



*'They're like cross-country skis. They make me the fastest thing you've ever seen.'*

Don Ego, 70, on his \$1,000 kangaroo-leather clap skates

# Old skaters feel need for speed

## Seniors from 60 to 95 gather at rink Olympics inspire about 20 devotees

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About the same time Cindy Klassen was winning a speed skating gold medal in Turin, another Canadian skater, Don Ego, zoomed past slower traffic on a Scarborough ice rink, his mind on a world record.

Several world-class skaters showed up yesterday, but Ego, with his low crouch, racing tights and \$1,000 clap skates, aimed to prove no one could keep up with him. Not 86-year-old Ernie Webster. Not 69-year-old Connie Hippman. Not even youngster Art Plasschaert, 63.

They were among about 20 senior citizen speed skaters from southern Ontario who gathered at the Scarborough Centennial Recreation Centre to celebrate the Olympics — and skate a few laps. The youngest was 60 and the oldest, Lemonville resident Blanche Cook, was 95.

Ironically, Plasschaert says, the summit was inspired by a lack of speed skating facilities.

Plasschaert comes from the Netherlands, which has 22 speed skating ovals, and now lives in Ontario, which has none.

"But you've got to skate, so you go to the hockey arena," says Plasschaert, of Brighton, Ont.

On one of those trips to Scarborough last month he met 89-year-old skater Ken Allen, who started speed skating at 70, three years after a skiing accident nearly crippled him.

"We have so many older skaters, but we never seem to get together," Plasschaert said.

Each is connected to the same loose network of elderly skaters, so when they put out the invitation to a mid-Olympics skating party, the skaters responded.

Betty Acton, 81, and her husband, Gerry, came down from Stouffville to skate. She learned to skate at 9 and started competing during World War II.

"I used to compete at local carnivals," she said. "Quite often I won, but not always. I might get two dollars."

She started skating again when her sons Keith — now an assistant coach with the Maple Leafs — and Kevin took up the sport. With 14 gold and six silver medals from senior Olympic and world championship meets, Acton's collection rival's Klassen's, although arthritis forced her off the ice two years ago.

Ego treated the gathering as a training session. While others cruised and chatted, Ego, 70, blasted around the rink.

During a break he showed off his kangaroo-leather skates, pointing out the clap mechanism, which allows the blade to maintain contact with the ice.

"They're like cross-country skis," he said. "They make me the fastest thing you've ever seen."

On a full-sized oval he covers 500 metres in 50 seconds flat. If he can maintain that pace until next winter he figures he'll set an age group world record at next year's world championships in Calgary.

"It's a different breed, speed skaters," Hippman said, pointing to her friends out on the rink. "They love skating and they keep going. I don't see hockey players in here. They know the rink is here but they don't come. They must be at home, looking at TV."

Then she steps toward the ice. "Excuse me," she said. "I have to go skate."