CASPIAN—Snowmobiles, speed, daring and skill dominate the weekend of Feb. 16-17 at the Caspian Ski Hill.

The second annual Mid America Championship Hillclimb (MACH) will take place on Saturday, Feb. 16, topped by a new Sunday event, the MASTERS Iron Range Trail Club uphill snowmobile drag races. __PUBLIC__

Saturday revs into action at 9 a.m. with the start of the Mid America Snow and Terrain Expert Racers (MASTERS) Racing Circuit hillclimb.

“This year’s Caspian Hill will be even more difficult to ‘tame’ then the one that few drivers made over the top last year,” said Skip Schulz, MASTERS circuit founder and president. “This past summer, the city of Caspian added another 50 feet to the top of the hill. It is at the top of the former Caspian ski jump hill that the drivers have to go through the timing shoot.”

That is, if they can get that far up the hill.

On the way to the top, the drivers have to go around a series of gates. The MASTERS circuit sets up different courses for each driver’s two runs.

MASTERS runs two professional hillclimb divis-ions, for stock and modified snowmobiles. While most hillclimb spectators may think higher horsepower machines have the advantage at a hillclimb, this has not been the case over the past 19 years.

“With more horsepower comes more weight,” said Schulz, “and with the way our hillclimb courses are set up, we have seen where the smaller horsepower sleds actually are competing on a level playing field.

“As the drivers are getting around the gates, they are trying to keep the sled upright as they are making turns on the steepest part of the hill.

“This is what is so exciting for the fans and, well, not so exciting for the drivers,” explained Schulz. “The vast majority of the sleds will not make it over the top and, well, you can imagine what happens to those that don’t.”

The winner of each pro stock class qualifies for the Station Pro Stock King of the Hill and $500 in cash, in addition to the money the driver wins for taking first place.

One of the most popular classes at the MACH is the 120 cc class. This is where children ages 4-9 compete on small children’s snowmobiles. Every child who competes in the 120 cc class is given a champion trophy.

For the first time this year, the MASTERS will have two classes for children ages 12-17. These youngsters will be competing on stock sleds.

Competition will conclude with the Pro Stock and Pro Mod King of the Hill “Shoot-out.” An awards ceremony and a chance for fans to meet the drivers will take place on Saturday night at The Station in Iron River.

Additional VIP parking will be available this year at the bottom of the hill. Fans can watch from their vehicles. They will be able to tune into an FM frequency to hear the PA system. VIP parking, at $25 per vehicle, is on a first-come basis, with the gates opening at 7:30 a.m. Admission is $10 ($5 for children 12 to 16). The Caspian Fire Department Auxiliary will have concessions on the grounds.

Sunday: In place of the Winterfest sleds, saucers and cardboard boxes from Saturday, the former Caspian ski hill will come to life for the MASTERS Iron Range Trail Club Uphill snowmobile drag races. This is the first time the former ski hill will host a professionally sanctioned snowmobile race.

It is appropriate that Caspian host a MASTERS uphill drag race, since some of the top snowmobile drag racing teams come from the Iron River area. This includes the Louie Goldbach/General Concrete and Construction team. Goldbach's team has dominated in many of the MASTERS racing circuit classes over the last three years.

"Over the past 20 years, our circuit has seen where certain communities become the hotbed of racers. Years ago, these racers came from Houghton, then from Greenland. However, the past few years, the top snowmobile drag team has been from the Iron River area," said Schulz.

In addition to the Goldbach team, last year's Top Gun champion was Jeff Szanto of Crystal Falls.

MASTERS officials expect some of the professional snowmobile hillclimb teams from Saturday's MACH will stay around to compete in Sunday's uphill drags. Those drivers will be looking to see how they compete with the drag race teams.

Drivers from Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota will be competing.

"When one looks at the teams, crews and family members that race at a MASTERS Racing Circuit event, it is amazing to see the dollars these teams bring into the area," said Schulz.

The MASTERS was able to make the uphill drags a reality with the support of the city of Caspian, Iron Range Trail Club and many local business sponsors.

Competition will start at 10 a.m. Admission is free. The awards ceremony will be that night at The Station.

Caspian is the place for fast tracked snowmobile action on Feb. 16-17 with the Mid America Championship Hillclimb on Saturday and the MASTERS Iron Range Trail Club uphill snowmobile drag races on Sunday.