

LEISURE: You can snowmobile from York Region to Manitoba

# Explore safely on sled

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Get your motor running, York Region. Bone-chilling temperatures and mounds of snow are just right.

"With winter being here, you might as well do something you enjoy," said Mike Kuechler, Holland Landing Snowmobile Club president.

"Snowmobiling is a relaxing activity, it's enjoyable because you are out in the fresh air and there is exercise involved. You do work when you ride a sled."

"Snowmobiling is definitely a great sport if you enjoy winter," added Greg Pritty, a Markham resident who took his first ride on a motorized sled when he was seven.

His grandfather introduced him to snowmobiling.

His interest in the sport remains as keen as it was back then, but now he travels along groomed trails with his family.

"We have a cottage and everyone in my family — my wife and two sons — we all ride snowmobiles," he said.

For others, such as Ballantrae resident Don Bremner, snowmobiling provides a great way to remain active during the winter as well as a diversion from the everyday rigours of work.

Most of his travels are done with close friends near his Lake Simcoe cottage.

"When we go out, I never go more than

six to eight hours a day, but some of my friends will go on trails for days," he said.

For many, it's the sightseeing that keeps them riding.

They can see far more of the countryside on a snowmobile than in a car or boat.

"You definitely get to see a lot of the country in the winter," Bremner said.

With a cottage near Dorset, Pritty recalled a three-day excursion that took them around the boundaries of Algonquin Park.

In the winter, you can travel anywhere, Pritty said, adding there are lots of groomed trails across the province.

"You definitely see things that you wouldn't otherwise see during the summer," Kuechler said.

Riding in the open air and at high speeds gets his adrenaline flowing and heartbeat racing, Bremner said.

"I like to go for it," he said of his machine that reaches speeds of 90 km/h.

After taking a leave of absence from snowmobiling, Bremner's interest was renewed thanks to advances in snowmobile technology that make riding more comfortable.

"On my wife's sled, there's an electric start and it has a reverse and it also has hand and thumb warmers," Pritty said. "It's not some rickety-old thing. All of the new machines have all of the comforts."

For those seeking trails, the Holland Landing Snowmobile Club can offer assistance.

With a membership of 20 families, the club, which is just one of many that are affiliated with the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs, sets up a 30-kilometre trail each winter, beginning at Cedar Street in Holland Landing and travels north

where it joins up with a trail created by the neighbouring Georgina Club.

Each groomed trail is connection to 40,000 across the province, Kuechler said.

Theoretically, you can go from Manitoba to York Region on snowmobile.

Work on the trails is carried out by members on a volunteer basis. Riders can use them with an annual trail pass costing \$250.

The club offers assistance to anyone interested in getting started in snowmobiling, especially families, Kuechler said.

While snowmobilers revel with the arrival of sub-freezing temperatures and snow, some express concerns about the future of the sport, especially during these challenging economic times when extra disposable income might be at a minimum and the cost of fuel is not dropping.

"Snowmobiling is definitely a great sport to do if you can afford to do it," Pritty said. "It's definitely more expensive to do because of gas prices and that's an issue."

"For a family of four, as an example, you could spend a lot if you do it over a weekend."

*If you wish to try the sport, but don't own a snowmobile, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs lists on its website places that rent machines.*

## TRAINING ESSENTIAL

For those starting out, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs and OPP suggest they get proper training beforehand.

Riders should take the time to learn how to operate and ride a sled and the rules of the trail.

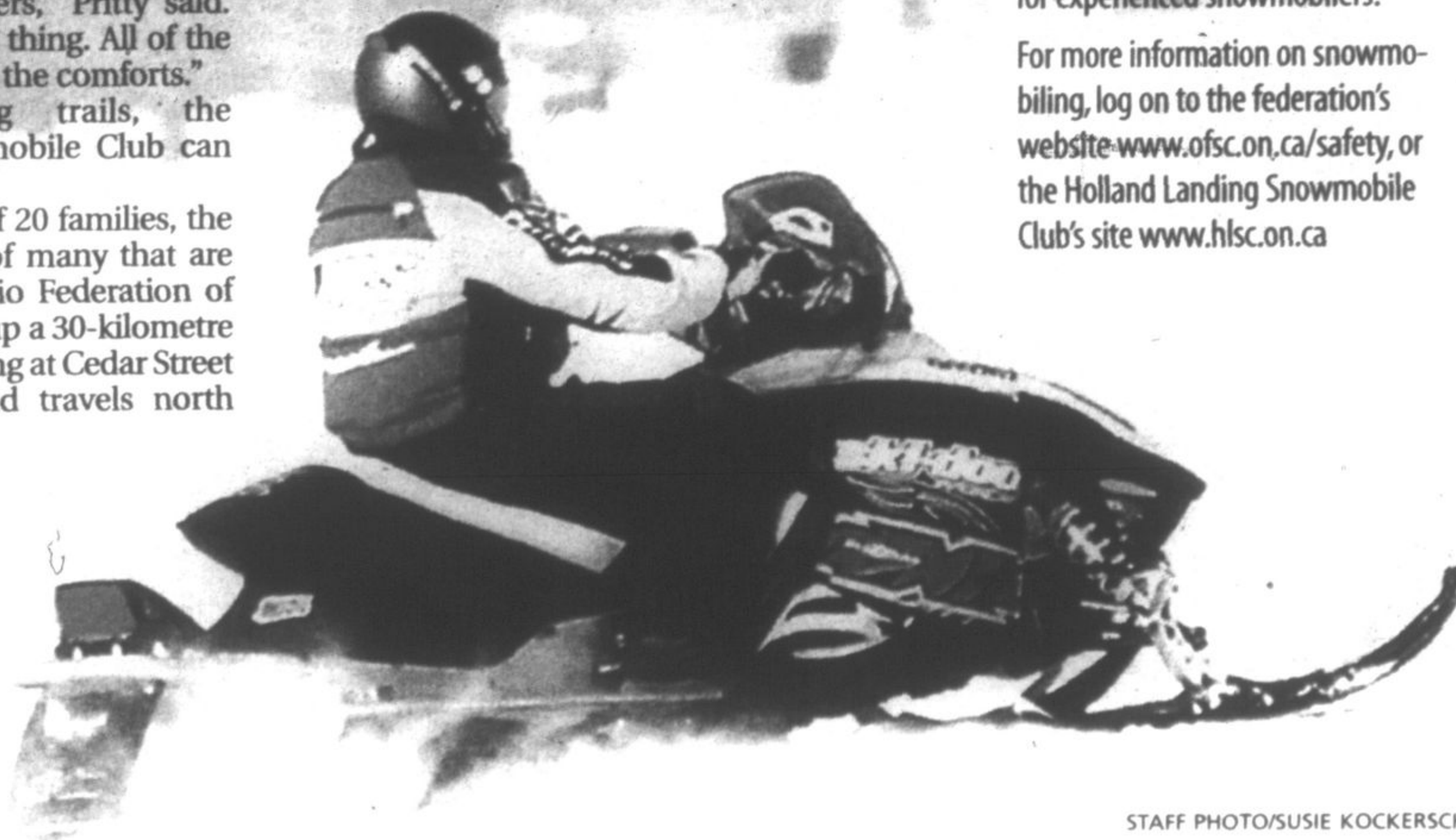
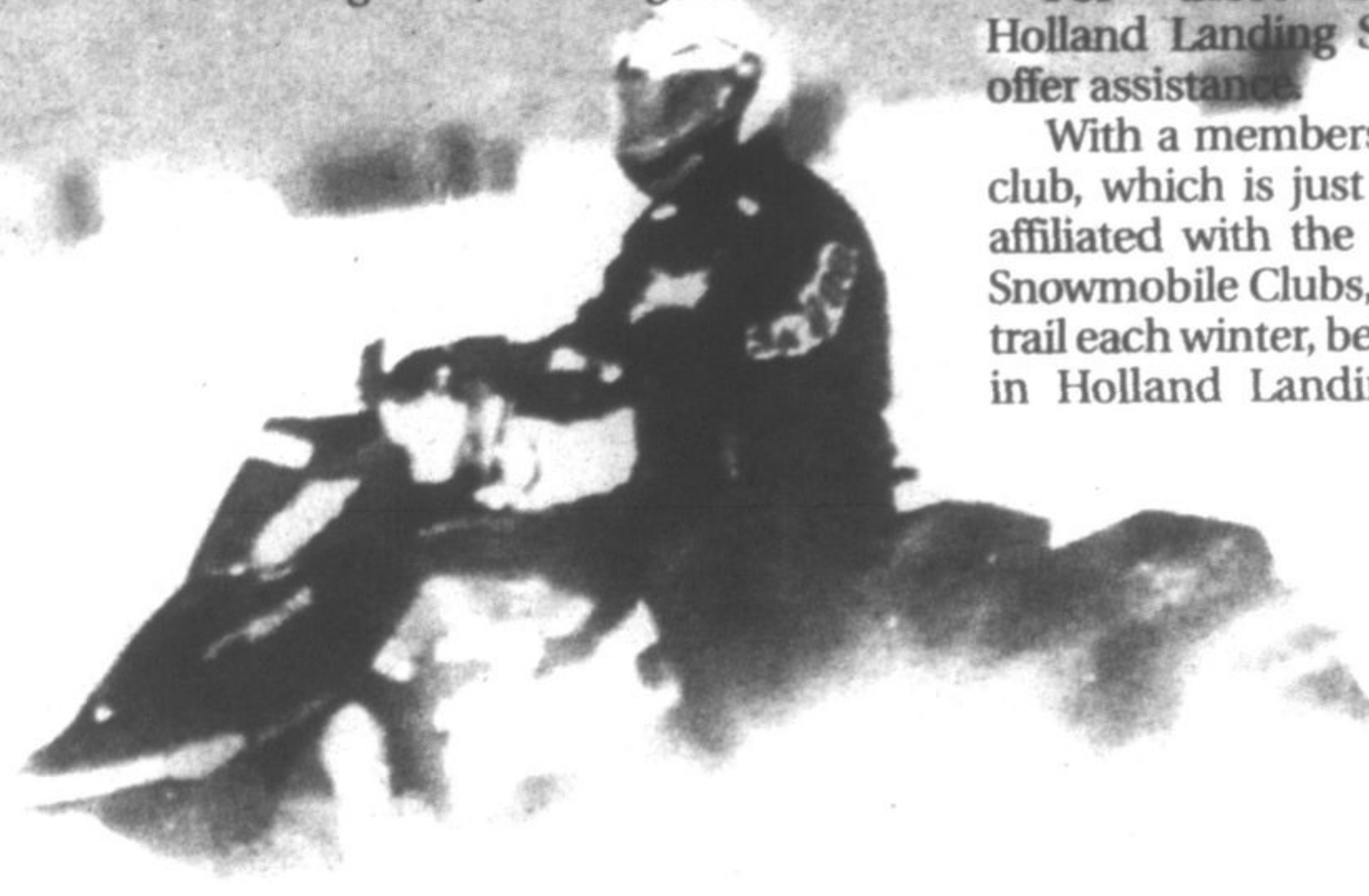
The federation offers two courses.

Training is a six-hour classroom style course for offered across the province.

The federation offers adults an interactive version called The Right Way. Snowmobilers with a valid driver's licence can order this course on DVD or CD. After taking this course and passing an online test, riders receive a certificate confirming course completion.

To help more snowmobilers get the proper training, the federation also offers a DVD/brochure package called Smart Choices. This package is geared toward teenagers, while its Think Like a Pro booklet provides advanced riding tips and techniques for experienced snowmobilers.

For more information on snowmobiling, log on to the federation's website [www.ofsc.on.ca/safety](http://www.ofsc.on.ca/safety), or the Holland Landing Snowmobile Club's site [www.hlsc.on.ca](http://www.hlsc.on.ca)



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