

Canada Eskimo Competing in Big 600 Race

A Canadian Eskimo is competing in the Alaska Midnight Sun 600. John Pudnak, 23, of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories is the official entry of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

Pudnak, and Jake Ootes, Special Assistant to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories, arrived in Anchorage last Sunday. They arrived several days early

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to familiarize themselves with the terrain and other details of the race.

Pudnak is rated as an excellent competitor. Although he has never raced in official competitions, he boasts of having beaten one of the top competitors of the 1967 World Championship Snowmobile Derby held at Eagle River, Wisconsin—Hugh Ungun-gai, another Eskimo from the Northwest Territories.

Until he was 17 Pudnak was hooked on dog teams. He was born in a tent on the tundra near Eskimo Point, Northwest Territories on Sept. 6, 1945.

He was learning the ways of the land hunting and trapping but saw his first snowmobile in 1962. He was hooked.

Pudnak had gone to school at Chesterfield Inlet, Baker Lake and Yellowknife and was now working with the Northern Affairs Office as an interpreter. He recalls that he was offered a job at head office in Ottawa as a translator. "I only lasted three months. The skidoo season is too short down there," said Pudnak.

He returned to the north to Baker Lake and has remained in the north ever since.

He and his wife Vera and two

sons now live in Yellowknife where he works as an interpreter and translator for the Government of the Northwest Territories.

"I had a skidoo in Baker, but we had to leave it there. It costs too much to bring it to Yellowknife. My wife and I love skidooing. We'd go out every weekend. I was the local champ."

"I'm sure I can win some of this prize money in Alaska and then I'll buy another machine."

The Bombardier Corporation of Sherbrooke, Quebec have shipped a skidoo machine for Pudnak to Anchorage. They are also donating a pit crew to keep the machine operational.

The Territorial Government is sponsoring Pudnak to develop closer relations with the Alaska sporting fraternity. It is the first step in working more closely together in preparation for the Arctic Winter Games scheduled for 1970 (March 10-14).

The invitation to participate in the rally was made by Governor Hickel of Alaska during Commissioner Hodgson's visit to Juneau in November. This was followed by a formal invitation from Robert W. Hastings, Executive Director of the Midnight Sun 600.