

LAST RUN

Talk about passion. Seventy-six-year-old **ELMER MULKINS**, a retired airline pilot, is invariably first in line on opening day at Colorado's Loveland Ski Area, typically among the first U.S. ski resorts to open each season. Mulkins has gone to great lengths to guarantee he rides the first chair—in recent years, he's even camped out at the resort to secure the coveted position. And his effort has paid off: Mulkins has only missed first chair a half dozen times in the past 30 years.

Born December 31, 1922 (age 76)

Flying High "I learned to fly in my 20s during World War II in the Army Air Corps. But I learned to ski when I was 39 at tiny Buffalo Park Ski Area in Illinois. It had a 210-foot vertical drop. I discovered that skiing and flying are similar—both have the sensations of speed and freedom."

Loveland Air Force "When I was working, I skied about 40 to 50 days a year. Since retiring in 1982, I ski about 110 days a year. Loveland is the only place I ski. It's close by, and everyone there is so friendly."

First Chair "I love to ski so much that I always want to be first in line for the season. It used to be that you could be first in line by being there at 6 am, but every year it has gotten earlier and earlier. A few years ago I got up there at midnight and there were people in front of me. The next year I started pitching a tent and spending the night."

Diehard Drill "In October, I start calling Loveland as soon as I think it's cold enough to make snow. Then someone from Loveland calls me and tells me when they're going to open. They know I want to be there."

Loveland Has His Number "I already have my season pass for this year. On my final day of skiing last year—May 7—the woman in the ticket office asked me if I wanted to buy next year's pass. I said sure. Now I have pass No. 1." —Reade Bailey

