

# the COST of WINTER

by MARIE-THERESE RIBEYRON

**Y**OU pay for winter in Canada—dearly. All the more reason to like it.

All the more because it is as unavoidable as it is punctual. Since Jacques-Cartier (1534), we give the impression of being regularly taken by surprise. But winter hasn't missed one appointment in 439 years!

Fortunately we've got used to it. Facing winter is no longer, as it was in those days, a question of technology, but a question of expense. Snug and cosy in the micro-climate of our homes automatically maintained at 72° Fahrenheit, we wake up in the morning in a warm room. No more, the teeth-chattering rush to replenish the logs in the furnace. And it's no longer the smoke curling skywards that tells us what the temperature is, but the cheerful radio voice ushering in the day.

If we venture out, we are protected by synthetic fibres as light as they are warm. We travel comfortably in heated cars on roads cleared by the snowplough. We can even feast on strawberries in mid-January—at four times the regular price.

The preparations of the fall, the rites of winter—putting up the double windows, adding antifreeze to the car radiator, fitting snow tires, covering the shrubs with sacking, getting the furnace oil tank filled—they're part of our folklore.

But our defences against winter cost plenty. Here's the bill of an average Canadian father of three: \$500 for warm clothes, \$100 for snow tires, \$100 for protective undercoating, \$100 for the car accessories, not counting bent windshield wipers etc. And \$275 for heating the house, not

counting the \$6,000 that must be added to the building cost for protection against cold, snow etc.: strengthening of the roof, double windows, insulation and furnace. According to one architect, Pierre Campeau, this supplementary outlay of \$6,000 is roughly constant, whatever the price of the house. That means a quarter of the total cost of a typical \$24,000 bungalow. And winter, as Campeau points out, accelerates the depreciation of our homes and adds to maintenance costs. One need only add that investment in outdoor living space, terraces, balconies and gardens pays dividends only four months in the year.

Having spent so much just to avoid suffering there is all the more reason to try and enjoy the season. In many parts, people converge on the snows, whether horizontal or sloping. There are half-a-million skidoo fans in Quebec alone, even more skiers and tens of thousands of snowshoe trekkers.

All these pastimes have to be paid for: \$75 for the youngster's hockey gear, \$40 for the two girls' skates, \$1,000 for the snowmobile, \$150 for skidoo suits. Resort skiing costs nearly as much as snowmobiling. The wise prefer to pay less for their pleasures and opt for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. Even then, our average family spends a good \$1,300 on winter fun.

That's when they've already forked out on bicycles, a trailer, a tent, an outboard motor, a boat, fishing tackle. . . . Since we live in two countries, not one, we could use two incomes. Maybe that explains the working wife: one income for summer, one for winter.

**T**HE spending doesn't stop there. Equipment and social services are more expensive in the snow belt. Montreal city alone burns 4 million gallons of furnace oil a year to heat its buildings. I will spare you the figure for all the public buildings in Canada, provincial, federal and municipal. One could almost lay the "energy crisis" at the door of winter if the Arctic Institute had not established that the consumption of power by airconditioners in the South about equals the fuel costs of keeping warm in the North.

Then. . . taxes! The Quebec Highways Department, for example, keeps 15,000 miles of roads clear at a cost of \$20 million. It takes \$40 million worth of heavy equipment plus 620,000 tons of defrosting salt, which incidentally destroys the half-a-million gallons of paint they used to mark the traffic lanes the summer before! And the roads thus cleared are more susceptible to frost damage than others. Not to mention the wear caused by tire chains and corrosion by the salt.

So down with winter, eh? Not necessarily. The Arctic Institute's report of 1969 concluded that we have the technology required to reduce the cost of winter. It is our habits and our way of life which cost the money. For instance, snowstorms only interrupt man's routine because we have placed a geographical divide between work and sleep: dormitory towns this side, industrial and commercial zones that side. This topographical division of life doesn't go with winter. We borrowed it from the great Californian cities, the car and bungalow civilisation. But are we going to change it now? Probably not.