



Star Tribune photos by Duane Braley

After one round of drinks, State Patrol trooper M.J. Hanson measures the blood-alcohol level of Chris Ueland, a snowmobile driver for Arctic Cat, during a series of test drives on drunken sledding.



Much of the course was reduced to slush and mud by warm weather, and drivers found themselves nearly falling off machines after several rounds of drinking.

Demonstrations of a dangerous combination

Test drivers from Arctic Cat and a couple of amateur snowmobilers demonstrated Monday just how much a driver's skills deteriorate after they drink different amounts of alcohol.

They repeatedly drove a 1.4-mile course at the Minnesota Highway Safety Center in St. Cloud, Minn., after consuming rounds of drinks provided by the state and taking breath tests. With blood-alcohol readings of roughly 0.05 percent, the four snowmobilers drove OK. With readings of 0.10 percent, the legal limit for driving, they missed or rolled through stop signs, teetered on one ski or strayed from the trail. At 0.15 or greater, they got lost or nearly fell off the sleds.

Veteran test driver Chris Ueland, 32, of Thief River Falls, Minn., tipped his snowmobile over on a straight-away after he blew .17 on the breath test. He righted the sled and climbed back on, but killed the engine a minute later. "It was bad, bad," he said as he shuffled back to a warming house.

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Arctic Cat will film a future demonstration in snowier conditions for a snowmobile safety course.

— Pat Doyle