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Karim (left) strongly resembles his late father, Aly Khan.

Prince Karim (Continued)

Life at his Swiss chalet, the Chateau de l'Horizon, has its complications because of the French newspapermen who skulk outside the house or hover offshore in boats, with telephoto cameras. Karim is careful that girl friends who stay with him are always chaperoned.

Guests at the Chateau de l'Horizon usually meet for a late breakfast and then, while Karim works, swim in the pool or the Mediterranean. In the afternoon Karim joins them for water-skiing or for a drive through the gorgeous Riviera countryside. In the evenings they are likely to set out for some intimate and noisy night club in Saint Tropez, or to some colorful restaurant.

Karim must be the most athletic religious leader in the world. Last January, Karim had a trial run with British skiers aspiring to places on the Olympic team. On the giant slalom, he zipped in and out of 47 tricky "gates" (as the spaces between the poles are called), making the trip in 126.5 seconds, and coming in third. But he was due for a disappointment. He was not named to the team but invited to join the No. 2 squad. Disappointed, he refused.

KARIM DID not expect to become the Aga Khan IV. He, like the rest of the world, thought that Aly Khan, his father, would assume that mantle. But one of the most impressive aspects of Karim's personality is his great sense of responsibility in all things. When the old Aga Khan bequeathed the leadership to him and made him the 49th Imam of the Ismailis, even though he was only 19, he accepted the position without question. "I shall begin my duties at once," he said to the Ismaili chiefs who were waiting for him when he left his grandfather's house.

Karim had always idolized his father, and his death last summer was a tremendous blow. But without questioning he took over his father's interests. He sought out the distracted Bettina, the French model who had been Aly's constant companion over the years, and told her he would continue to look after her.

On only one issue has he veered from the wishes of the old Aga Khan. In his testament, the Aga Khan stated that Karim should turn to his widow, the Begum, for advice on financial matters, a condition which would have made the Begum head of the family, controlling an incalculable fortune left by the Aga Khan, estimated at 2 billion dollars.

But Karim knew that the Ismailis resented the Begum. To them she was still the little bourgeois French girl, Yvette Labrousse, brought up a Catholic, a milliner from Lyons, who once paraded publicly in a swim suit to become Miss France of 1930.

Backed by his elders, Karim gradually edged the Begum out of his affairs. Today, she lives alone in the Villa Yaky-mour, the sumptuous Riviera home left her by the Aga Khan. Although it is only a few miles from the Chateau de l'Horizon, the Begum and Karim rarely meet, and are on the coldest of speaking terms. The Begum appears seldom in public and is a very unhappy woman.

For Karim, on the other hand, the future looks reasonably optimistic. He has to solve many problems, the problem of his marriage, the problem of his place in the world. But he takes his time and has an Oriental patience. "It is a long and lonely task for such a young man," his mother, the former Joan Yarde-Buller, said when he became the Aga Khan, "but he has the courage to do it."

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