



POP CULTURE

ZAMBONI'S SMOOTH MOVE

From California, hypnotic ice resurfer still a cool star.

BY MARY-LIZ SHAW

An inveterate tinkerer, Frank Zamboni set himself the task of finding a better way to clear the ice at his family-run rink in sunny Southern California.

Frank and his brother Lawrence opened Iceland skating rink in 1940 in Paramount, south of Los Angeles, and it was a hit. But skaters' enthusiasm waned when they had to wait for the ice resurfacing—an arduous process that involved pulling a scraper behind a tractor, scooping up the scrapings, squeegeeing the dirty water, then spraying

the cleared surface with more water.

Zamboni tinkered for seven years until he produced Model A in 1949, out of Army surplus, including jeep parts. With its exposed workings, Model A resembled a Rube Goldberg contraption, but it reduced ice resurfacing from over an hour to several minutes.

Today's machines are boxy-sleek and as much a crowd-pleaser at hockey games as the main event. As Charles Schulz's alter ego Charlie Brown said: "There are three things in life that people like to stare at—a flowing stream, a crackling fire and a Zamboni clearing the ice."

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MODEL A was only used at Paramount Iceland skating rink, which is still operating. The restored Model A is now on display there.

GLIDE ACROSS YEARS OF ICE MADE NICE

1950

Norwegian skating sensation Sonja Henie is at the Paramount rink when she sees the Model A doing its thing and has to have one—two, actually. Frank Zamboni builds the first on a tight turnaround to have it ready for her skating show in Chicago. The iceman puts the parts in a U-Haul, hitches it to the jeep that will be the base, and drives it to Illinois to assemble it. Henie's Model Bs are two of only four made. Zamboni founds his company that same year.

HOLLYWOOD STAR Sonja Henie, left, was among the first to buy the machine invented by Frank Zamboni, top right.



1953

The U.S. Patent Office grants Frank Zamboni's application for an Ice Rink Resurfacing Machine. Zamboni, ever the inventor, keeps modifying his creation and is already on Model D when his patent comes through. By the end of 1954, the company has produced a total of 17 resurfacers.

1954

The Boston Bruins are the first NHL team to use a Zamboni resurfer. The Boston Garden's Model E21 becomes a star in its own right and now lives in the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, Ontario.

1960

Zamboni provides six machines for the Winter Olympics in Squaw Valley, California. Two of the machines are electric-powered.

1967

To meet demand in a hockey-crazed country, Zamboni opens a Canadian branch about an hour west of Toronto, in Brantford, Ontario. The same year, in the same city, 6-year-old Wayne Gretzky is already playing hockey with much older boys—and scoring his way to future fame.

1970

Adapting principles used to create his ice resurfacers, Zamboni devises a water-clearing machine for AstroTurf-covered stadiums. The machine sucks up about 400 gallons a minute.

1980

Charles Schulz first mentions Zamboni machines in his *Peanuts* comic strip. In December of that year, he shows Snoopy driving one. Schulz was an avid hockey fan and player, and owned two Zamboni resurfacers for his home rink in Minnesota.

1990

The Zamboni Co. introduces Model 552, which will become its most popular electric-powered ice resurfer.

2006

Two parks department employees of Ice World in Boise, Idaho, take two Zamboni machines, valued at \$75,000 each, on a midnight joy ride to the Burger King drive-thru. Parks manager Jim Hall tells the *Boise Guardian* the stunt is "one of the five stupidest things I have seen in 35 years of parks work." Hall fires the men and muses about having them charged with operating unlicensed vehicles on a public street. Given that the machines don't go over 10 mph, "there is little chance of a speeding conviction," the *Guardian* editors conclude. ●