

Blackwell skis into World Champs

MOUNT Beauty is a town synonymous with cross-country skiing.

The small town is intertwined with the mountains and specifically Falls Creek – the home of the Australian Cross-Country Team and the southern hemisphere's largest ski race, the annual Kangaroo Hoppet ski marathon.

It's no surprise then the town constantly throws up young athletes coming through who are pretty handy on skis.

Nick Blackwell, 20, is a young



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local who will head to Europe this summer as part of the Australian under-23 Cross Country Ski Team, racing in a number of FIS events then culminating in the World Junior U23 Championships in Germany at the end of February 2020.

Blackwell, a member of the local Birkebeiner Nordic Ski Club, won the Aussie 'Birkie' 21km race last year.

This year, in his first attempt at the longer marathon-length Kangaroo Hoppet he placed ninth – the fourth best Australian behind more mature athletes Callum Watson, Mark Pollock and Phil Bellingham.

Now, balancing training with work and full-time study (Blackwell is studying mechanical engineering

at Swinburne in Melbourne), he's still chalking up about 20 hours a week of training, although that's slowly tapering off.

To get a sense of the volume skiers train, Blackwell is aiming to train 800 hours in 2019. That's the equivalent of 20 full-time 40-hour work weeks.

With the snow gone, that means hours on roller skis, running, and at the gym.

Competing successfully in cross-country skiing isn't just about how

high your aerobic capacity is, it's also about how much pain you can endure while continuing to push.

Blackwell said he does pretty well on both fronts, and is why he leans towards the longer distance races as his specialty.

Back from a weekend of testing at Canberra's Australian institute of Sport last weekend, he'll press on with training until departing for Davos, Switzerland in early December for three months abroad, returning in March 2020.