Alex Tilley – Season 2009

This year, my season was a test of perseverance. Only finishing two races was a little hard to swallow, but support from coaches and family kept me going to help me prove myself at the end of the season.

Starting my season u=in the gym with personal trainer Scott Brady was vital for me to take the step up into FIS. During the season I travelled to France, Switzerland, USA, Canada, Italy and even Poland mainly with the Scottish Ski Team. Training was encouraging and left me excited for the season. However, my first FIS races started off with six DNF's (Did not Finish) in a row, frustrating for me and coaches. The next race I skied very disappointingly in my eyes to score 11o FIS points in a Giant Slalom in MT Orford, Canada. This story would continue for most of the season. Completing my first slalom run of the season in Italy was a great confidence booster, I managed to ski into 2nd position after the first run. Starting from bib number 59 this was a great achievement for me, not to be matched by a crash in the second run halfway down the course.

I was honoured to have been selected to represent the GB at the European Youth Olympics in Szczyrk, Poland. I finished fastest during the qualification rounds at the Manchester Snowdome and was selected alongside 3 other Junior 1 girls, aged 15 and 16, to represent GB in the alpine disciplines. It was an amazing experience to compete alongside Europe's best in my age group, although not finishing any race without some serious mistakes was hugely frustrating. I'll look forward to giving a better account of myself when I meet these girls on the FSI circuit.

Training at the British Ski Academy in France with ex GB Team members Lynn Sharp and Luke Hadley allowed me to realise just how much I had improved since the start of the season. However, a bad crash in the first run of a GS race in Megeve left me on crutches for just over a week. I was very close to breaking a leg, but fortunately the gate hit my boot to leave my shin badly bruised – an inch higher and that would have been the end of my season. More than anything the injury hit me hard emotionally. It was so close to the British Championships where I was determined to salvage something from a disappointing season in terms of results. Repeatedly being told to rest isn't as easy as I thought and it came as a huge relief being able to get back onto skis after only two weeks. My confidence was a low entering the British Championships as I had doubts over my injury and was having to take it slow to begin with. Throughout the championship my frustration grew as I continually failed to finish Races until the last day in Meribel. Winning the Junior Giant Slalom was the only race where I put down 2 solid runs and allowed me to look back at the season with a measure of success – I knew it had been coming I just wasn't sure it was going to happen. It was my first

time on top of the podium at the National Champs and finished a massive 6 seconds in front of my nearest Junior 1 rival. It was definitely worth waiting for after years of always coming second or third. Above all, the results scored me 73 FIS points, it may have been the only good result of the season, but I would do it all again just for that. The sweet taste of victory didn't last long however, as the Scottish Championships in Courchevel consisted of four more DNFs.

Although my season was difficult, I still see it as a positive experience. I set myself a target at the start of the season to score a sub 90, meeting this goal has left me enthusiastic for the 2010 season.

During the summer months or close season I trained and race in Australia. The southern hemisphere's winter. It turned out that Australia was well worth the journey. Everything I had been struggling for during the season clicked into place with huge improvements in my line through Slalom and GS courses – finally I was starting to finish. More importantly I completed my first Slalom at Junior level with 2 great runs. I finished 3rd overall in the Australian National Champs and won the Junior 1 title. Better still it scored me an amazing 49 points which is a qualification criterion for skiing at Europa level – one level above FIS and one below World Cup/Olympic standard. For my age group it placed me far ahead of my closest rivals and overall 10th position in the GB for Slalom. This was a massive confidence booster in an inconsistent season that had posed major question marks about self belied. All questions were resoundingly answered in Oz and I can't wait until 2010 season gets underway so I get the opportunity to prove to a lot of people that I can deliver on the big stages and realise my potential in a sport that really has become my life.