

SPORTS &

Speed skating club right on track

By RON WALLACE

As far as Bill Allen is concerned, it's the best kept secret in town.

Newmarket has a speed skating club, and precious few people seem to know it. It has had such a club since the fall of 1996.

Known officially as the Newmarket Jets Speed Skating Club, the group has about 20 members, half a dozen of them female.

They meet and practise every Wednesday night at the Ray Twinney Recreation Complex.

Bill and his 13-year-old son Liam were at the complex during a recent practise. Both are sold on the sport.

It's "life on the edge," Bill says, noting speed skaters depend on the edge of their blades to gain maximum performance.

Skaters have a choice of two blade lengths, the

short-track and the long-track, with the latter measuring about 14 inches. A pair of speed skates can cost anywhere from \$200 to \$1,000 a pair.

But, don't panic. If you'd like to try the sport before investing any serious money, the club will loan you a pair of skates.

Among the differences you'll notice between speed and hockey skates are a thinner, obviously longer, blade, and a shorter boot.

"A speed skater needs strong ankles," Allen said, since there is no ankle support from the boot.

And, the edge of the blade needs to be razor sharp, allowing for those corners where it appears the skater is so low to the ice he could lose the edge and crash into the boards.

"It happens," Allen said.

Hockey players can profit from speed skating, he noted. "The techniques are a bit different, but it can't help but benefit them."

The Newmarket club is coached by Den Kozak, a past member of the Ontario Speed Skating Team; Ian Henniger, who is executive director of the Ontario Speed Skating Association; and David Didiaodato, a current provincial level skater.

Club members participate in various meets around the province, and can also use the skate time booked by the Markham Speed Skating Club (Newmarket's sister club) on Friday nights in Markham.

Newmarket's club welcomes skaters from beginners to experts, ages five to 75.

Interested in trying it? Call Bill Allen at 853-4495.



LENGTHY SUBJECT: Bill Allen and his 13-year-old son Liam inspect the lengthy blade of a speed skate during a weekly practise session of the Newmarket Jets Speed Skating Club. The blade is thinner, sharper and longer than that found on a hockey skate.