

49'ers to the rescue on trail

The New Alaska 49'ers first furnished communications for snowmobiles in February of 1967, for the first World Cross Country Championship Snowmobile Race from Talkeetna to Anchorage. The visibility was so bad that the helicopters and planes that were to observe the race were unable to fly. So the 13 families of the 49'ers that were participating were about the only ones that were able to furnish any kind of information as to the whereabouts of the racers. It was written "Thanks to the 49'ers, 104 of the original 271 machines limped across the finish line at 3rd and C Streets. Some racers suffered the usual scruffs and bruises but no one who entered the race was seriously hurt. Veterans of the big race say that without the 49'ers the race would have ended somewhere between Talkeetna and Tok."

The following year the race was dedicated to Bill Harpel and about 70 49'ers were out, including for the first time 49'ers with CB radios mounted on snowmobiles acting as trail-

sweepers. These sturdy fellows followed the racers to make sure no one was on the trail hurt or stranded. In fact it was after midnight the first day when one stranded racer was brought into Willow and sent by ambulance to Palmer hospital for treatment, the ambulance waiting as a result of the radio communication set up.

The next year 1969, the trail sweeps finally arrived at Big Lake at 5 a.m. Sunday morning with three stranded racers, then were able to snatch a couple of hours rest and be back on the trail to Anchorage by 10 a.m.

In 1970 we worked the Talkeetna race and the first Women's Cross Country Race from Eagle River to Big Lake and back, and also the Big Lake 500.

Every race the 49'ers have worked, especially the cross-country ones, they have kept track of each racer by bib number as he passed each checkpoint, and as the trailsweeps reached each checkpoint, were able to tell them if all the racers left in the race were already ahead of them. If not, then the

sweeps went back down the trail to see if anyone had missed the trail and was possibly hurt or lost.

Since 1967 the 49'ers have furnished communications for all the Talkeetna to Anchorage races and the Women's Cross-Country races, most of the Hatcher Pass and Wasilla Grand Prix races, the Mayor's Cup Race around Anchorage, the Big Lake 500 and the Old Man's race. During this time they have arranged for helicopters and ambulances to pick up injured racers, and even carried some of them off the trails in ahkios to be treated. They have given information to pit crews and families as to the whereabouts of their racers, and to the officials as to where the leaders were and who they were, as well as the same information about the last man on the trail. Today many of the present 49'ers have worked the majority of these races, and some of them have raced in them.

One thing for sure they all look forward to is having enough snow each year to ensure that the events will be held, so that once again they can get out there in their cars, campers, motorhomes, or on their snowmachines to be sure that each and every entrant is accounted for at the end of each race.

