crossed, but it's shaping up to be a great ski season in Michigan. By Thanksgiving, skiers were already out on the slopes at Pine Knob in Clarkston.

Mt. Bohemia, up near Copper Harbor, already had 37 inches of snow.

In northwest lower Michigan, ski resorts basked in the frigid temperatures.

The new Boyne Mountain Grand Lodge and Spa at Boyne Mountain was bustling with its first holiday crowds.

And the season had barely begun. "It was a typical February weekend — in November," says Boyne spokeswoman Julie Ard.

Michigan is notorious for wildly variable early winter weather, but this year many of the state's 30 ski resorts either are already open or are about to unlock the gates. It may be the first time in five years the weather has been this cooperative this early.

Skiers can't wait. "I'm attracted to the speed and exhilaration of the sport itself, and the scenery," says Calvin Browne, president of metro Detroit's Jim Dandy ski club and an avid skier for 19 years. He plans a first trip with the club Dec. 17 to Caberfae Peaks in Cadillac.

Browne, 54, of Farmington Hills learned to ski at Mt. Brighton, and his favorite Michigan slopes are at Boyne Highlands in Harbor Springs. He plans on at least 15 ski trips this season.

Families, too, are aching to get out. "It used to be when I was in college, we would go up skiing every Thanksgiving weekend. They were always open. Just the last few years, it seems things have gotten warmer," says Russ Smith, 50, of Grosse Pointe Woods. The former racer has taken his wife and three children skiing every year for nearly 20 years during

See SKI, 7K

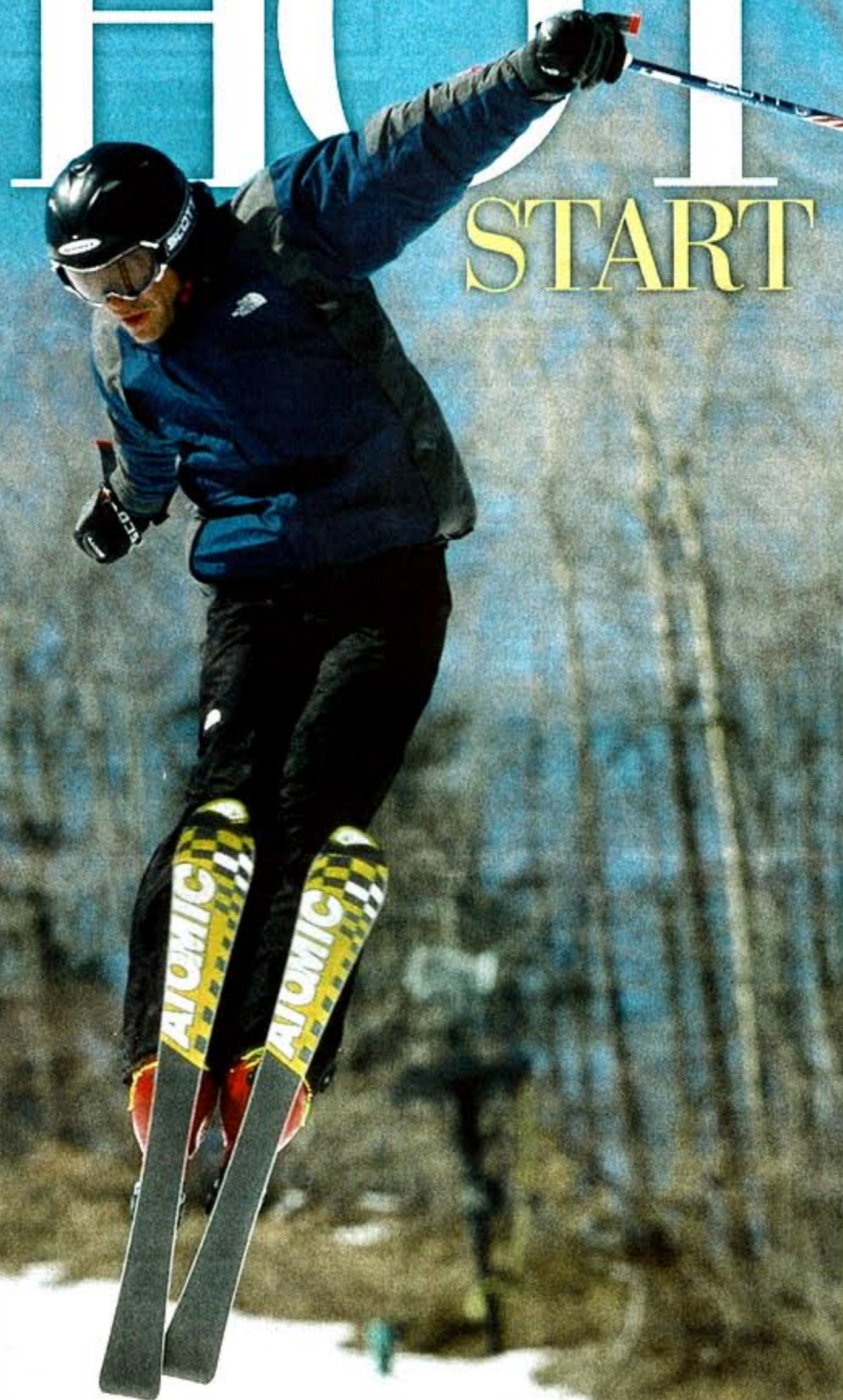


Crystal Mountain

ABOVE: Crystal Mountain has added five cottages; it's one of several resorts upgrading their lodging lineups.

RIGHT: Many of Michigan's 30 ski resorts, including Boyne Mountain, are already open for the season.

OFF TO A HOT START



Looking cool starts with staying covered

BY LISA JONES TOWNSEL
ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Certain sports have a look; skiing is one of them. And although it's OK to be a ski bum, you want to avoid being labeled a ski geek at all costs.

So heed a few fashion fundamentals and spare yourself the anguish of going overboard.

Want to get started? Layering is key.

Layering

Wearing long underwear is not negotiable, experienced skiers say. The thin, body-clinging thermal pieces add the first layer of warmth to the skier's uniform. Stay away from cotton items that tend to retain moisture and look for those made of synthetics that move moisture away from the body.

Hat and gloves

You want to keep your extremities well-covered, too. Hats that pull down over your forehead and ears are a must. Those made for active lifestyles will often have a fleecy band along the head to absorb moisture.

Hands sweat, too, meaning that gloves need not only be waterproof but also able to wick moisture away from the fingers.

One suggestion is to look for gloves with draw cords at the wrist, says Jessica Boyd of Hidden Valley Resort in Eureka, Mo. The feature helps block winter's chill. Gloves

See WEAR, 4K

On the slopes in Michigan

900 feet

Tallest vertical drop — at Mt. Bohemia, Lac La Belle.

9,240 feet

Longest run — at Mt. Bohemia, Lac La Belle.

67

Most runs — at Boyne Mountain, Boyne Falls.

125 feet

Vertical drop at Pando Winter Sports Park, Rockford.

14

Lifts at Mt. Holly, Holly — the state's most.

22

Number of cross-country ski trails at Caberfae Peaks, Cadillac — the state's most.

2

Number of resorts that don't make snow: Skyline in Grayling and Mt. Bohemia.

8

Number of ski areas with indoor pools: Big Powderhorn in Bessemer, Indianhead in Wakefield, Pine Mountain in Iron Mountain, Boyne Highlands in Harbor Springs, Boyne Mountain, Crystal Mountain in Thompsonville, Shanty Creek in Bellaire, Treetops in Gaylord.

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