



The Odyssey Of No. 4

No. 4, the last Model B that Frank built, was purchased by John Harris, the owner of the Ice Capades show, and its unique history follows. In June of 1973, the Zamboni Company received a phone call from Ted Dunn of the Los Alamos Skating Association in New Mexico telling them that their Zamboni machine was involved in a fire at their rink and they required assistance in rebuilding it for the coming skating season. When it was determined that their resurfacers were the fourth machine that Frank had built, and up until the fire, was to the Company's knowledge the oldest unit in regular operation, it was decided that the Company would obtain it, re-build it and reconstruct the story of its much-traveled history.

The No. 4 machine was delivered to the Pan Pacific Auditorium on May 6, 1952 and was used in the Ice Capades show for the first time two days later. It was then shipped to Atlantic City, New Jersey, where it began a ten-month tour of 22 cities in the United States, as well as appearances in Toronto and Montreal. When traveling between cities, the conditioner was lifted into the snow tank by a chain hoist and the machine was then driven into a railroad baggage car. Its operator and chief mechanic was Robert Skrak, who also skated in the show and demonstrated the machine in various arenas when requested to do so. Bob operated the No. 4 machine and its replacement, No. 16, for many years. Between May and July of 1953, the machine was again in Los Angeles and received a complete factory checkup prior to rejoining the show again in Atlantic City. The 1953-1954 Ice Capades Show again trouped No. 4 in the United States and Canada and the machine made its last show appearance in May, 1954, at the Denver Stockyard's Stadium. Ice Capades took delivery of the first Zamboni Model E machine in July 1954 and No. 4 was traded in on this new machine.

Following its factory renovation, the No. 4 machine was sold to the Iceland Skating Arena in Albuquerque, New Mexico. W.C. "Bill" Snelson had a fire at his original Albuquerque ice arena in 1953 and decided to rebuild at another location. He was able to reopen in November of 1954 and did so with the recently rebuilt Zamboni No. 4. At this rink, Bill Snelson and Mack Griffin operated the machine until it closed in August of 1960. Much of the equipment, including the Zamboni machine was then sold to the Los Alamos Skating Association, whose development is an interesting story worth telling.

During World War II, Los Alamos, New Mexico changed dramatically. From a private ranch-school for boys, it grew into a super-secret city of 15,000 scientists, technicians and military personnel with the assignment of unlocking the secret of atomic power and harnessing it as a weapon. Located at 7100 feet on the sunny mesas and deep, eroded canyons of the northern New Mexico Jemez Mountain range, the Los Alamos community had to make the best of local recreational opportunities. This included a 60' x 110' oval ice rink in nearby Los Alamos canyon, which was created by flooding and damming a tiny canyon creek. Its buildings consisted of two 14-foot square shacks and a wood-burning, pot-bellied stove. Its Skating Club subsisted on a meager budget, which basically relied on its 100-plus enthusiasts at \$1.00 per season membership fee.

The creation of the Atomic Energy Commission in 1947 made Los Alamos the world's foremost research and development laboratory in nuclear weaponry and it also diversified its interest into many peaceful uses of nuclear energy; including solutions to the world's energy crisis. With this change, Los Alamos became a normal community with families instead of G.I.'s. The old ranch-school skating oval was enlarged to a hockey rink of 78' x 178' in 1950 and was moved 800' down Los Alamos canyon to find better shade. Another rebuilding in 1959 made the rink 90' x 210' and it now featured a 20' x 100' wing of an old dormitory at the rink site. The non-profit Los Alamos Skating Assn., in spite of their limited funds, became interested in acquiring a Zamboni machine. Through the travels of their amateur adult hockey teams, they became familiar with the Jeep®-mounted ice making machine. The rig intrigued the Los Alamos players because their open rink was maintained through snow, unseasonable rain and excessive weekend use, with an army-surplus Fordson tractor, brush and lots of volunteer labor.

May 1961 prompted high hopes when a decision was reached in Albuquerque to convert Bill Snelson's rink to uses other than skating. Although stymied at first by a lack of funds and their policy not to borrow, the Association remained hopeful and on a Friday in August, received a phone call saying they could have the machine and other rink equipment not attached to the building for their original offer of \$1500.00. The one stipulation was – that everything they wanted had to be removed by 6:00 p.m. the following Sunday. On Sunday, a caravan of Los Alamos hockey players and figure skaters (in a variety of vehicles) descended from the Jemez Mountains and arrived at the Albuquerque rink at dawn after a 2-hour, 98-mile trek. Fifteen hundred dollars changed hands about noon and by mid-afternoon, the caravan, replete with rubber floor tile, old rental skates and other rink paraphernalia “took to the hills”. Earlier in the day, Association president Wally McCracken departed in the Zamboni machine's driver's seat with pick-ups fore and aft to begin their 20-mile an hour return to Los Alamos. The Los Alamos rink had its “Zamboni”.

Through twelve skating seasons, the machine operated faithfully and diligently. At 1:00 on a cold Sunday morning in February of 1973, Ted Dunn was awakened by a fire call from the ice rink. By the time he arrived, the garage (which housed the Zamboni machine and their old Jeep-plow) was in flames. A loft above the machine also stored such flammables as rubber flooring and hockey sticks. Amid the smoke and flames, the old Jeep was driven out the door onto the ice. The firemen were about ready to give up on No. 4, when Ted asked to give one more try to removing it from the burning garage. Soaked by the fire hoses, he re-entered the garage, threw a dampened canvas over the engine and after having to quickly tighten the battery terminals, got the engine started. Signaling to the firemen to push the burning loft up, he drove out the door, carrying burning hockey sticks, part of the garage door and other debris with him.

This machine was rebuilt and restored (by the Zamboni Company) to its original condition and has been on display for many years at the United States Hockey Hall of Fame in Eveleth, Minnesota.

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