

Above and beyond

Watch out for helicopters and firework fallout zones, and make sure you don't scare the zoo animals - just another day in the life of the ops crew for the Telegraph Ski & Snowboard Show

Since it's the December issue and *EN* was in a rather festive mood, our attention was naturally drawn to the Telegraph Ski & Snowboard Show, with its snowy slopes, alpine lodges and hearty street food. But how exactly does one go about building an alpine festival, complete with real snow, ice rink and 30,000 visitors in a London park? To find out more, we took a trip to the Telegraph Events offices to sit down with Matt Wozniak, operations director, and Laura Cole, director of LC Events, to hear about the triumphs and trials of putting on the organiser's biggest outdoor event.

"I took over the show in 2007 when it was at Olympia London," says Wozniak. "Then it went from Olympia to Earl's Court and now to Battersea Evolution. The benefit of Battersea was that it gave us a conventional indoor space at the Evolution site with [venue owner] Smart Group, and it gave us an external space to look at bringing this winter wonderland into the heart of London."

The show, now in year two of a three-year tenancy at Battersea Evolution, attracts a range of top skiers and snowboarders from the UK and beyond.

"The calibre of riders has been great," continues Wozniak. "Putting the event back on the map at Battersea two years ago really opened up the eyes of the snow sports market. They realised it wasn't just the standard trade show; it was a really fun thing to attend."

"There aren't many events that you can go to on a Friday evening and watch professional snowboarder and skiers," adds Cole. "The content of the show is great, along with the exhibition side."

While visitors might only see the polished finished product, there are a plethora of factors coming into play behind the scenes in the lead up to the show's opening.

And Wozniak is the first to admit that his extensive experience in operations couldn't prepare him for some of the more unusual challenges the event posed.

"The thing that was hardest for me to get my head round was not having a conventional event management team there to help and protect and assist you," he tells *EN*. "You're exposed to so many more disciplines in the outside events world.

"You've got your Safety Advice Groups, parks police and the council. We've learned so much that we now carry through to our everyday work.

"It doesn't matter what parks police

person is on, they'll come in and say hello, because we're all part of a team. They know the park inside out. They know how to move people around and they know how the local transport network works."

"A challenge in the first year was that our dateline clashed with bonfire night in Battersea Park so we had to clear the site in less than an hour," recalls Cole. "The site had to be completely clear of everyone, including contractors."

"We were part of the fallout zone from the fireworks," laughs Wozniak. "You're part of a bigger event that you're not really privy to; they have 70,000 people in the park. It's important to understand that you're not the biggest player in that room."

Working on the show has other quirks, such as having to add a beacon to the ski slope to make it visible to low-flying aircraft. With the London Heliport nearby, it's a vital precaution and, as Wozniak says, "something you don't think about in a venue with a roof."

"Another restriction we have to bear in mind is that there's a zoo next door to the venue," adds Cole. "If restrictions are put in place for us it's because it would affect the animals."

"We have to keep it in mind for sound checks," agrees Wozniak. "We have to call the zoo to let them know that we're about to start a sound check, because they might need to move some of the animals."

Another major factor in putting the show together, perhaps unsurprisingly, is acquiring the tonnes and tonnes of snow needed over the four days. The show teams up with Milton Keynes Snozone, and takes large deliveries of snow every evening, which dedicated teams work through the night to prepare for the daytime event.

"By 10am, about an hour before the show opens, everyone can just see our perfectly manicured slope," describes Wozniak.

As with every event in the exhibition industry, the days of the show are just a tiny snapshot of a complex and lengthy process, with hundreds of people coming together to create a magical experience for visitors. What is clear from talking to Wozniak and Cole is that, despite the various trials and tribulations, they wouldn't change it for the world. **EN**

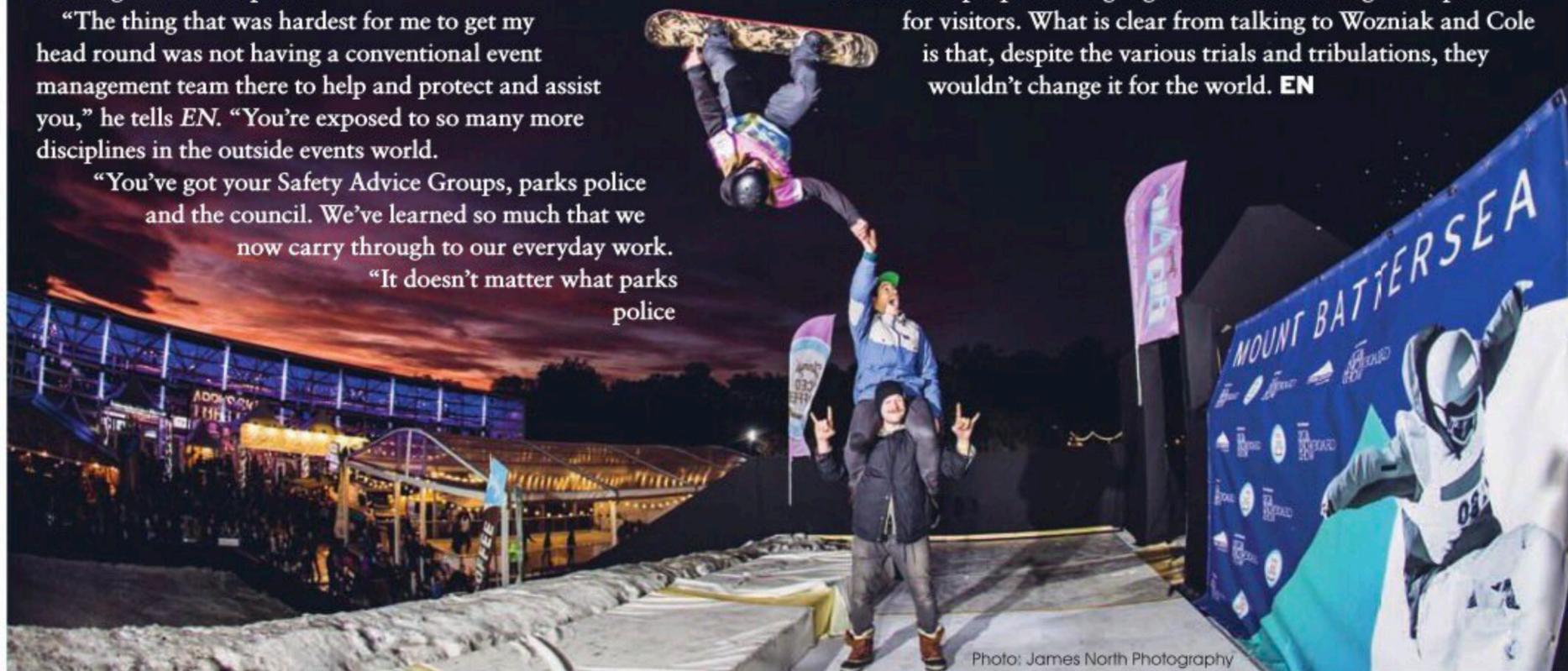


Photo: James North Photography