

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

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Personal Travel Journey – The Philadelphia Inquirer, Travel Section  
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## RACING FOR THE GOLD

I had the most exhilarating and frightening 51.48 seconds of my life on the Comet, the 4-man bobsled ride at Utah Olympic Park.

When my wife and I had the opportunity to visit Park City, Utah for the Sundance Film Festival, we jumped at the chance. Before we left on our trip, my wife was most excited about planning which films which we would see, whereas I was most excited about planning my bobsled ride. I didn't even think twice about it. I love roller coasters, so how could the Olympic bobsled be much different?

When we arrived at the Olympic Park and I saw the track that I first had seen when we attended the bobsled races at the 2002 Salt Lake Winter Olympics, I really began to wonder what I had been thinking. Maybe my wife had made the right decision - she opted to videotape my bobsled's launch at the top of the track.



At Utah Olympic Park in Park City, Jonathan & Leslie Bari watch other racers after Jonathan completed his bobsled race on The Comet.

The Comet is certainly not a kindler and gentler tourist track; it is the exact same track used in the 2002 Winter Olympics. With 15 steep twists and turns, the track is just under a mile in length and is completely covered with hundreds of fine layers of ice. During our ride, we attained our top breakneck speed of 81 miles per hour and descended the equivalent of a forty-story drop in just under a minute.

The quarters are quite tight in the 4-person bobsled, and I raced with one professional driver, who occupied the first position and steered the sled, and a couple visiting from California. My driver was Stephan Bosch who has driven the 2-man and 4-man bobsled for Team USA. Bosch is also a former four-time World Champion. I trusted that we were in experienced hands with Bosch since it was up to him to ensure that our bobsled maintained a tight line on the banked curves, that it did not crash, and that we would win with the fastest tourist time of the day.

Unlike the expert racers who compete with a running start to gain momentum and then jump into the moving bobsled before the first turn, tourists like myself start in a seated position, and the sled is pushed by Utah Olympic Park staff to start the sled down the track.

When we went around the first curve, I thought that the ride was pretty cool. Just a blink of my helmet-covered eyes later as we careened through the second curve, I thought that curve two was certainly more intense. By the third curve, all I could do was pray that my bobsled would not crash and possibly flip, just like I witnessed when Prince Albert of Monaco's 4-man bobsled flipped over in the 2002 Olympics (Prince Albert was not hurt). By the fourth curve, the extreme ride made it practically impossible to keep my head up and my eyes open to see what was happening.

With a light snow falling and the cold wind whipping by us, we experienced 4 Gs of force as we raced down the track. The Comet certainly left me breathless, in a great way! When we disembarked from the bobsled, my knees were a little weak, but the smile on my face was from ear to ear, even after some other sleds beat our finish time by just tenths of a second.

When I took the ride of a lifetime during the peak winter season, reservations were required and it seemed like there were at least a hundred other thrill seekers who were there for the same reason as me. While the Comet offers both winter bobsled rides on ice and summer wheeled bobsled rides on the concrete track, I would suggest experiencing the ride during the winter for a more authentic Olympic feel.

As we get set for the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy, my wife and I wish Team USA all the best, and I am hopeful that their training at Utah Olympic Park, which the tourist bobsled rides help fund, will enable our athletes to bring home the gold! U-S-A! U-S-A!

For more information on the Comet bobsled rides, contact: [www.olymparks.com](http://www.olymparks.com) or call 866.OLY.PARKS.