

Höst-Öst

By Bernt O Myrvold, Norway

Readers in Central-, South- or Eastern Europe might have encountered the band of weary, sleep deprived runners, who jump out of a bus, put on some rather rancid o-cloths, and then disappear into the bushes. After a short thank you to the local organiser they disappear again, only leaving a wisp of diesel fume, and some empty beer bottles. Höst-Öst has hit town, or more likely the local forest. Here is the explanation for what this is all about.

It starts early in the year. People are whispering “are you going?” No need to ask where, for the initiated there is only one trip. Höst-Öst. Literally meaning Autumn - East. The first trip was organised by PeO Bengtsson 35 years ago, and the idea was to give young Scandinavian orienteers the chance of trying different orienteering terrain. The basic idea is still there, and over the last few years runners like Emil Wingstedt, Emma Engstrand, Mats Troeng and Erik Andersson has used Höst-Öst as part of the preparations for coming championships.

Jörgen Mårtensson once declared that orienteers have to learn to cope with the unexpected - and that Höst-Öst is the perfect way of learning this. This really is a moving circus. There are long haul in bus with it's unexpected problems. In the author's memory there has been, faulty wind screen swipers, doors that would not lock, leaky tires, and running out of diesel, and the reoccurring bridges and tunnels that are too low for the bus. In addition there are the border controls which might take anything from 15 minutes to 8 hours. This has given rise to one of the fiercest competitions. The border-pivo cup. The aim is to guess the time from the first stop at the border to the final go.

But to label Höst-Öst as a preparation for championships does of course not explain why runners well into their seventies or eighties take part year after year. The orienteering is of course one important part of it. Many tough and interesting terrains, but also some flat uninteresting green bushes. Some really excellent maps, while others have seen their best days



PeO Bengtsson checks into one of the many hotels he has visited over the last 40 years.



Six o'clock in the morning, and still no hotel in sight.



Party time. Proper opening of a champagne bottle is demonstrated.

several years ago, and still some maps probably never had a best day.

The best thing about Hst-st is the comraderie that develops. The maps are discussed with runners of all ages and abilities. People are literally shaken together in the bus. There are the same parties to go to, there are joint meals. And of course there is the competition. A fierce competition in the Pivo cup (named after PeO Bengtsson, which by a strange coincidence has a name that sounds nearly like beer in most countries in Eastern-Europe. Points are awarded in each event. Last minutes change in courses take place depending on where people believe there are most points to be gathered.

The Hst-st spirit is still probably the main reason for runners returning year after year. In 1986 a group of experienced travellers formed the Hst-st legendaries. To become a member it is necessary with at least three tours and five weeks at Hst-st, and pass the gruelling test by the present members. The group (to call it an organisation would be to exaggerate the formality of the club) have grown to 129 members. Last year the Hst-st legendaries also decided that they should support the orienteering

development in one of the countries they pass through. This is a way of showing gratitude for all the hard work that organisers have done over the years, and also, hopefully, a way of furthering the development of orienteering. For this year the choice was relatively simple. The recipient of the first legendaries stipendium was Macedonian orienteering, which now will be able to send runners to the O-ringen clinics in 2003.



Post-mortem in a Venice street cafe.



Peo Bengtsson organiser during 35 years enjoying himself with some local orienteers in Novy Sad.



Venice street OL initiated by Hst-st. During the '94 event there were high tides.



The bus driver has taken his double-decker bus up the 'road' to the right and enjoys a well deserved rest, while Bente Konst prepares for a race in Bulgaria.