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WINTER 2021

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MASTERFIT BUYER'S GUIDE 2021

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A Ski Season Like None Before

It's hard to be sure of anything these days, especially the Winter 2021 ski season.

The world, and especially the United States, will most likely still be dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic when the first snows start dusting the high peaks. And the international ski trips on your bucket lists will have to be postponed for at least another winter.

All this doesn't mean we can't still enjoy the sport we all love. The inherent nature of skiing makes it possible to enjoy our sport with recommended social distancing precautions. Heck, skiers have been wearing face and eye coverings for a century.

Sure we will have to adjust to new lift-riding protocols and outdoor dining with grab-and-go fare. This winter will be more like the old days when skiers would often return to their vehicles and dine alfresco with a home-prepared picnic.

One thing is for certain: owning your own gear is more important than ever this season. Renting will surely be more cumbersome and time-consuming than before. There's industry talk of ski and pole fulfillment moving outdoors where possible, but boot fitting will most likely still be an indoor affair—with lots of people jockeying to be served. And seriously, who would ever want to ski in a rental boot?

Many on the Buyer's Guide staff have enjoyed demoing freshly tuned high-performance skis on destination trips recently, but we'll be schlepping our own boards this year.

While most resorts and shops will be taking yeoman disinfection precautions, is this really the year you want to be using gear—boots, helmets, poles, goggles, gloves—that are being passed among hundreds of different people? The more touch points and public contact you can eliminate, the better.

BOOTFITTING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 GUIDELINES:

To help safeguard shop personnel and create a comfortable environment for customers, at this time **Masterfit** recommends the following bootfitting practices be adopted by snowsports shops:

- Schedule bootfitting appointments and discourage drop-ins. Promote appointment bootfitting on the shop website, through direct mail and email. Let customers know that drop-ins can expect longer wait times than normal.
- A “gatekeeper/greeter” should verify all appointments and should be present to control and limit access to the bootfit area.
- To minimize person to person contact, only customers being fit for boots shall be allowed in the bootfit area, unless parental assistance is required.
- If possible, bootfitting stations should be separated by a plastic curtain or plexiglass panel.
- All critical touch surfaces, measuring devices, tools, reusable shields, etc. should be disinfected before each fit session.

Once you've made the decision to buy or upgrade your gear, call or go online before visiting your shop. Many will be serving customers by appointment, especially for bootfitting, which is **the** most high-touch, high-contact shopping experience.

“The inherent nature of skiing makes it possible to enjoy our sport with recommended social distancing precautions.”

Masterfit, the publisher of this *Buyer's Guide* and operator of the Masterfit University Bootfitter Training Centers, has created a recommended set of protocols for bootfitting operations. You can find them listed below. [America's Best Bootfitters](#) shops will all be following them. These stores have experts who can identify your foot type and match it to boots that will best serve your needs—in a fraction of the time “guess-fitting” shops do it.

If you are not able to visit an ABB shop, call ahead and ask about service protocols so you know what to expect. Like all retail operations, some shops are taking virus transmission prevention more seriously than others, and safety precautions will vary at different locations.

Be a well-prepared and educated shopper. You've already taken the first step by getting this Buyer's Guide. As you browse through the Masterfit Buyer's Guide, you'll find practical advice not just on what to buy, but how to buy as well as maintain and use it.

Even the most experienced ski enthusiasts will pick up a tip or two from one of our advice columns. Read about what's new from our comprehensive ski and boot test reviews. If you're hungry for more details of this season's top gear picks, visit our [Realskiers.com](#) and [Bootfitters.com](#) websites for more in-depth reviews.

So there are still plenty of reasons to be excited about skiing this winter. And we expect to see all of you on the slopes. With a mask and from a properly distanced 6 feet, of course.

–Steve Cohen, Publisher

BOOTFITTING IN THE TIME OF COVID-19 GUIDELINES, CONT'D.

- Customers must bring proper ski or snowboard socks or purchase new socks for the fitting. Try-on socks will not be made available.
- All bootfit customers must wear a face mask or other acceptable face covering. No exceptions. Face shields may be made available to customers for an additional layer of protections. Where face shields are an option, they are to be worn in addition to a face mask, not in place of one.
- Hand sanitizer should be available for customers to apply prior to touching any bench or product surface.
- Bootfitters should wash hands or apply hand sanitizer before each fit evaluation and must wear a face mask or other acceptable face covering during all customer interactions. Bootfitters may also opt to wear a face shield or protective eyewear as well as gloves.
- Boots that were tried on but not purchased must be sanitized before being returned to stock.

We hope that the adoption of these practices will help foster better service, encourage civility during challenging times and promote an abiding sense of community among all skiers.



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2021 SKIS: THE RICH GET RICHER

BY JACKSON HOGEN



Shown above: Brian Elling

Looking at the big picture, model turnover among men's (aka unisex) models is relatively modest. Bucking this trend are major collection introductions at Rossignol and Dynastar, where popular series—7 and Cham, respectively—have been supplanted by all-new designs. Blizzard, Nordica, Head and Kästle have introduced significant product modifications to key models with well-established followings. Völkl boosts the performance profile of its second-price-point models, the Kanjo 84 for men and the Yumi 84 for women, and adds a value tier to its freeride (and BC) collections with the Blaze 94 and 106 in both men's and women's versions. Head has reinforced its market-leading position in carving tools with a revamped Supershape series.

In the women's market, most of the new model action is in the overcrowded All-Mountain East category (waists 85-94mm), where almost every major brand has at least one new and/or improved model. Because the All-Mountain East category is a crossroads of in-resort and off-trail designs, most brands offer at least two models in this battleground genre. The struggle for the hearts, minds and credit cards of American women will be fiercely contested in what will remain the go-to genre in the women's market for years to come.

What a snapshot of the 2021 market reveals is a trend for the entrenched category leaders to hold

or enhance their positions. Once the severity of the coronavirus pandemic became evident, the ski trade was bound to get shaky as conservative buying, if any, became the order of the day. The specialty shop community isn't interested in assuming any greater risks than it's already facing.

NEW & RENEWED MODEL COLLECTIONS INCLUDE

Blizzard All-Mountain Freeride
Kästle MX
Dynastar M-Pro & M-Free
Head Supershape
K2 Disruption
Nordica Enforcer & Santa Ana
Rossignol Blackops
Salomon Stance
Völkl Blaze

As of this writing, no one has a clue exactly what the 20/21 ski season will look like, so predictions about market direction aren't tethered to a stable reality. If we make the unwarranted assumption that access to resort skiing will be quasi-normal, and therefore orders for new models aren't cancelled en masse, the American skiing public will continue to be overserved by an enormous breadth of selection.

SKIS DEMYSTIFIED

PICK THE CATEGORY

The simplest way to find the right ski is to focus first on your terrain preferences, as this will lead directly to the correct category. When discussing where you ski, be as specific as possible, naming the runs you like at the areas you frequent.

A ski's genre is determined primarily by its width: narrow skis for hard snow, big fat skis for powder, and medium width models for all-terrain capability. Determining where you'll spend a typical ski day will tell you and your salesperson which category of ski is right for you.

FIND THE RIGHT LENGTH SKI

Getting the right length is almost as important as finding the right model.

As a general guideline, low-skill skiers should select a length close to chin-height, average skiers around nose-height and advanced skiers around the hairline.

But height isn't the sole consideration. Weight is also a factor, as is speed and terrain preference. Some ski designs reduce a ski's effective snow contact, so they won't ski as long as they measure.

MATCH YOUR STYLE

Within each category, some ski models are made for highly skilled skiers who are capable of extending their feet far out from under them in order to set their skis at a high edge angle. These skiers are comfortable at speed and capable of varying pressure, stance and degree of edging to handle any terrain. We classify these skiers as Power skiers. Finesse skiers may have a very polished skill set, but they don't generally exert as much force, ski as fast or attempt to set as high an edge as Power skiers. Their preferred skis might be softer flexing, less cambered and more forgiving.

—JACKSON HOGEN

CATEGORY FRONTSIDE

WAIST
75mm–84mm

TERRAIN
80/20 Groomed/Off-Piste

ALL-MOUNTAIN EAST

85mm–94mm

70/30 Groomed/Off-Piste

ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST

95mm–100mm

60/40 Off-Piste/Groomed

BIG MOUNTAIN

101mm–113mm

80/20 Off-Piste/Groomed

POWDER

> 113mm

100% Off-Piste





PARDON OUR JARGON

At Realskiers.com we use the terms “**Power**” and “**Finesse**” to describe two distinctly different skier styles and the skis that are best suited to them. A Power skier is technically proficient, comfortable at high speed and able to ski well in all conditions. Finesse skiers don’t apply as much force to each turn, tend to skid rather than carve, prefer comfort to speed and generally avoid conditions which challenge their more limited skill set.

Power skis’ primal characteristics include a tenacious connection to the snow throughout the turn, the ability to stay connected at high speed and an emphasis on precision over ease. Finesse skis are more responsive at slower speeds, have a large sweetspot and are easy to drift, which makes them preferable for skiers for whom technique isn’t as important as comfort.

SKIS: THE TEST KEY

BRAND MODEL NAME
Manufacturer and ski model

128/84/112
Width at tip/midbody/tail

16.3M @ 176CM
Turn radius in meters at sample size

L: 152, 160, 168, 176, 184
Lengths available

HOW WE TEST SKIS

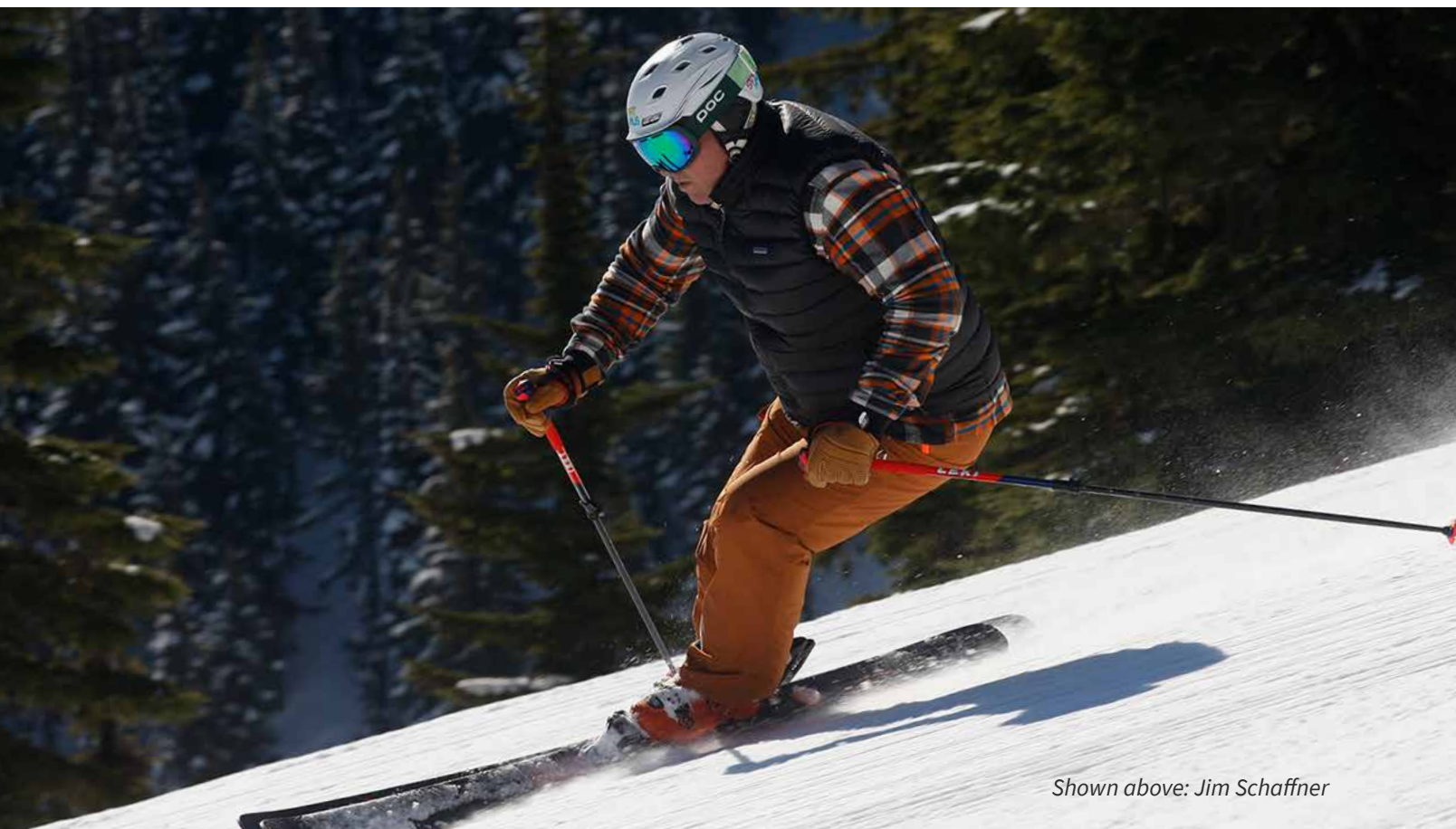
Our test results are based on hundreds of scores and comments submitted by the owners, managers and employees in the Masterfit Buyer’s Guide. Each ski is rated for 10 performance criteria that together capture a complete picture of its capabilities. Within each category the models are listed in descending order of total score.

–Jackson Hogen

To read more 2021 ski reviews and learn more about the ski market in general, please visit realskiers.com

Frontside Skis

The Frontside category (74-84mm underfoot) spans the entire spectrum of skier abilities. The groomed frontside of the mountain is where everyone begins, so the genre includes entry-level skis as well as rail-stiff carving tools meant for highly polished experts. For the novice, almost any ski will do, so the focus of these reviews is on skis made for skilled skiers who are looking for specific properties. As a rule, the men's models are stiffer and geared higher than those made specifically for women. In other words, for women, a Frontside ski is often a stepping-stone, while for men it tends to be a destination. Experts often have a Frontside ski in their quiver for days when groomed runs are the only game in town.



Shown above: Jim Schaffner



MEN'S FRONTSIDE SKIS



Völkl Deacon 84

132/84/115

15.8m @ 172cm

162, 167, 172, 177, 182

\$1,150

Two years ago Völkl resurrected its beloved Mantra by concocting a new technology called Titanal Frame; last season, Völkl applied the Titanal Frame touch to its Frontside family. The new pater familias is the Deacon 84 and like the M5 Mantra, it represents a return to traditional Völkl values.

Compared to the RTM 84 it replaced, the Deacon 84 has more edge-gripping power, more energy out of the turn and an overall bigger performance envelope. It's not just better than its predecessor; it out-scored the entire Frontside field in the primordial technical criteria of early turn entry and short-radius turns, as well as earning the top Finesse score in the category, not bad for what is inherently a Power ski.

What is it about the Deacon 84 that allows it be all skis to all (Frontside) skiers? It's the alluring combination of a fiberglass torsion box and tactically placed Titanal parts that nullify shock without stifling the glass structure's naturally springy nature. It's exceptional rebound—it will lift you right off the snow if you punch it—derives from the Deacon 84's 3D Glass, top and bottom glass laminates that come together above the sidewall to create a torsion box. The 3-part Titanal Frame anchors the forebody and tail while allowing the center to react to pressure, so the glass can compress and load up energy for the turn transition.

[Read More](#)

NEW!

Kästle MX83

126/83/112

16.3m @ 175cm

154, 161, 168, 175, 182

\$1,199

The reason the return of the MX83 ought to interest experts everywhere is because it responds so intuitively to technical commands. All you have to do is look where you want to go, and you're there. Its fully cambered baseline feels super-glued to the snow, inviting speeds that would cause lesser lights to shake loose. Most skis this torsionally rigid don't flow over and around moguls too well, but the MX83 has an almost liquid flow bred into its bones.

One of the best indicators of a great ski is how well it performs in conditions for which it wasn't made. By this measure, the MX83 remains an all-time great. Sure, it's a gas to make deep trenches in corduroy at speeds that on another ski would be terrifying, but the MX83 adopts the same attitude towards all terrain. It doesn't care where you point it because it's confident in its abilities, a self-assurance that invariably rubs off on its pilot.

If it sounds like the MX83 is too much ski for you, in one sense you're right, and in another you're dead wrong. You're right in that you may never live up to the capabilities of this extraordinary ski; its ceiling will forever be above you. But you're wrong to think the average skier can't savor its delights. The MX83's size range is skewed short so that lighter or less talented skiers can experience perfection without necessarily being able to epitomize it. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Head Supershape e-Titan

133/84/115

15.7 @ 170cm

156, 163, 170, 177, 184

\$1,200

Of Head's four Supershape models, the one that underwent the most telling transformation for 20/21 was the e-Titan.

It's not just that the e-Titan has plumped up to a 84mm waist; it's also been trimmed down at tip and tail. By taking some of the shape out of the sidecut, the e-Titan has become more adapted to uneven terrain and even powder, while its close relative, the e-Rally, remains an unadulterated carver. To put it more plainly, the e-Titan is more at home in a big-bellied GS arc while the e-Rally is genetically inclined to SL turns.

Comparing the new e-Titan to the Titans of yore, the latest issue feels smoother flexing and easier to compress at less than rocket speeds. Reducing the core profile underfoot and making the middle of the ski softer allows it to bend more fully, unleashing the e-Titan's flawless grip. The flex pattern is matched to the sidecut and baseline of each length to achieve a more fluid, balanced flex pattern that makes skiing feel as natural as walking.

Some carvers can be finicky—they're wonderful to ski as long as you do it according to their definition of what's right. But the shallower sidecut of the e-Titan makes it more open-minded. Pick a turn shape, any shape, and the e-Titan can dance to it. Pretty much anyone can hop on a pair and have fun as its slick blend of carving power and drift-ability opens up the bottom end of its ability envelope as well as the ungroomed side of the mountain. [Read More](#)

Liberty V76

126/76/106

15m @ 179cm

165, 172, 179

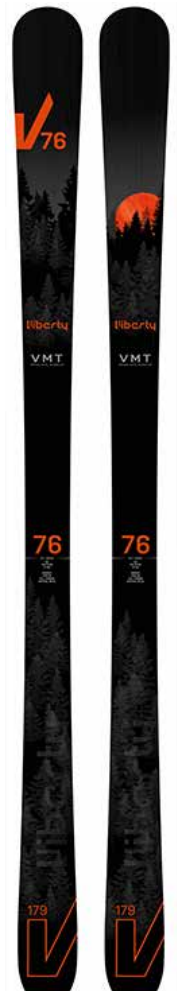
\$850

The V76 imparts a thrilling cocktail of sensations that don't normally mix. It's inherently both lively and damp, urgently on and off a steeply angled edge, or content to ride a relaxed, languid arc. Best of all, it's instantly accessible; you don't need to adapt to it because it's already one move ahead, adapting to you. For this reason it's a brilliant re-entry vehicle for skiers who have been out of the sport for over a decade and want to try something that is both new and yet familiar.

The unique construction that allows the V76 to simultaneously maintain world-class snow contact and sensuous snow feel is Vertical Metal Technology (VMT). VMT consists of vertical aluminum struts that run tip to tail. When it was introduced last season, the V76 had two such struts; last season Liberty added a third to boost its effectiveness on hard snow. As you might imagine, a longitudinal vertical strut will resist any force that tries to bend it, which is how the V76 is able to achieve such unshakeable edge grip.

"The ski was quiet but not dead," noted master ski technician Theron Lee. "The ski follows terrain well and its liveliness was much appreciated." The V76's full range of talents is certainly best appreciated by a skilled technical skier like Lee, rather than someone who still stems their turns. Its 15m-sidecut radius favors the skier who like his turns tight and tidy, although it only takes a tweak of edge angle to extract a longer turn.

[Read More](#)





NEW!

Head Supershape e-Rally

132/78/114

14m @ 170cm

156, 163, 170, 177

\$1,200

In light of Head's long history of making category-crushing carvers, it's saying something to assert that the new batch of Supershapes is the best ever and that among them the e-Rally hits the sweet spot. At the first hint of recognition that its pilot wants to change direction, it dips and tugs into the turn; all it needs is a little more encouragement in the form of a tilted edge and it's cutting a short-radius arc you couldn't bobble if you tried. As the skier's energy shifts to the tail at arc's end, the e-Rally provides an earthquake-proof platform for transitioning to the next exhilarating turn.

With its 54mm-drop between tip and waist width along with two thick, end-to-end, wall-to-wall sheets of Titanal, you'd surmise the e-Rally isn't open to suggestion about turn shape. But you'd be wrong. Sure, if you take full advantage of its sidecut, you can cut a world-class slalom turn, but back off the edge angle and you can extract whatever shape you want.

A parallel point can be made about the e-Rally's attitude about speed: it's not mandatory to go 40 mph, but you'll never discover the amazing effect of Head's new Energy Management Circuit (EMC) if you don't give it some gas. The EMC converts vibration to electric current at precisely 80Hz, so you have to generate enough shock to trigger the EMC conversion. When you have sufficient energy coursing through its system, the e-Rally becomes both calmer and more responsive, reacting to a jolt of added pressure with palpable forward propulsion. [Read More](#)

Nordica Dobermann Spitfire 80 RB

130/80/110

16m @ 174cm

162, 168, 174, 180

\$800 (without plate)

The tip-to-tail camber line on the Spitfire 80 RB creates an instant connection at the top of the turn and releases energy at the bottom with a peppy pop. "A great dynamic performer," assessed Start Haus' Jim Schaffner. "I could have a blast all day on groomers with this one."

The Spitfire 80 is available either flat or with its own plate and binding. This is not an idle choice, as the plate version doesn't just change how the ski feels underfoot, it stabilizes the entire ski, as if the plate were full length. You might think a race-style plate would make the Spitfire 80 an unmanageable hellion in low-depth crud, but the opposite is true. If your plan for the Spitfire is to crush high-speed groomers in the early morning and you have the skills to commit your hips to the turn, the plate defangs all vibrations that might perturb your blazing descent.

To get full value out of the Spitfire 80, with or without the plate arrangement, it pays dividends to be skilled. Pay heed to the remarks of Corty Lawrence, who is the epitome of the strong, technical skier: "80mm is a good width—versatile yet still agile and playful. Like all Nordicas, you need to be lord and master," by which he means you better be in charge or else the ski will be. [Read More](#)





Dynastar Speed Zone 4x4 82 Pro

130/82/112

16m @ 179cm

164, 171, 179, 185

\$1,000, with binding

The American skier's ongoing infatuation with fat skis has so distorted our collective notion of what an all-terrain ski should look like that we no longer remember the days when the best skiers' everyday ride was a race ski or something similar. As recently as the late 1990s, a ski as wide as Dynastar's Speed Zone 4x4 82 Pro would have been regarded as a powder-only behemoth.

The 20/21 4x4 is attached to the Speed Zone family, but it's actually a separate breed. In keeping with the overall trend to lighter skis, the 4x4 82 Pro uses a multi-material core with laminated beech providing the primary structure and a band of polyurethane (PU) between the wood and the outer sidewall. The PU adds a dampening element as well as being lighter than the wood it replaces.

For a ski with a race lineage, the 4x4 82 Pro is oddly more in its element off-trail than on, as it transitions from a carve to a scrubbed turn without a hitch. Peter Glenn's Steve Parnell was impressed by its versatility as he navigated through a melee of spring conditions at Squaw Valley. "Went from groomed to crust to powder today. This one will make your day. Made it all easy."

A well-balanced ski with nearly equal scores for all performance criteria, it should have a broad appeal across all ages and abilities. [Read More](#)

NEW!

K2 Disruption 78 Ti

123/78/109

17.8m @ 177cm

156, 163, 170, 177, 184

\$900

As befits the brand that made "rocker" an enduring entry in the ski design lexicon, K2 hasn't paid much attention to the ski market below a 80mm waist width—where cambered baselines still dwell—since the brand lost interest in racing around the turn of the millennium. For 20/21, K2 has error corrected with a vengeance by launching the 10-model Disruption series of carving skis.

Both the power and forgiveness inherent in the Disruption 78 Ti derive from the same source, a single band of Titanal that runs nearly the entire length of the ski in a uniform width that matches the waist dimension. On soft groomers, it feels like the edge is cushioned yet never loses contact, thanks in large part to a baseline that has zero tail elevation and only a smidgeon of early rise at the tip.

While the Disruption 78 Ti is a departure from K2's twin obsessions with Freeride and Freestyle designs, it's pure K2 in its emphasis on ease of use. You don't have to have perfect timing or Navy Seal fitness, just point, tip, repeat, and look Ma!, you're carving! Okay, it's not quite that simple, but damn near. Anyone buying his/her first pair of skis who anticipates staying on groomers for the foreseeable future will discover that the Disruption 78Ti encourages proper edging skills without requiring them. [Read More](#)





Atomic Redster X9 WB

125.5/75/109.5

13.5m @ 168cm

152, 160, 168, 176

\$1,200

The “WB” in this Redster’s name stands for Wide Body, but by today’s standards its 75mm waist looks painfully corseted. Its sidecut radius is only 13.5m in a 168cm, roughly the dimensions of a World Cup slalom ski. If the pilot tilts it to a high edge angle, it will tuck into a short-radius turn with the eagerness of a cutting horse cornering a calf. (Note that it earns a 9.0 for short-radius turns, one of the best scores in the category for this bellwether feature.) As long as it isn’t subjected to FIS-level speeds, its fully cambered baseline stays plastered to the snow. If the pilot gives it a little poke in the tail just for grins, it responds with a jolt of energy that carries you weightlessly into the next turn.

Well, weightlessly may be a stretch. The Redster X9 WB is hauling around a lot of Titanal in its pudgy frame, enough to keep its SL shape from getting too skittish at GS speeds. Surprisingly easy to ski, the X9 WB feels geared down to accommodate a skilled skier who may no longer be in tip-top race condition.

“I didn’t know Atomic made a Redster in a recreational ski,” mused Theron Lee. “Great at slower speeds. Its width makes the ski easy to maneuver at lower edge angles without hurting its carving accuracy at higher angles.” [Read More](#)

Blizzard Brahma 82

121/82/105

19m @ 180cm

166, 173, 180, 187

\$720

This ski shouldn’t be here. Skis with a patently off-piste baseline have no business infiltrating the ranks of Frontside models, by definition the domain of deep sidecuts and highly arched camber lines. How does a ski whose Flipcore baseline is practically already bowing manage to mingle with the second cousins of true race skis? If a sitcom producer cast a story about the Frontside category, all the proper club members would be draped in Armani, while the brash Brahma 82 would crash the party in flip-flops, jams and a tattered tee.

In short, the Brahma 82 is here because it’s so damn easy and fun to ski. It’s one of a tiny minority of Frontside skis with a higher Finesse score than Power score. Of course, its ease of use wouldn’t mean squat if it couldn’t hold on hard snow, but the Brahma 82 grips ferociously because beneath its mellow exterior beats the heart of a lion. Two end-to-end sheets of Titanal are sandwiched with layers of multi-directional fiberglass around a poplar and beech core. Throw in a dab of carbon in the tip to keep the swingweight down and a dampening platform underfoot and you have many of the same components that power the rest of the genre’s best skis. [Read More](#)



Women's Ski Test: A-Team Steps Up

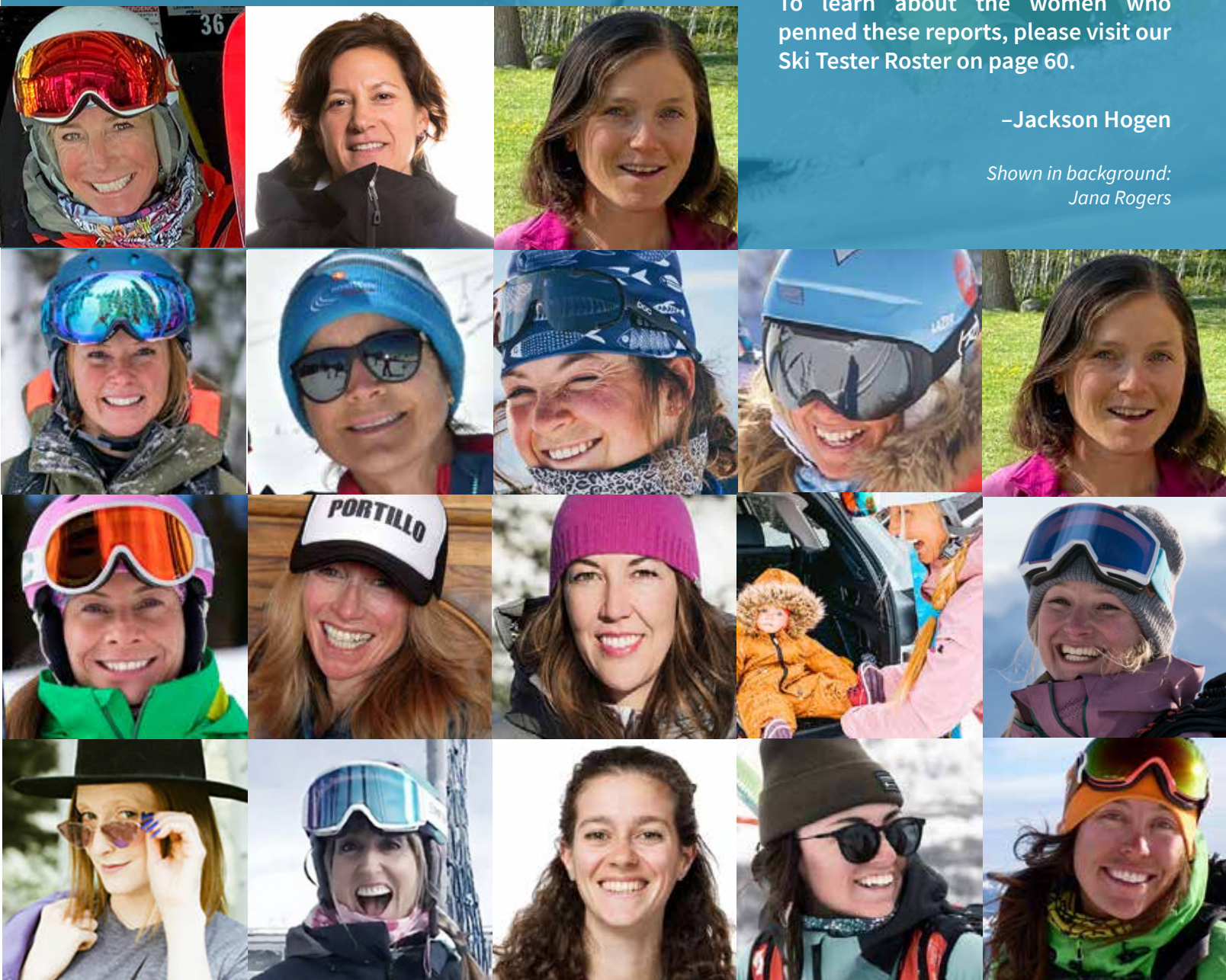
My ski season abruptly ended on March 13, 2020 and with it any hope of business as usual. When the hammer fell, my scheduled women's test session was still two weeks from launching. How could I credibly report on the current crop of women's skis—including some important new models—without any data to support my assessments?

I turned to the one cadre of skiers who had already skied this year's top models: the women who serve as test pilots for the major brands' product development teams. Every one of our 20/21 women's ski reviews is authored by a veteran evaluator, some with over 20 years experience. Naturally, their reviews reflect their personal experiences and are therefore biased in favor of the brand and model under review. Whatever the shortcomings of an explicitly prejudiced point of view are more than compensated for by personal insights into the process of creating these models.

To learn about the women who penned these reports, please visit our [Ski Tester Roster](#) on page 60.

—Jackson Hogen

*Shown in background:
Jana Rogers*



WOMEN'S FRONTSIDE SKIS



Dynastar Intense 4x4 82 Pro

130/82/110

14m @ 171cm

156, 164, 171

\$900

Tester: Jennifer Simpson

I've had the chance to ski the Dynastar Intense 4X4 in a variety of conditions and found it to be a versatile frontside adventure ski. Face it, at most resorts the powder does not last all day and having a ski that performs well in a variety of conditions is key. They're nimble enough for moguls, stable at speed on the groomers, and provide enough float for forays into frontside powder stashes in the trees or beside the trail. This ski is fun, fun, fun on the groomers, and while they're wider than my go-to carving skis, they're quick edge-to-edge and will leave satisfying deep grooves in the corduroy. The 82mm width is great for light powder days, where this traditional-feeling ski provides some extra float and smooths out the ride compared to narrower skis. These skis perform very well up to medium-fast speeds in powder, bumps, and crud. If you like to go on the faster side, or are a more powerful skier, you might consider going up one size to keep the tip stable and to feel confident when plowing through piled up snow.

[Read More](#)

Liberty Evolv 84 VMT

124/84/110

13m @ 158cm

151, 158, 164

\$750

Tester: Kimberly Beekman

This year, Liberty moves its VMT—Vertical Metal Technology—into its women's line of all mountain skis with two new Evolv models and all I could utter after trenching up Steamboat's corduroy during a ski test is a breathy, "Thank you." The 84 is built to be an all-terrain vehicle (between the racy V and freeride Origin lines), with a touch of tip rocker and progressive flex, but it definitely prefers to mach the groomed at eye-watering speeds. That's not to say it's impatient, however; it will hold your hand and coach you into a carve if you're an advanced intermediate. As for the VMT (which made its women's debut last season in the V frontside carvers), I'm not sure how this homegrown brand in the Vail Valley managed to invent something so groundbreaking, but I do know it works. Metal struts are laid vertically into the core, sandwiched between lightweight bamboo and poplar (as opposed to sheets of the stuff laid horizontally on top and beneath), to add strength and vibration damping without all the weight. In my humble opinion, it unequivocally puts this former pow-ski brand in the big leagues when it comes to edge grip and stability. The other guts of the ski include energetic polyethylene which helps give the ski more pop, liveliness, and versatility in all conditions.

[Read More](#)



All-Mountain East Skis

The All-Mountain East genre, the narrower (85mm-94mm) of the two all-mountain categories, is a mix of the narrowest off-trail models and the widest on-trail skis. In keeping with the current fashion for all things off-trail, most AME models are extensions of a family with its roots in a Big Mountain (powder ski) archetype. They remain excellent on-trail skis because they're still skinny enough to get on edge easily. Because they travel so readily all over the mountain, AME skis make the ideal one-ski quiver. This is especially true for women, who have made this genre by far the most popular in the U.S. for female skiers, from first-ski buyers to lifelong participants. Men should pay heed, for a lot of guys jumped on super-fat skis when they were all the rage and their skiing suffered for it. A switch to an All-Mountain East ski will get them back on track.



Shown here: Ashley Teren



MEN'S ALL-MOUNTAIN EAST SKIS



Völkl Kendo 88

129/88/111

24m/17m/30m @ 177cm

163, 170, 177, 184

\$775

In last year's review of the Kendo 88, we predicted that it would be Ski of the Year. And indeed it was, both for Realskiers and many other pundits. The quality that continues to distinguish the Kendo 88 from a very strong field is that it seems able to raise its game in every circumstance. No matter how or where the skilled pilot asks it to stretch its performance limits—go faster, react quicker, ride more quietly, dice up bumps, or cruise groomage—the Kendo 88 handles it all in stride.

The single most important quality an all-mountain ski can possess is total indifference to terrain selection. On this score, the Kendo 88 has no peer. It transitions from wind-affected crud to crisp corduroy as if those two conditions were the same. On hard snow, it's so quick to the edge the skier can't even tell it's rockered, and it's so stable in crud you can relax, drop the reins, and let the boys run.

The Kendo 88 uses a "3D Radius Sidecut" with a long radius forebody, a tight shape in the midsection and longest radius in the rear. This allows it to behave like a GS cruiser at relatively low edge angles and morph in a moment to a snappy SL stick when it's tilted and pressured. An energetic turn finish isn't unique to the Kendo 88, but it's nonetheless a relatively rare commodity in today's market. [Read More](#)



Blizzard Brahma 88

128/88/110

16m @ 177cm

165, 171, 177, 183, 189

\$840

Realskiers doesn't dole out a "Most Improved" award. But if we did, the Blizzard Brahma 88 would win it running away. The previous Brahma 88 was already a brilliant ski, so the jump in status simply moves the definition of perfection forward.

The old Brahma 88 already used a poplar/beech core and two sheets of Titanal, so it wasn't the Power side of the Power/Finesse divide that needed shoring up. Two performance points in particular required attention: a flex pattern that allowed for easier turn entry/exit and optimizing flex, shape, and baseline by size.

The reason flex is primordial is because if a ski can be made easier to bend without losing its grip on hard snow, the pilot can use less of his/her precious energy reserve getting from turn to turn. But historically, softer skis haven't been able to withstand the vibrations induced by traveling fast over hard snow, handling as well as a Yugo with bald tires.

So it's a joy to discover an all-terrain ski with the strength and stability of an Old School GS race ski that can be reined in to less than 40mph and still move edge to edge with the ease of a figure skater. Like a gifted drummer, it can keep the beat no matter what tune you ask it to play. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Nordica Enforcer 94

127/94/115.5

16m @ 179cm

165, 172, 179, 186, 191

\$800

The Enforcer 94 gets a new number to underscore that it's an entirely new ski, and not just an exercise in relabeling. Whenever a brand invests in new molds, it represents an opportunity to re-examine every detail. For the Enforcer 94, this meant creating five new sizes, each with a unique baseline and sidecut. Adjusting the rocker/camber intersections for every length results in a ski that feels fully-cambered, its abrupt but brief rocker zones solid and unflappable, both literally and figuratively speaking.

I'm not sure if the Enforcer 94 can actually confer expert status on anyone who steps into a pair, but it sure won't hold anyone back. It's a nearly perfect ski in that a lateral drift or trench-cutting carve is immediately accessible at all times. Every movement feels intuitive, unforced, and integrated with the flow of the mountain.

It's hard to pigeonhole the Enforcer 94 as a specialist at any one thing, for it has the chameleonesque ability to be whatever its pilot wants it to be. The key to its mutability is how mindlessly simple it is to transition from a crisp edge to a friction-free drift. This facility is what makes the Enforcer 94 masterful in any terrain, from brittle hardpack to fluffy powder and every crud-junk-chowder consistency in between. It's the epitome of an all-terrain tool. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Kästle MX88

130/88/114

17.1m @ 173cm

159, 166, 173, 180, 187

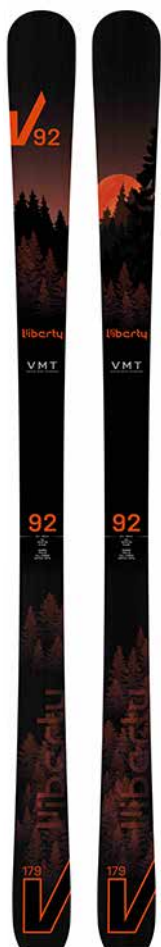
\$1,249

The return of the MX88 to the Kästle line is a significant re-launch, as it's not only a revered model with more than 10 years of history, it's also one of the first skis made by Kästle for Kästle in over two decades. To get to the point, the resuscitated MX88 is a gem, perhaps the smoothest, most unperturbed ride in a genre overstocked with stellar skis.

The changes to the new MX88 are similar to the tweaks applied to the Blizzard Brahma 88 and Nordica Enforcer 94 in that the particulars sound inconsequential, yet the total effect is stunning. Using poplar in the core in lieu of silver fir makes the MX88 considerably lighter than the MX89, so the new model feels more nimble. The forebody now has a hint of early rise but it doesn't compromise snow contact because the new Hollowtech 3.0 tip design muffles shock before it can knock the edge off line.

All these embellishments make the MX88 easier to bow and more subtle in its transition from edge to edge. The new MX88 takes less effort to guide without surrendering an ounce of its power quotient, so it's more amenable to the movements of the less skilled skier. While it's not necessary to ski the MX88 with the speedometer pegged, it would be a shame not to let it run. [Read More](#)





Liberty V92

133/92/120

17.5m @ 179cm

172, 179, 186

\$950

2018 was a breakout year for Liberty, a small brand that had previously carved out a niche as a bamboo-and-carbon specialist with a knack for making lightweight wide-bodies. Then they figured out how to industrialize the integration of an aluminum strut into their wheelhouse construction, trimmed down their usual silhouette to something more svelte and boom, Liberty elevated to a whole new level of performance.

The second generation of Liberty's Vertical Metal Technology (VMT) came to market last year. Version 2.0 added an additional strut to the original dual vertical laminates, a modification that added a higher level of connection that paid off when skied aggressively.

That said, the V92 doesn't require high speeds or steeply angled edges to feel utterly in control. Every sinew of the ski seems dedicated to maintaining snow contact. If the modestly rockered tip deflects upward for a microsecond, the struts manage the moment so the edge underfoot is never perturbed. Like all the V-Series from Liberty, the V92 requires zero adaptation on the part of the pilot. Just ski from a centered stance with whatever means of angulation floats your boat, the V92 will hold an edge no matter how you stand on it. It's an ideal match for someone who hasn't bought a new ski in ages, wants the benefits of new technology, but doesn't want to re-learn the sport. [Read More](#)

Fischer RC One 86 GT

130/86/116

17m @ 175cm

161, 168, 175, 182

\$799.99 (flat)

To grok the essence of the Fischer RC One 86 GT, think of it as a carving ski with wanderlust. As an Austrian brand, Fischer's collective mind rarely meanders far from the racecourse, so it's natural that the RC One 86 GT is a carving machine first and an off-trail implement second. Not that there's anything wrong with that. All a ski this wide really needs to navigate most off-trail conditions is a dash of tip rocker, aka, early rise.

The tip-off that Fischer envisions the RC One 86 GT in frontside environs is that it's the head of a mostly Frontside (75mm-84mm underfoot) family. Furthermore, its construction is all about maintaining snow connection, a classic Frontside obsession. The tip and tail are outfitted with Bafatex®, a synthetic compound meant to muffle shock and keep every cm of the 86 GT's fully cambered baseline plastered on the snow—not to mention 0.8mm's of shaped Titanal to further cow hard snow into silence.

For a ski with all-terrain dimensions, the RC One 86 GT showed a decided preference for carving over drifting, and hard snow, technical skiing versus flotation. If your everyday snow surface is groomed—but when powder appears, you want to pounce on it without restraint—Fischer's latest spin on a Frontside ski with off-trail pursuits deserves your attention. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Salomon Stance 90

126/90/108

18m @176cm

168, 176, 182, 188

\$800

If you digest all the brochure copy expended on All-Mountain East models, you'll find somewhere in every model description that it's a "50/50" model, meaning it's equally suited to skiing on-trail or off. What this seemingly innocuous shorthand term for a versatile ski masks is that no ski can ever truly be half-and-half, for every model is part of a design family that's inherently biased to one side of the mountain or the other.

This prelude explains why Salomon felt compelled to create a second off-trail line, named Stance, when they already had a successful freeride series in the QSTs. The latter are unmistakably meant for off-piste, while the Stance 90 tilts the 50/50 equation in favor of Frontside features, beginning with two sheets of Titanal and a shallower sidecut with a more slender silhouette that's quicker edge to edge. Its square tail in particular is appreciably narrower than the norm in the AME genre, but it keeps the ski's orientation down the fall line. The impression of quickness off the edge is enhanced by its lightweight design that in fact weighs less than the QST 92 and far less than Salomon's Frontside flagship, the S/Force Bold. The Stance 90's lightweight structure certainly contributed to our testers giving it higher aggregate scores for Finesse properties versus Power attributes, the only one of our top eight Recommended models to do so. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Head Kore 87

130/87/110

16m @180cm

153, 162, 171, 180, 189

\$750

Head was selling freeride skis before it cooked up the Kore series. But I'll bet you can't name one of them as they barely sold a stick in the U.S. The 3-model launch of the Kore series changed all that overnight. The first vintage sold out immediately, so Head quadrupled production. And sold out again. Then along came the Kore 99 to fill the space between the wildly successful 93 and the series sweetspot, the 105, and it sold to the wall, too.

When you're on a roll, it's hard to pass the dice, so this year Head pushed the boundary of its off-trail collection down to the Kore 87. Considering that initially the focal point of the Kore series was the 105, an 87 is a mighty skinny sibling. (BTW, this phenomenon, once a rarity, is now commonplace.)

But as the Kore concept has proven in its every iteration, when the name of the game is off-trail versatility, Kores come to play. The whole point of this genre is expanding the skier's playing field, opening up access to the ungroomed mountain where its real magic lies. For off-piste playgrounds like moguls and trees, the Kore 87's crazy-light construction and narrow silhouette allow it to slither through spaces where bigger boards flounder. Since the Kore 87 is in every way like its elder brothers save for its width, it retains their affinity for irregular terrain. [Read More](#)





Blizzard Rustler 9

127.5/92/117

17m @180cm

164 ,172, 180, 188

\$720

The fraternal relationship between Blizzard's two All-Mountain East entries, the elder brother Brahma 88 and its upstart sibling, the Rustler 9, encapsulates the contrasting cast of characters that populate this crossroads category. While both skis belong to off-trail families, their personalities couldn't be more different than, well, two brothers.

The Rustler 9, is not interested in following its elder's tracks. Its comparatively loose, tapered tip wants to party. The Titanal laminate just below its topskin restores order underfoot, but nothing can suppress its youthful exuberance.

Ski buyers always ask at some point in their give-and-take with the salesperson, "How is it in the bumps?" While the flip reply is always, "As good as you are," in the case of the Rustler 9, the ski actually is well suited to today's hacked-up mogul formations.

Put in Realski's terms, the pliable Rustler 9 is a Finesse ski while the stouter Brahma 88 is a Power ski. The Brahma's best scores are for performance criteria like carving accuracy and stability at speed; the Rustler 9's marks reveal a model with a high aptitude for off-trail conditions with a peppy personality that's easy to manage. It's not that it's bad at edging; it just doesn't care for the regimented lifestyle of a carving ski. It prefers life off-trail where it has the freedom to add a bit of schmear to every turn. [Read More](#).

K2 Mindbender 90Ti

127/90/114

17.9m @ 177cm

163, 170, 177, 184

\$800

Last year, K2 completely changed every core model in its line, without straying one centimeter from its core values of forgiveness and ease of operation. True, the Mindbenders are built differently than the Pinnacles of yesteryear, using all wood cores in their Ti incarnations (say ta-ta to Nano-tech), and more Titanal in the tail section to increase rear support compared to the passé Pinnacles.

Even though the Mindbender Ti series, of which the 90Ti is the narrowest, aims for a better class of skier (if you'll pardon the expression), they're not so stout they can't be controlled by adventurous intermediates. The Mindbenders' Ti Y-Beam construction puts Titanal over the edge in the forebody but moves it away from edge in the tail. This adjusts the skis' torsional rigidity requirements to create more bite in the forebody and easier release of the tail, without affecting their even, balanced flex longitudinally.

Light and responsive to a gentle hand on the reins, the Mindbender 90Ti may at first blush feel a tad too loose in the tip to trust at warp speed, but it proves trustworthy if given a chance to run at high rpms. An elevated platform connected to the core by its robust sidewall gives the Mindbender 90 Ti turbo power when rolled on edge. "It turns the way you ask it to and holds with confidence on hardpack," attests Ward Pyles from Peter Glenn. [Read More](#).



WOMEN'S ALL-MOUNTAIN EAST SKIS



Head Kore 93 W

127/85/107

14.3m @ 171cm

153, 163, 171

\$750

Tester: Robin Barnes

Hummina, hummina, hummina. This ski made my heart go pitter-patter! When I first picked it up, I wondered if the lightness of its construction—thanks to Head's Graphene technology— could stand up to a variety of conditions and speeds. Shame on me for doubting. The Kore 93W shows great versatility. It's gentle and easy to tip and carve at lower speeds. But throw it into gear, and it rips robust trenches or massacres any ungroomed condition that you throw at it. The ski is equally stunning at high-edge angles or low-edge angle steering, pivoting, and shmearing. It dazzled me on groomers, sliced and diced through the crud, and perhaps most astonishing was the way it deftly handled frozen coral-head bumps covered in 10 inches of heavy pow. At 93mm underfoot, there is really no reason to fret about which ski to bring for the day. It does it all and makes you feel like a champ doing it. The Kore W93 is the ski for a skilled skier who seeks a ski that can handle the hard-charging days as well as the cruise-y days. The Kore W series is adopted from non-gender specific Kore line with little modification – just moving recommended mounting point 1 cm forward to make front of ski more accessible. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Black Pearl 88

128/88/110

14m@165cm

147, 153, 159, 165, 171, 177

\$780

Tester: Cara Williams

I have been a part of Blizzard's Women2Women movement for nearly six years now, and the technology that Blizzard has created from our feedback keeps getting better. Enter TrueBlend Woodcore, a game-changing core at the heart of the new Black Pearl 88. During vigorous (yet fun) on-snow testing, the W2W group engaged in myriad conversations that led to the creation of the women-specific Black Pearl collection. The new Black Pearl 88 delivers stability at high speeds and in all types of conditions. Period.

The 2020 skis are actually slightly heavier (+150g) than the previous model, but I discovered after only 3 or 4 high speed turns that once you click in, the function and performance outweigh the literal weight of a ski—it's more important to be the right weight than light weight. The new Black Pearl 88 is less nervous, especially on harder and steeper snow, which is partly due to a women-specific Titanal platform in its midsection that runs edge to edge underfoot. The subtle rocker at tip and tail has less contact with the snow for added float and liveliness. In all conditions, the Black Pearl 88 conveyed a smooth and confident feeling that will benefit skiers ranging from novice to expert. Blizzard added a 177cm length and changed to 6cm size breaks that give the buyer more options. Every length is calibrated to create an optimal, round flex that travels well in all conditions. [Read More](#)





Rossignol Experience 88 Ti W

127/88/117

14m@ 166cm

159, 166, 173

\$750

Tester: Claire Challen

If you're looking for a one-ski quiver for both groomed and ungroomed trails, the Experience 88 Ti W is for you. Whether you're a seasoned intermediate starting to explore off-piste terrain or an expert skiing all over the mountain in any conditions, these skis will take you where you want to go with confidence. The Experience 88 transitions from off-piste to on-piste terrain with ease, making them my go-to choice for the majority of days on the mountain. I know I'll always have a good time no matter the conditions. I use my Experience 88s for my own free-ski play days because I like to explore off-piste, but I also like to ski fast on groomed trails. They're also fantastic do-all skis for instructing because I can confidently navigate all terrain and snow conditions, switching up trail choices per the needs of my clients. The 88s are playful and easy to turn yet also stable at higher speeds. I can go from solid carving turns on groomed and hard-pack conditions and hop over to an un-groomed trail for some fresh powder turns. These skis are a well-utilized pair within my quiver. [Read More](#)

K2 Mindbender 90C Alliance

127/90/113

14.5m @ 163cm

149, 156, 163, 170

\$650

Tester: Kim Reichhelm

My days of being a big mountain ripper are past. I have a closet full of trophies and a body covered in scars. My goal these days is to be the most fluid skier on the mountain. I want my skis to complement my style and not punish me when I make a mistake. The Mindbender 90C Alliance is my go-to resort ski and the most popular ski for my Women's Ski Adventure clients. The C stand for carbon; there is no metal in this ski making it more flexible tip to tail, which allows it to engage into the turn easily and be more forgiving coming out. The carbon adds torsional rigidity that keeps the ski from chattering on hard snow and adds some snap for carving and in bumps. The versatility of this ski is what makes it so fantastic. It carves, it skids, it's fun in the bumps and even has some float in a little bit of fresh snow. The best part is, I don't have to work hard to ski fluidly on this ski. K2's Alliance female test team was created in 2000 to create women's skis in collaboration with K2's engineers and marketing team. In addition, the Alliance partnered with Breast Cancer Research Foundation and K2 has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars over the 20-year period to that group.

[Read More](#)





NEW!

Nordica Santa Ana 93

125/93/112

14.4m @ 158cm

151, 158, 165, 172, 179

\$750

Tester: Madeline Dunn

The entire Santa Ana collection this year blew me away. Growing up as a Junior Olympic and NorAm level ski racer, I expect excellence when it comes to big mountain skis. I need a ski that can turn on a dime, float in the powder, and rip the groomers, often on the same run. This Santa Ana 93 does just that for me, day after day. It's my go-to ski for any day that I plan to take at least a few groomer laps, knowing I'll be off-piste on every other run. I grew up racing on Nordica and still ski their entire quiver to this day.

This year's collection of Santa Ana skis dials down the dosage of metal to a single sheet of Titanal that varies in dimension by model and size. As a female who has skied both the Enforcer and Santa Ana collection, this shift to one piece of metal instead of two in the women's line has been a game changer for the brand. One piece of metal delivers just the right amount of sturdiness while also keeping the ski lighter for a lady that likes to ski bell-to-bell. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Dynastar M-Pro 90 W

118/88/108

13m @ 162cm

154, 162, 170

\$900

Tester: Pauline Astruc

The M-PRO 90 W is an all-new woman's freeride ski and part of Dynastar's new M-Line collection. Featuring a directional freeride shape, the M-Pro 90 bridges the freeride/all-mountain segments offering fast, precise performance for advanced to expert women skiers.

In terms of construction, the new M-Pro W range is totally different from the previous Legend W series skis. The goal was to develop a more modern product with a better balance of power and playfulness, something that was very performance-oriented but also didn't lose sight of the fun factor.

Our test team is based at the foot of Mont Blanc, in Chamonix, giving us access to all types of terrain and snow condition to solidly test a ski's strengths and weaknesses. Even with a freeride ski, our test team generally begins on groomed terrain as this is where every little imperfection can be felt. For the M-Pro 90 W, I began on a mid-steep slope with northern exposure, slowly rolling the ski from edge to edge and then progressing on it until I was really skiing fast. My initial impression was that I was on a slalom ski. The instant engagement and quickness edge to edge was amazing. Later, when moving into mixed snow conditions, the combination of the M-Pro 90's hybrid core construction and Rocket Frame Ti insert allowed me to continue pressing the gas with a level of confidence I hadn't really experienced before. The M-Pro 90 is quick and nimble, yet strong and damp. Really it's the perfect combination for a fun, confident everyday ski that's not overly demanding yet delivers strong performance and pure all-mountain versatility. [Read More](#)





K2 Mindbender 88Ti Alliance

125/88/112

14.7m @ 163cm

149, 156, 163, 170

\$800

Tester: Emma Whitelands

I hop on the chairlift, three other women next to me, yet we don't speak a word. We are all utterly focused on the run we just took and getting our thoughts down on our test cards. Now as I glance down, I see four different versions of what is to ultimately become the Mindbender 88Ti Alliance.

Our goal was to create one of the most versatile skis for women—a ski that's stable, balanced, and confidence-inspiring to a range of skiers. Titanal Y-Beam construction evolved through the process of developing the desired weight and stiffness for the women's 88Ti: too heavy of a ski would steer many women away, but too light would make the ski constantly deflect and bounce around. Having the metal laid out in a "Y" allows for a weight savings while maintaining desired stiffness. The result is a flex profile that promotes precise turn initiation and easy release at end of turn—no muscling or race technique required here. It took numerous on-snow tests throughout the season, limitless discussion, brainstorming, reworking ideas, not to mention the countless hours the engineers spent transferring testers' feedback to the drawing board in order to improve on prototype after prototype.

The end result is the Mindbender 88Ti Alliance, K2's most versatile and high performing women's ski to date. It can serve as a one-ski quiver for anyone from an ex-racer to an intermediate. From carving groomers to tackling moguls, this ski gives the skier the confidence that she can do it all. [Read More](#)

Völkl Secret 92

130/92/113

116m @ 163cm

149, 156, 163, 170

\$825

Tester: Kaylin Richardson

The Secret 92 is the single ski quiver for the powerful female skier. Its versatility continues to blow me away. It is the first ski I've had the pleasure of owning that I can pull out on any given day, with any given conditions, and never have any regrets. The Secrets rip in virtually every condition. At 92mm underfoot they allow me the agility to lay big, aggressive arcs on corduroy, rivaling any carving ski, while transferring to off-piste crud effortlessly. I was skeptical that the narrow waist would perform as well in deep powder, and granted, when it is super fluffy, I don't get as much float. However, they still do well, and I have had many awesome powder days on my Secrets. I have been especially psyched to use them when the light-as-air snow gets skied out or weighed down by warmer temps throughout the day. That's when the Secrets really shine because they perform so well in variable snow, when the fatter, lighter, bona fide powder skis, in my experience, can struggle after first tracks.

As a former ski racer, and 5'10" woman, I can overpower many women's skis when I really go for it. The Secrets are slightly stiffer than some of their contemporaries, and I love that. Their multilayer woodcore and full sidewall design make for a ski that holds an incredible amount of energy without requiring a herculean effort. The Titanal Frame creates a stability I can trust at speed on any surface, yet I still get the dynamic feedback of acceleration, arguably the most fun part of skiing. They are playful without being squirrely, cutting through virtually any snow condition like butter. This is what initially impressed me most and keeps me coming back to the Secret day in and day out: the magical combination of power, versatility, and ease.

[Read More](#)





Nordica Santa Ana 88

118.5/88/106.5 @ 158cm

14m @ 158cm

151, 158, 165, 172

\$700

Tester: Brooke Froelich

The first time I skied the Santa Ana 88 was for a photo/video shoot on a spring storm day with heavy snow. I was hesitant to ski on new skis under those conditions. However, the SA 88's were super intuitive to ski. By my second turn, I forgot I was on a new model. They were stiff enough to cut through crud, and playful enough to quickly respond in the powder or on variable terrain. Since it is only 88mm underfoot, I thought I might have to work a little harder in powder. Not much! I still bring this ski on powder days, and always have fun on them. It's just a super all-around fun ski.

Additionally, this is *hands down* my favorite pair of skis for the backcountry. The Santa Ana 88 is relatively lightweight considering how responsive and solid it skis. For backcountry, I like a ski that will let me confidently hop turn in a chute, solidly bust through sun crust, and be a pleasure to ski for the patches of powder along the way. If you want a one-ski quiver, the Santa Ana 88 will do anything you want it to.

[Read More](#)

Head Kore 87

127/85/107

14.3m @ 171cm

153, 163, 171

\$750

Tester: Elaine Furtney

The Head Kore 87W is quite simply the most versatile ski I've ever skied. Light, playful and maneuverable, it boasts stability and edging performance that rival that of typical "carving" skis.

Pairing a modern tapered tip and tail with a svelte 87-mm waist allows heretofore unimagined playfulness and "surfability" in this category compared to anything out there. Suddenly a relatively narrow ski can rip up the groomers on that first corduroy lap, and show you refined and forgiving manners in the end-of-day slush and crud. The narrower waist gives the Kore 87 edge-to-edge quickness that encourages snappy short turns and lets them dance through the moguls without fear of catching the tip or the tail.

On a bluebird 6-8 inch powder day with a fortuitous early up at 7:30, I skied spongy wind-buff, fluffy pockets of light snow, wind-scoured hard snow and groomers. Through it all, the Kore 87W behaved with impeccable conduct and added joy to the day. It was literally great in everything!

This ski has such a huge sweet spot I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to anyone from the aspiring advanced skier to the dedicated expert. I used to say "when you're not sure which ski to bring, bring the Monster 88's." That has now changed to the Head Kore 87! [Read More](#)





Shown above: Ashley Teren

Carry Gear Like a Pro!

by Jackson Hogen

LOCK BRAKES IN PLACE

The brakes on all bindings are designed to latch together and secure your skis for transport. For increased security during longer walks and vehicle transport, wrap a Velcro strap around the forebody. Your skis will stay together no matter how you handle them.

VERTICAL CARRY

In congested areas like tram lines or busy plazas, carry your skis vertically to avoid clobbering your fellow snowsports enthusiasts. To carry your skis vertically, lock the brakes, cradle the skis in the crook of your arm and pick them up by the inside of your binding toe.

CARRY OVER SHOULDER

In open areas and for longer hauls, balance your skis tips forward on a shoulder with binding toes resting on your shoulder. Hold the forebody with one hand and grasp both poles in your other hand and use to provide better balance and support and ease your travels.

All-Mountain West Skis

All-Mountain West models (95mm-100mm) serve a different need for men than they do for women. For the guys, AMW skis maximize off-trail versatility by providing the most surface area in a ski that still retains hard snow chops. For the ladies, an AMW model is heavily biased towards off-trail conditions to the point that on-trail aptitude suffers for all but the most accomplished lasses. More succinctly, for men an AMW model is the apotheosis of the all-terrain ski that does it all; for women, it should be a second ski they reserve for when the snow is soft and deep. While the average skier can have fun on an All-Mountain West ski, they are far more appropriate for those with well-developed skills.

Don't expect a lot of price differentiation among the most popular models as all are high-end skis built with the best non-race technology the brand has to offer.



Shown here: Kevin Gabriel



MEN'S ALL MOUNTAIN-WEST SKIS



NEW!

Blizzard Bonafide 97

136.5/97/118.5

17m @ 177cm

165, 171, 177, 183, 189

\$900

Like all brands, Blizzard is under pressure to periodically renew every corner of its collection. The trick the brand has had to pull off several times is refreshing its successful designs without fundamentally changing them. To alter the Bonafide's feel without sacrificing its identity is an intricate challenge that Blizzard attacked from the inside out.

A great all-terrain ski begins with a well-balanced flex, which begins with the core. To obtain just the right pressure distribution, thin bands of dense beech are inlaid among poplar laminates, a design Blizzard calls TrueBlend. Each TrueBlend core is optimized not just by model, but by size as well. In essence, the Bonafide 97 isn't one new model, but six.

Once Blizzard committed to the TrueBlend core, it reassessed all of its properties, including baseline (the length and severity of the tip and tail rockers) and sidecut. The cumulative effect is that the new Bonafide rolls to the edge compliantly, ready to grip according to the pilot's dictates of edge angle and pressure.

One of the complaints leveled against earlier editions of the Bonafide was that it favored expert skiers. While that's still true of the longest length, the charge won't hold water against the shorter sizes. The Bonafide 97 still favors experts, but only because any great ski is always best appreciated by those with the skills to extract its elite performance. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Nordica Enforcer 100

132.5/100/120.5

17.3m @ 179cm

165, 172, 179, 186, 191

\$850

For 2021, Nordica has applied the lessons learned in making the latest iterations of Enforcers to the first-born of the family, the 100. The alterations include a construction change and the ability to adjust the contact points (where the rocker and camber zones meet) for each size. Core profile and sidecut are also tweaked with each length, so the new Enforcer 100 calibrates performance by size.

The biggest change in on-snow comportment between the ancestral Enforcer and the newbie is in the forgiveness and ease of use departments. Not that the old boy has been gutted—far from it. But the new kid seems to transition to its camber zone more smoothly, and while it's still lively off the edge, it's easier to decamber in its longer lengths. It's unusually easy to feather the edge or switch from carving to drifting to match the terrain.

The acid test for an all-terrain ski with aspirations of greatness is a powder-covered mogul field that was untouched ... two hours ago. The Enforcer 100 looks at this dumpster-fire of a ski run with the preternatural calm of the Buddha. It's not worried if you're not. Don't be afraid to floor it, for the 2021 Enforcer 100 still has the wood-and-metal guts of a GS race ski. Intimidation is not in its vocabulary. This is why you get an all-terrain ski in the first place. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Kästle MX98

137/98/120

20.9m @ 178cm

169, 178, 187

\$1249

The last time Kästle made an MX98, it was the burliest All-Mountain West ski extant. If the skier didn't commit to the turn, the ski would sense weakness and assume control. If you weren't a strong, technical skier, you were more prisoner than pilot.

This personality profile didn't change with the advent of the MX99 two seasons ago; the ski's non-negotiable approach to turn shape—the fewer the better—limited its potential owners to those experts willing to submit to its terms.

The 20/21 MX98 incorporates several design changes that together flip the ski's personality from stubborn to compliant. The tip is a tad wider in order to accommodate the larger Hollowtech 3.0 insert, and its slight early rise returns to a fully cambered baseline further up the ski. Note that the tail is square and flat, so the MX98 can hang onto the bottom half of a carved turn better than any other ski in the AMW genre.

One property that hasn't changed about the flagship MX model is its pedigree: it comes from a line of carving models, the only ski in the All-Mountain West to do so. When other AMW models confront a foot of new snow, they're predisposed to ride near the surface, while the MX98 bulls it to the side. Getting knocked off course feels not only unlikely, but impossible. [Read More](#)

Head Kore 99

133/100/121

21.3m @ 177cm

162, 171, 180, 189

\$800

Most veteran testers who try the ultralight Head Kore 99 for the first time carry with them a hint of suspicion. You can tell in the hand that they're lighter than the typical wood-and-metal make-up usually found at the top of this popular genre. Will a noticeably lighter ski like the Kore 99 measure up to the standard set by powerful skis like the Bonafide 97, MX98, M5 Mantra, and Enforcer 100?

Any competent tester will be focused on trying to find a flaw that derives from the Kore 99's lightness, so the first run on this ski feels experimental, sort of like a first dance with a new partner. Somewhere during the second run you realize it can do whatever you can do. You stop focusing on its differentness and gain a deeper appreciation of how well it mimics the performance envelope of this hotly competitive category's perennial all-stars.

Not only do the Kore 99's Power properties meet the highest standard for edge grip and stability at speed, its lower mass means it takes less effort to ski, forestalling fatigue and lengthening the ski day.

Unlike some of its burlier bros in the All-Mountain West genre, the Kore 99 feels quick to the edge and reactive off it. "It did not feel like a 99mm width," noted Bob's Theron Lee. "It felt much narrower." [Read More](#)





Völkl M5 Mantra

134/96/117

19.8m @ 177cm

170, 177, 184, 191

\$825

Back in the day, liveliness was a common trait among performance skis. With the advent of shaped skis, advanced technique involved maintaining snow contact through the end of the arc. Popping off the snow became a faux pas, rockered tips reared their ugly heads, and camber lines flattened out like deflated tires.

By freeing up the fiberglass in its belly to compress, Völkl's M5 Mantra creates the energy to recoil off the edge and fire the skier through the turn transition. It's expert skiing as it used to be, before it became popular to make off-trail skis that were built more for skidding than carving.

The M5 Mantra is the antidote to the smeary ski. It's not a ski for floating over fluffy drifts of powder. Instead, it dives into pow and blows it up from the bottom, using the energy out of the turn to bring the ski up to the surface like a dolphin. No other ski in the genre is as firmly committed to carving through thick and thin as the M5.

For the skier with established carving skills looking for a ski unintimidated by rough-and-tumble terrain, the revitalized M5 Mantra is your kind of board. The M5 was focused from its conception to serve the needs and meet the expectations of experts, which is why it doesn't smear as readily as the rest of the AMW contingent.

[Read More](#)

NEW!

Salomon Stance 96

132/96/114

20m @ 182cm

168, 176, 182, 188

\$850

There are two opposing archetypes for a wide, all-terrain ski: light and smeary or beefy and more connected. Salomon had the surfy side covered with the QST 99; its new Stance 96 is meant to wrestle with wood-and-metal powerhouses like the Blizzard Bonafide and Nordica Enforcer 100.

Salomon wasn't going to win this battle with a cap construction, so the Stance 96 uses square sidewalls. To match up with metal, you have to use Titanal, so the Stances are equipped with "Twin Frame" Ti laminates. You can't get a wood core feel without a wood core, so all the unisex Stance models have an all-poplar center.

All that said, the Stance 96 doesn't strictly imitate the benchmark skis that it presumes to supersede. Its rockered tip works better when buffering blows against loose snow; it feels a little loose on groomers and consequently a bit late into the top of the turn. But when it's fully laid over, it grips confidently regardless of the snow surface.

The Stance 96 handles speed well, which is a good thing, as it likes to hew closely to the fall line. Its long turn shape is the product of a narrow tail that helps keep the skier oriented downhill. A rectangular cutout in the Titanal topsheet pares off a few ounces, so the Stance 96 feels more agile than its girth measures.

[Read More](#)





NEW!

Dynastar M-Pro 99

127/99/117

20m @ 178cm

162, 170, 178, 186

\$ 800

The new M-Pro series is the first new freeride series from Dynastar that isn't a spinoff of the Cham models it rolled out nearly a decade ago. Eventually the Cham name was dropped in favor of Legend, but aside from a damping system in the forebody, the essentials of the design remained the same.

The M-Pro series bids au revoir to all that. The M-Pro 99 is tapered and rockered at both ends, but neither the baseline nor sidecut is copied from the Cham/Legend playbook. Titanal has been re-introduced, although not in full sheets. Instead, the Rocket Frame insert is concentrated in the tail and underfoot, with a thin sliver extending towards the tip. The net effect is a forebody that is ready to give in any direction married to a tail that is built to hold its course.

Dynastar knows that skiers don't buy a 99mm-waisted ski to cruise groomers; they get one in hopes of never seeing a groomer again. The M-Pro 99's shallow sidecut and square tail design signal a directional ski that will plane evenly through tracked-up pow. One way to think of the M-Pro 99 is as Powder ski shrunk to everyday dimensions, with a more supportive tail that will make a crisper arc on hardpack.

As long as the snow has a bit of give to it, M-Pro 99 handles easily and responsively. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Rossignol Holy Shred

131/98/121

19m @ 182cm

162, 172, 182, 192

\$800

For two years, Rossignol treated its Black Ops models as if they were part of a clandestine operation known only to insiders. The problem with marketing a secret ski collection is you can be too successful at keeping it quiet. After serving as second fiddles behind the legendary 7 series, Black Ops models have now been thrust into the spotlight as their replacements.

The Holy Shred brings two distinctive elements to the party that its 7 Series predecessor, the Sky 7, lacked: Titanal in its lay-up and a full-on twin-tip baseline. Almost every ski in the All-Mountain West genre has tail rocker, but no other major brand produces an unabashed, directional twintip intended for all-mountain skiing. The addition of Titanal gives the Holy Shred the stability on edge that most Pipe & Park twintips lack.

Here's another twist to the Holy Shred story: it's unusually high camber line gives it spring-loaded rebound that propels the skier off the bottom of bottomless snow. While its dual-shovel baseline suggests it might smear easier than mayonnaise, when in powder – its preferred terrain if you can find it—its 45-degree braid of synthetic fiber loads up as it finds the belly of the turn. As it recoils, the rising Holy Shred helps the skier unweight as he (or she) crosses the fall line, as Old School a move as camber itself. [Read More](#)





Liberty evolv 100

139/100/122

19m @ 179cm

172, 179, 186

\$850

Before Liberty could make an all-mountain ski that could go head-to-head against the world's best, it first had to learn to make a great Frontside ski. Like most small-batch brands, Liberty began by making the wider skis that the mainstream brands underserved. Their first imperative was to make a light and maneuverable off-trail ski, not an on-trail carver.

Two years ago that changed when Liberty mastered a means of inserting vertical aluminum struts into their customary carbon and bamboo structures. The test run for the new Vertical Metal Technology (VMT) was a 3-model series in waist widths of 76, 82 and 92mm. Most small brands attempts at carving skis border on the comically bad, but the V-Series skis were a stunning exception. They could deliver a punch on hard snow and come off the edge with authority.

Last year, the original, dual-strut construction was applied to an All-Mountain West design, bringing Frontside-quality edge hold to a more floaty silhouette. The trait that distinguishes the evolv100's personality from the rest of the AMW pack is directly attributable to Liberty's VMT concept. The instant a shock tries to deflect the ski off course, the struts resist the deformation and stick the ski back on the snow before the pilot knows it ever left. Snow contact is maintained in all snow conditions but is especially notable in wind-affected crud, where many rockered forebodies flounder. [Read More](#)

Fischer Ranger 99 Ti

130/97/121

18m @ 181cm

174, 181, 188

\$799.99

Fischer has been tinkering with its off-trail Ranger collection over the span of several seasons, searching for the fine line between lightweight, with its attendant ease of operation, and elite carving capability that can handle the transition to hard snow. The Ranger 99 Ti tilts the scales in favor of stability, amping up the carving power by reverting to square ABS sidewalls straddling a classic wood-and-Titanal sandwich. A carbon inlay in the tip lowers swingweight and overall mass, which is substantial enough to keep it calm on corduroy, yet feels comparatively light when tearing through crud.

By tweaking everything—core, baseline, sidewalls—Fischer transformed this commercially important model from a lightweight that got beat up by mean conditions like hard snow or chunky crud into a lean machine that doesn't take any crap from any kind of snow, no matter what the Eskimos call it.

Realskiers testers lauded the Ranger 99 Ti's agility for a ski of its girth, calling it "nimble and quick to turn," "light and playful," and "best short turns of the big mountain, soft snow skis." Its relatively zippy reflexes belie a sublime stability at speed that eluded the previous generation of Rangers but is inbred in the new 99 Ti. "It's a solid edition to the Fischer family," vowed Jack Walzer of Jan's, who has been an aficionado of Fischers for a generation. [Read More](#)





Atomic Bent Chetler 100

129.5/100/120

19.5m @ 180cm

164, 172, 180, 188

\$725

The key to the Bent Chetler 100's charms is its Horizon Tech tip and tail which are rockered on both axes. Its crowned extremities allow the littler Chetler to drift in any direction on a whim without losing control of trajectory. When in its element, it's the epitome of ease, rolling over terrain like a spatula over icing.

The Bent Chetler 100 is all about freedom of expression rather than the tyranny of technical turns. Showing up early in the turn isn't its shtick, but it has talents Technical skis never imagined, like throwing it in reverse off a precipice. It's light, it's easy to pivot, and it's wide enough to float in two feet of fresh. If you evaluate the Bent Chetler 100 for what it does rather than what it isn't meant to do, it's an all-star in a league of its own.

Although the Bent Chetler 100 is a directional ski, its unique design lends itself to omni-directional skiing. This pegs its probable skier profile as a young male with aerial antics on his bucket list. But it would be underselling the Bent Chetler 100 to lump it with Pipe & Park twin-tips. Its preference for soft snow is hardly a character flaw in an All-Mountain West model. Anyone looking for a great value in an all-terrain ski can't do any better than a Bent Chetler 100. [Read More](#)

REVEAL YOUR INNER SELF

Salespeople are trained to open the sale by asking a litany of questions. Be ready to reveal as much as you can about yourself as a skier. Make sure you cover these key subjects with your ski salesperson.

SKI BACKGROUND

How many years have you been skiing and how frequently per season? How would you describe your skills?

SKI STYLE

Are you cautious and conservative or aggressive and attacking? Do you like speed? Are you a Finesse or Power skier?

CURRENT SKI PLANS

Where do you ski now? On what runs? Be as specific as possible as to where you ski and what sort of terrain and conditions you want to master. How much will you ski this year?

WHY YOU SKI

What motivates you to get on the hill? Fresh air with friends? Learning off-trail skills? Skiing with the kids? Mastering a challenging sport?

—Jackson Hogen

WOMEN'S ALL-MOUNTAIN WEST SKIS



Dynastar M-Pro 99 W

126/98/116

18m @ 170cm

154, 162, 170, 178

\$800

Tester: Megan Dingman

The Dynastar M-Pro 99 W is one of those skis I'm stoked to have in my quiver. Deceptively light, Dynastar's new hybrid core construction creates a platform that feels incredibly smooth and intuitive, is playful yet responsive, and allows you to produce incredible rebound and energy. Needless to say, it charges. It's this rare combination that makes this ski a perfect daily driver, and hands-down my go-to ski for all types of conditions and terrain. Whether ripping groomers or skiing tight trees, this ski is fully gassed, quick edge-to-edge, and very predictable. I felt extremely confident when laying the ski over and getting my hip on the ground, plowing through chunder fields, or skiing light powder. The 20m radius hooks up easily and allows you to create the turn you want. Not to mention the sleek graphic: the M-Pro 99 W catches one's eye. Pair it with Look's new gold Pivot 15 and you have yourself a head turner. Overall, this ski delivers a smooth, easy, powerful ride that I would highly recommend to anyone who is looking to buy a new ski that looks as good as it rides. [Read More](#)

K2 Mindbender 98Ti Alliance

134/98/120

15.6m @ 168cm

154, 161, 168, 175

\$850

Tester: McKenna Peterson

The first time I skied on what is now the Mindbender 98Ti Alliance was during our second round of testing at Crystal Mountain, Washington, in variable conditions (snow up high, rain down low). I'm a big mountain skier and have always preferred fatter skis for float and stability at speed, but there was something about this 98mm underfoot ski that made my jaw drop. That something is the 98Ti's new Torsion Control Design, which allows the ski to be stable and confident throughout the turn while also giving the option to release on a dime and playfully maneuver. Up high, the 98Ti floated through the powder, perfectly balanced between riding on top and diving too deep. The ski carved through the nasty re-frozen wet snow of the lower mountain as if it were butter. The ski was both confident and playful. The 98Ti is my 'go to' resort ski for any and all conditions. ... Fun fact: this ski graces the cover of the 2019 December issue of *SKI* magazine, and the photo was taken after an unusual 40" dump at Sun Valley. Yeah, she's skinny but she rips in the powder.

[Read More](#)





Rossignol Blackops W Blazer

131/98/121

16m @ 170cm

160, 170

\$800

Tester: Jill Beers

The Blackops Blazer is one the most fun and dependable skis I've skied. This ski can handle any terrain and conditions I'm thrown while ripping around my home resort of Alta, Utah. From railing turns on hard-packed corduroy during chilly early mornings, to cutting through the afternoon crud post-pow day, this ski proves to be an extremely stable yet playful option. The 98mm waist makes it my ideal one-quiver ski for West Coast shredding, but I was equally impressed with how it handled when I took it to the East Coast for a week. This Blazer has come a long way from when I was able to help out during early testing a few years back and has since become the perfect ski for all the lady shredders who want an all-mountain charger to take them from bell to bell. [Read More](#)

Blizzard Black Pearl 97

136.5/97/118.5

15m @ 165cm

153, 159, 165, 171, 177

\$840

Tester: Brenna Kelleher

Whether you are new to off-piste terrain or a high-level ripper, the Black Pearl 97 does not disappoint. Our test day began with ideal conditions: six inches of fresh snow on high-speed groomers. During the next few runs I explored a bit more, finding crud-covered bumps and lots of chopped-up powder—they performed brilliantly. The new TrueBlend woodcore offers the perfect combo of the right weight and performance. The Pearl 97 made it easy, yet felt like it had power and quickness underfoot as well. Overall, it performed well from bell to bell as conditions changed throughout the day.

The Black Pearl 97 would suit any intermediate to advanced skier looking to explore ungroomed terrain. The ski performs at a low edge angle for intermediate skiers looking to explore new terrain, while more advanced skiers can ramp up the edge angle to execute precise carves in whatever terrain is in play. The new Pearl 97 is made with a slightly modified sidecut and baseline in every size, so each length is a perfect match for its pilot. Blizzard added a 177cm to the line-up which is a welcome addition for stronger and more skilled female skiers.

If you're looking to purchase a great all-round, off-piste, bell-to-bell ski, be sure to put the Black Pearl 97 on your list. You can't go wrong adding it to your quiver. [Read More](#)





Liberty Evolv 90 VMT

132/90/114

18.5m @179cm

165, 172, 179, 186

\$750

Tester: Kimberly Beekman

The Evolv 90 is an all-mountain multi-tool designed to make your face hurt from smiling so hard. Using Liberty's revolutionary Vertical Metal Technology—struts of metal sandwiched vertically between lightweight wood stringers, rather than two sheets of metal laid above and below the core—this ski has all the confidence-inspiring stability and edge-grip without the muscle-burning weight. It goads you to go faster, ski longer, explore further, and is always up for the challenge. The 90 waist is perfect for venturing all over, from arcing perfect turns on groomed to surfing boot-top fluff in the trees. It's also remarkably forgiving when you want to back it off and slide it around; it readily welcomes your input. (Personal side note: This ski singlehandedly changed my 12-year-old daughter's outlook on skiing. It strikes the perfect balance between stability and fun, and gave her the support she needed to tackle the fall line rather than just survive it.) It's poppy, playful, responsive, and yet bites like hell when you want it to. A lot of that playfulness has to do with its sidewall material, which is made from the more energetic polyethylene (rather than the usual damper polyurethane). The Evolv 90 is versatile for a wide range of abilities in a huge range of terrain—East and West. If you've never skied a Liberty before, this is the one to try. [Read More](#)



Shown here: Ashley Teren



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Big Mountain Skis

Big Mountain models are adapted for powder and crud, period. The fact that they can be skied on hard snow doesn't mean that they should; if you can only afford one ski, a Big Mountain model shouldn't be it unless you're planning on skiing powder, or what was recently powder, exclusively. (This advice applies doubly for women.) However, if you already have an everyday ride, a Big Mountain model is insanely fun for those days when everything on the hill is buried in a blanket of white. Skiing powder on a narrow ski, particularly one with a deep sidecut, can feel like fighting a marlin with a fly rod. On a Big Mountain model, the same condition isn't exhausting, but exhilarating. Effort is replaced with euphoria, which more than justifies the price of a second pair of skis.



Shown here: Mark Elling



MEN'S BIG MOUNTAIN SKIS



Nordica Enforcer 104 Free

135/104/124

18.5m @ 186cm

165, 172, 179, 186, 191

\$900

Two years ago the Nordica Enforcer 110 earned the title of easiest Big Mountain ski. Last year, the crown stayed in the Enforcer family but passed to a new epitome of ease, the Enforcer 104 Free, that continues to hold the throne in 20/21. (The “Free” denotes the slightly lighter wood core that’s been in the 110 since its introduction.) The Enforcer 104 Free leapfrogged to the front of our Finesse rankings by being even more maneuverable and responsive than the highly recommended ski that served as its role model.

Back-to-back runs on the 110 and 104 in 10 inches of partially tracked powder confirmed what one might suspect *a priori*—that the narrower ski was noticeably easier to steer no matter how you slice it. Whether pivoting your feet to make a short turn shorter or banking off a wind drift, the Enforcer 104 took less force to guide. To the obvious question—is a 104-waist width really necessary in a line that already has cornerstone models on its flanks in the original Enforcer 100 and the 110? —we have an equally obvious answer: oh, yes.

At the 104mm width, the girth of the ski is less of a liability and more of an asset as it takes less muscle power to maneuver. It still feels as stable as a mini-tanker—the overriding sensation is that you can’t be knocked off your feet no matter what you hit in the flat light that often prevails on powder days. Yet it remains lively and responsive to pressure. It doesn’t just reward competence; it bestows grace. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Dynastar M-Free 108

138/108/128

18m @ 182cm

172, 182, 192

\$ 800

This season, Dynastar debuts the most significant changes to its core collection of Freeride skis since the Chamonix Valley brand launched the first version of the Cham design in 2012. The new Freeride family has three branches: M-Pro—four flat-tailed all-terrain models; M-Tour—a 99mm backcountry board; and M-Free—a pair of twin-tips made to surf big lines on big mountains. The emerging stars of the 20/21 line are the M-Pro 99 and the subject of this review, the M-Free 108, which bedazzled the few lucky enough to essay it last winter.

No question that the M-Free 108 is built to butter around in deep powder. It uses a shallow sidecut to minimize sinkage, along with tapered tips and tails that shorten the platform underfoot. This makes it a brilliant drifter that can be swiveled in a phone booth (remember those?). Its hybrid core uses poplar down the center and a swath of PU on either side to dampen the ride without impinging its lively response to pressure.

Theron Lee, a longtime Dynastar fan, found the M-Free 108 to be “very damp and smooth but with great rebound. Easy to turn and stable at speed. Very playful yet has plenty of power. Skis kinda short.” Every behavior cited by Lee can be traced to the M-Free 108’s abbreviated but responsive center section buffered by twin-tipped extremities that are tapered and rockered out of the way. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Rossignol Black Ops Sender Ti

138/106/128

21m @ 187cm

164, 180, 187, 194

\$900

The previous occupant of this slot in Rossignol's lineup, the Soul 7, might well have been the biggest seller in the short history of the Big Mountain genre. A mostly glass ski that was light, springy, and sinfully simple to ski in the soft conditions it was meant for, the Soul 7 HD left behind big tracks to fill.

The new Black Ops Sender Ti could probably follow a Soul 7 track as they share a similar sidecut, but in almost every other respect the two skis are decidedly different.

The biggest differences between the two Rossis are in baseline and construction, with the Sender Ti favoring more continuous snow connection and a damper ride able to suck up the vibrations that come with higher speeds. The Sender Ti doesn't just toss Titanal at the problem; it adds supplementary damping systems on both the horizontal and vertical planes. An elastomer layer Rossi calls Damp Tech smoothes out the ride in the forebody while twin ABS struts running the length of the ski resist every effort to knock it off line. A weave of carbon alloy incases its poplar core, just for good measure.

Brilliantly balanced between Power and Finesse behaviors, the Black Ops Sender Ti belongs in the first rank of Big Mountain skis. While it shares few of its forebearer's behavioral traits, the Soul 7 and the Sender Ti do have one thing in common: they both may wear the mantle of Ski of the Year. [Read More](#)

Blizzard Rustler 10

133/102/122.5

17.5m @ 180cm

164, 172, 180, 188

\$840

The Blizzard Rustler 10 wants you to look good, so it makes everything about off-trail skiing easier. There's a long, central band of Titanal on the top to stabilize the ski underfoot while allowing the tip and tail to twist. The idea is to keep the tapered tip from getting involved with every obstruction it meets; instead of trying to hook up at the top of turn like a hard-snow-oriented ski is meant to do, it politely deflects all rough treatment by bending with the blow. The same basic idea at the tail keeps it from insisting on finishing every arc on a hairline trajectory.

The Rustler 10 also wants you to ski all day. So it keeps its overall weight under control—despite the Titanal stabilizer—by using a recipe of poplar, beech, Paulownia, milled foam and balsa for the core, and layers of glass laced with carbon as the main structural element. Swatches of unidirectional carbon in the tip and tail subtract from the ski's swingweight so it's easier to pivot when circumstances require a sudden change in direction.

A more powerful skier who takes his hard-snow technique with him when he travels off-trail might prefer the more connected feel of the Blizzard Cochise 106. But for the majority of off-piste skiers, the Rustler 10 is a better fit. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Salomon Stance 102

134/102/121

23m @ 183cm

176, 183, 190

\$900

The new Salomon Stance 102 is a Frontside ski in a fat suit. Were it not for its width, which by Realski's rules lands it in the Big Mountain genre, and a dash of tip rocker, it would be a Frontside ski, and a strong one.

To understand a ski's purpose, one needs to know what void it's filling in its brand's big picture, as well as where it fits in the category in which it's competing. Perhaps the best way to define the role of the Stance 102 in Salomon's 20/21 collection is to identify what it is not, namely a QST.

The niche the Stance 102 aims to occupy is that of a wood (poplar) and metal (Titanal) laminate that's just a bit less than the market leaders in the genre: a bit less heavy, a bit less torsionally rigid in the forebody and a bit less work to bow.

Mission accomplished. While the rockered tip isn't over-eager to get into the next turn, it hooks up as early as any in this all-rockered-all-the-time genre. Because Salomon has tampered with its torsional stiffness, the Stance 102 doesn't feel as wide as it measures, so it never feels ponderous. It also feels quick off the edge in part because it doesn't cling to a cross-hill arc, its tail's unusually narrow width dictating a more direct route downhill. [Read More](#)

Völkl Mantra 102

140/102/123

24m/19m/26mm @ 177cm

170, 177, 184, 191

\$850

You can feel the power percolating under the hood of the Mantra 102 before you have it out of first gear. Even though it's "only" 102mm underfoot, it feels more substantial. At slow speeds, its triple-radius sidecut (long-short-long) encourages the Mantra 102 to stay close to the fall line so it can pick up enough inertia to show its other moves.

Once you've shown it you care by injecting speed into its veins, the Mantra 102 becomes more compliant. Even though it's double rockered, its Titanal Frame design, which puts more mass around the tip and tail, keeps nearly the full length of the ski engaged. While not exactly nimble—its lowest score is for short turns—it doesn't have to be, for whatever lies in its path better get out of its way or face extinction.

This "Mantra über alles" attitude is unusual in a Big Mountain genre where Finesse skis are in the majority. The Mantra 102 has as much interest in floating over new snow as a bathysphere, and would rather pummel a patch of soft snow than caress it.

If you'd had difficulty finding a Big Mountain ski that's able to support your mass and your mojo, your search has ended. I'm sure that someone whose nickname is Bruiser will use the Mantra 102 as his everyday ski, but its glory is a wide-open crud field where it can cut loose like an extra-large GS race ski with anger issues.

[Read More](#)





NEW!

Blizzard Cochise 106 NEW!

137.5/106/124.5

24m @ 185cm

177, 185, 192

\$960

The 2021 Cochise represents a return to its traditional values by cutting back on some of its beefier elements without scrimping on the 2-½ layers of Titanal that give the Cochise its indomitable determination to teach crud a lesson it won't soon forget. The new Cochise whittles away at the tip and waist width and plumps up the tail, reducing the sidecut radius by 3m in a 185cm. While this encourages the rejuvenated Cochise to finish its big banked turns, quick little arcs are still not part of its repertoire.

To get the Cochise to feel more like the original, Blizzard tinkered with several possible core changes. Bear in mind this re-design comes after several years of Rustlers, Blizzard's softer, gentler Big Mountain collection that uses Paulownia, balsa and ISO-core alongside the poplar and beech laminates that have been used in the Cochise's clan forever. Blizzard attempted to modify its new TrueBlend core for the Cochise, but its added width meant more mass, inhibiting the maneuverability the R&D team was trying augment. So the 2021 Cochise core added Paulownia to its matrix, lightening the load and improving its responsiveness.

The cumulative changes to the Cochise 106 contribute to a general improvement to its on-trail comportment so it's truly an all-terrain ski, as it was conceived to be. Even though it has changed, it hasn't contorted into something it is not: it's still the same Power ski it always was. [Read More](#)

K2 Mindbender 108Ti

136/108/125

22.9m @ 186cm

172, 179, 186, 193

\$900

Two visible features give the best of the Mindbenders, headlined by the 108 Ti, its signature look and associated behavior: Titanal Y-Beam and PowerWall. Ti Y-Beam is, as the name suggests, a slingshot-shaped yoke of Titanal that fortifies the tail and perimeter of the forebody. PowerWall elevates the midsection to amplify pressure over the camber pocket and direct more force to the edge. The tapered tip is allowed to distort as it shoulders its way ahead in tracked-up crud without affecting the tranquil ride behind it.

The Mindbender 108 Ti tries to win the war against crud by caressing it instead of crushing it. To execute a truly tight radius turn requires overruling its roughly 30m-sidecut radius and foot swiveling a flat ski, a move the Mindbender 108Ti has down pat.

It takes only one section of uncut powder to realize that this unsullied canvas is where the Mindbender 108Ti would prefer to display its artistry. Remarkably, its soft, rockered forebody allows the 108Ti to conform to gnarly bumps as if they were only a minor inconvenience. Because it isn't torsionally rigid throughout, the Mindbender 108Ti doesn't feel as wide as it measures. In soft snow it feels comfortable enough to be an everyday ski, but that's asking a lot of a ski that likes powder as much as you do. [Read More](#)





Head Kore 105

135/105/125

17.8m @ 180cm

162, 171, 180, 189

\$875

Head is the only ski maker with a license to use Graphene, carbon in a one-atom thick matrix, which allows its engineers to stiffen or soften flex with minimal affect on mass. To maintain this weight advantage, the heaviest component in the core is a slice of poplar next to the sidewall; the rest of it is a synthetic honeycomb called Koroyd and a quotient of Karuba, an ultralight wood commonly found in Alpine Touring skis. The Kore 105 gets its power and energy from the carbon, fiberglass and Graphene that are laminated around this exotic core.

This recitation of low-mass components makes it sound as though the Kore's only selling feature is its lightweight chassis. There's no question that the Kore design is laser-focused on keeping the ski light, but if that were its only accomplishment, it wouldn't be such a big deal. What makes the Kore construction remarkable is that it's light but never wimpy. Once you ski it for a few runs, you forget about its light weight and just ski as you would normally, only with less labor and fatigue.

"The dampest lightweight ski ever, awesome energy and snow feel. Works all day inbounds or backcountry," raved Lucas from Footloose. "[My] favorite ski in the test." One of The Sport Loft cohorts captured its multiple personalities: "Soft for the soft snow, stiff and stable for the hard snow. For the weight, the best ski for the money, period." [Read More](#)

Fischer Ranger 107 Ti

139/107/131

18m @ 182cm

175, 182, 189

\$850

In 2020, Fischer re-designed the flagship of its Ranger Ti series, returning to a lay-up with twin Titanal laminates for stability and liberal use of carbon to make it responsive. Carbon inlays in the tip and tail help make the extremities thin and light, so the Ranger107 Ti is easier to foot steer when necessary. "It's user-friendly but still can be skied aggressively," noted one admiring tester. "You can take your foot off the gas, and it's still responsive."

Compared to the Ranger 108 Ti that preceded it, the Ranger 107 Ti has a slightly less shapely silhouette and a longer contact zone underfoot, giving it more directional stability and an overall calmer disposition in the sloppy seconds that prevail on so-called powder days. Its new sidecut favors the skier who can maintain momentum through a series of rhythmic, mid-radius turns that neither enter nor exit the turn too suddenly.

Fischer is going through something of a renaissance of late, reinvigorating its Alpine ski and boot collections in tune with the market demand for lightweight constructions that deliver high performance. The latest redesign of the Ranger flagship is emblematic of a new emphasis on product at Fischer and a harbinger of good things to come. [Read More](#)



WOMEN'S BIG MOUNTAIN SKIS



K2 Mindbender 106C Alliance

139/106/124

15m @ 167cm

159, 167, 175

\$750

Tester: Kim Reichhelm

When the morning snow report is over five inches of fresh, the Mindbender 106C is my ski of choice. As is the case with the 90C, the 106C features Spectral Braid™, a combination of carbon and fiberglass woven at an angle around the aspen core. This first-of-its-kind construction gives the 106C versatility, stability, and control. It's amazingly quick edge-to-edge and super stable in variable conditions. The 106C has the perfect amount of float for the freshies in the morning yet continues to be forgiving and fun as the day goes on. Be warned this is not a sissy's ski. Demo this ski in different lengths before you buy. A little bit shorter might be a better call if you are not super strong or aggressive. [Read More](#)

Rossignol Rallybird Ti

137/102/127

16m @ 171cm

163, 171, 178

\$900

Tester: Juliette Willmann

The first time I tried the prototype of the Blackops Rallybird Ti was in Chile in the summer of 2019. My first thought: "Oh YEAH! This ski is just incredible. A perfect freeride ski!" After a few runs, I realized that the tail was a bit too stiff; it wouldn't slide when I wanted it to, and it required a lot of energy to make the ski turn on harder snow or steep terrain. During the debriefing, I explained what I was feeling. They agreed to make changes to the ski. ... Later that fall, I skied on the new version of the Rallybird Ti. Halfway through my first run, I stopped and said to the test boss, "BRAVO, J'adore ce ski!!" The balance, ease of turn initiation, and release is amazing. I can drive the skis where I want, charge through the turn or slide. The ski is not pushed around by bumps and crud, and it's playful. The titanium makes the ski strong enough for all situations, but because it is not a full sheet, it does not overpower my turn. I can ski steeps, powder, crust, jumps and groomed pistes all with the same control. I'm very proud to be part of the development of this ski. You'll see me skiing on it every day! [Read More](#)



Bindings Made Simple

Bindings are rugged little devices, but like any mechanical unit they can wear out quickly if not kept clean and lubricated.

At the beginning of the season, do a binding check. Annual shop inspections of the ski/boot/binding system will reveal any deviations in the release system that may require a binding to be re-set or retired if it won't release within a standardized range.

After a given binding model has been off the market for several seasons, the binding company's liability insurer can decline indemnity coverage for a model it deems obsolete due to its age and likely condition. If shop personnel inform you they "can't work on this binding," they're acting within established guidelines over which they have no control. No matter how much you once loved them, if your bindings are no longer indemnified, it's time for them to go.

--Jackson Hogen



DO:

Determine your binding setting. It's based on height, weight, age, boot sole length and skiing style. Any shop tech can help you do this in about 10 seconds.

Pick a binding with your setting number (often called a "DIN" number) near the middle of the binding range. If your setting is "6," a binding with a 3 – 10 scale should be fine.

Ask a salesperson about any special features that may make one binding more suitable for you than another.

DON'T:

Continue to use a binding the manufacturer no longer indemnifies.

Use a boot with a touring sole or walking sole that's incompatible with your Alpine bindings.

Use a boot with worn-out soles.

Mix a child's normal boot sole with an adult binding.

--Jackson Hogen

Tips for Success!

Gear for your kids: A good year to buy or lease

Most kids' skis are sold as systems, meaning they come with a specific binding. While renting gear for kids makes far more sense than purchasing, sharing gear this season may not be best given the pandemic. A seasonal rental is a good compromise and can cost under \$200 for skis, boots and poles.



Kids' Binding Intel

As for bindings, most kids' skis are systems, meaning they come with their own bindings.

If buying a child's binding à la carte, be sure it's a junior binding designed to accept children's norm boot soles. It will have a DIN scale of roughly 0.5 – 4.5.

Junior bindings that work with both junior and adult soles usually have a DIN scale from 2 – 7.

Children can seem to grow out of their equipment overnight – this is especially true when it comes to boots. Some shops recommend getting a boot a little larger especially if your child is in a growing phase. But be aware that if it's fitted too big, children risk having zero control over the skis as their feet slide forward in the outsized shell. It makes it difficult for children to put forward pressure on the front of the boot, which is essential for good skiing habits. It's a good topic to discuss with the bootfitter and the best option is to switch it out mid-season if your kids feet grow and the boot becomes too tight. Comfort is key!

When it comes to skis, shorter skis are the way to go for kids just learning how to ski. Go for a length that just reaches the chin. Shorter skis are easier to control and maneuver. Even if your child is on the tall side, consider a shorter length until he or she learn the necessary skills to control turning. Once skiing comfortably and in control, length can grow to nose height. By the time a child attains advanced ability, you'll have a clear idea of his or her needs.

What to Day Pack

BACK-TO-SKIING COVID CHECKLIST

by Iseult Devlin



Osprey Daylite Waist Pack (above)



Civil Mask (left)
and Hood (below) by
Blackstrap



Darn Tough
RFL Over-the-Calf Ultralight
snow sock (left)



What's in your winter kit for the coming year? Not the usual assortment of lip balm and hand warmers given the times. Treat yourself to a stylish new waist pack and pack it with Covid-era necessities for a safe, successful day on the slopes.

Obviously, you'll need to pack a mask or two as most resorts will be requiring them this winter, whether inside the lodge or out in the lift line. Sanitizer and wipes along with snacks are also go-to items that will come in handy.

New-style waist packs make it easy to bring just the basics. The [Osprey Daylite Waist Pack](#) is a compact and comfortable choice for only \$30, available in multiple colors. Made of a sturdy ripstop nylon, it has a zipper main compartment and an interior mesh organizer with key clip. The 38-mm webbing hip belt is adjustable.

Day packs also could sell quickly this season. The popular [Patagonia Black Hole pack](#) (available in 23, 25 and 32L) is a burly daypack perfect for carrying daily essentials. A durable pack made out of recycled fabric, it has stretch-woven pockets to carry a variety of water bottle shapes and a front stash pocket, among other storage features.

Some studies have shown that single-layer fleece and spandex gaiters are not the best masks for protecting against Covid-19. So consider trying [BlackStrap's](#) Civil Mask (\$16), a non-Med public safety style mask. It has dual layer construction with a perforated inner liner, an outer shell that's tightly woven, and 4-way stretch. The Blackstrap Hood (\$31.99) has the same dual layer

Winter 2021

construction on the Exo-Hinge, which keeps your face and ears warm but has single layer construction on the head and neck for helmet compatibility and thermal regulation.

For a large selection of easy-to-wear surgical-grade and KN95 masks, check out [Masterfit Enterprises](#), which also sells the hospital grade disinfectant VitalOxide in convenient 3 oz. travel sprays as well as reusable shields. Add-on visors for helmets are also showing up for the winter. The [Bouclier Visors](#) (\$55), designed to protect people from the sun, are stylish and fit right onto a ski helmet with provided helmet mounts.

While grab & go food and heated tents for expanded seating options may be the norm this year, you might want to bring some snacks in your pack. Go all out with sandwiches or keep it simple with a couple of energy bars and pocket bacon. Collapsible water bottles like the [Platypus](#) (REI) are another idea so you don't need to use cups.

Grab an extra pair of socks for your kit, too. They are lightweight and don't take up too much room. If you're like me, your feet may get damp so toes get colder. Plus, if you're trying on boots, there will obviously be no sock basket to use, so go prepared. This year, I'm going to try the new [Darn Tough new RFL Over-the-Calf Ultralight snow sock](#) (\$25). Call-outs for this sock are its ultralight weight, re-engineered flex window that has reduced material to ease bend where it's needed most and a performance upper. Its performance fit results in no slipping and no bunching. It's also antimicrobial, so repels bacteria and odor.

And, believe it or not, female urination devices are becoming popular with cyclists and hikers. Skiers may be next! Advertised as ideal for outdoor activities, the [GoGirl Pink FUD \(\\$13, Amazon\)](#) is small and travel friendly. Made of medical grade silicone, it has a patented splash guard and is moisture and germ resistant. Bring a Ziploc bag to put it in!



Platypus collapsible water bottle (left)

GoGirl Pink FUD (right)



Bouclier Visor (left)



VitalOxide disinfectant spray (left)

Patagonia Black Hole Pack (right)





Völkl Blaze 106 W

146/106/128

23m/14m/29m @ 165cm

158, 165, 172

\$700

Tester: Ingrid Backstrom

The first time I got on the Blaze 106 W, the off-piste conditions were borderline horrible (and I have low standards). I ventured gingerly off the rock-hard, icy piste, expecting maximum teeth-shaking chatter. Instead, the Blaze held an edge. I could feel the hard ridges of frozen snow beneath the skis, but the edges were biting, and the skis felt soft enough. I could make hoppy, GS-style turns, and I loved how the Blazes made it almost effortless to finish the turn, propelling me into the next turn. On icy groomers, I could hold an edge and go for bigger turns without chatter. I was blown away by the playfulness in this softer ski.

When I skied them for the first time in powder, they felt as light and nimble as they had been on the hard snow, while their shape and width gave them the perfect float. I was giggling with how playful they felt, and how much control I had with such minimal effort. When the sun came out and the snow got heavier, I could find my stable center position and power through the crud with a bit wider stance, the skis doing the work for me and enabling me to ski until the lifts closed—my favorite type of ski day. In short, the Blaze 106 is an everyday ski that excels in all conditions in a light and nimble package. [Read More](#)

Völkl Secret 102

140/102/123

19m/15m/21m @ 163cm

156, 163, 170

\$850

Tester: Edie Thys Morgan

When you go to Jackson Hole, you want one thing and one thing only. You want powder, and lots of it. You don't really care if your ski can carve GS turns without a whimper on firm groomers, or turn on a dime in the crux of a chewed up chute. You certainly don't care if it will hold on a marble hard wind-scoured ridge or if it can downshift without flinching when you get into a dicey tight spot that was a whole lot friendlier the last time you were in it. Why bother wondering if it can navigate sun-baked moguls without your knees and your back squawking and your teeth rattling out of your head?

No, you don't care about any of those things because you're going to be ripping down Rendezvous Bowl and hitting the Hobacks for 4,000 vert of uninterrupted champagne fluff. And then you wake up, and guess what? Your vacation just might come between epic dumps. When it does, you're going to wish you brought that one ski that can do all of the above.

The Secret102 may look like a fatty—and it's definitely got the girth to plow through the powder of your dreams and its skied-out aftermath—but it's no one trick pony. The ski gets happier as you dial up the intensity, which is also to say, it performs best when you're the boss. This is not the ski for the faint of heart or of flex. For best results, you need to stay centered and be prepared to move forward and drive. This ski loves momentum. If you want to be able to maneuver through the woods and chutes with frolicky ease and then run it out and hit the groomers with some heat, this is your ski. [Read More](#)





Advice for First Timers:
.....

TAKE A LESSON!

Shown here: Emily Poore

by Mary Jo Tarallo

Taking lessons from professionals is a great investment. Instructors know and can demonstrate technique and they also have experience dealing with customers who have varying skills. They understand that different individuals will respond differently to learning.

Snow sports industry research indicates that about 50 percent of beginners who purchase a lift, lesson, and rental package from a resort wind up not taking the lesson. The assumption is that one can “self-teach,” they feel that it is easier to rely on a friend or family member. Those who make that assumption should ask themselves, “Would I try to teach myself how to skydive or have a friend teach me?”

That analogy may be a stretch. But all too often, well-meaning companions over-estimate newcomers’ skills and escort them to a slope that is beyond their ability level. That often leads to an exercise in frustration for both parties rather than a sense of accomplishment. Most instructors can

“Would I try to teach myself how to skydive or have a friend teach me?”

readily assess those skill sets. They can tailor their programs accordingly.

Having an opportunity to “pick the brains” of professional instructors is an added value. Most instructors are a wealth of information on all aspects of the sports. By and large, they are more than willing to share that knowledge with others on issues within and outside the parameters of the lesson. Topics might include how to dress, types of equipment, tips on the most popular slopes, safety precautions and more.

Lessons are available all winter long at resorts throughout the U.S. Additional tips on skiing or snowboarding for beginners can be found at sunandsnowadventures.com.



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#8001 MEN'S RFL



#1884 MEN'S RFL
(THERMOLITE®)

KEEP YOUR GEAR IN SHAPE

BY JACKSON HOGEN

How long your gear remains in tiptop condition depends entirely on how well it's maintained. At least once a season, it's good to get skis tuned by a specialty shop, where tuning machines can reproduce a factory finish on the skis so they perform like new. Here are some tips on how to keep your equipment in optimal condition for better performance on the snow.

If you follow these maintenance tips, a well-made pair of skis can perform acceptably for 200 skier days, and may last longer if there's no major damage. Even inexpensive package skis have at least 100 days of useful life in them. Heavier and more aggressive skiers will usually wear out their skis—and anything else they own—faster than the lighter and more cautious.



DAILY EQUIPMENT CARE

SKIS: Wipe clean and dry. Check for dings on edges and bases.

BOOTS: Buckle all buckles with just enough tension to keep closed. Be sure soles are clean and no mud or debris is lodged in tread.

BINDINGS: Wipe clean, particularly at boot/binding interfaces.



REGULAR MAINTENANCE & AT THE END OF THE SEASON

SKIS: Get ski edges tuned by the shop. Or do it yourself: freshen up side edges with a light filing, followed by hand polishing. Fill cuts in bases if necessary. Wax, scrape and buff.

BOOTS: Visually inspect for sole wear and damage to buckles.

BINDINGS: Look for excessive wear, damage or missing parts. Inspect boot/binding interfaces.

2021 MASTERFIT BUYER'S GUIDE **SKI TESTERS**



PAULINE ASTRUC

Pauline Astruc is the communication and women's product manager for Dynastar. The new job allows her to combine her passion for mountain sports with work. She lives in Grenoble, France, close to the mountains where she spends most of her free time. "From steep skiing to free riding, I love practicing off the boundaries always with respect for the mountains, their stability and their hazards," she said.



INGRID BACKSTROM

Ingrid grew up as a casual recreational skier in the Seattle area. After graduating from college in 2000, she spent one year "ski bumming" at Squaw Valley. One year turned into many as she started entering freeride contests and had success. Her skiing caught the eye of video producers Matchstick Productions and in 2004 she entered the scene with a bang. Her incredible segment in MSP's Yearbook earned her Powder Video Awards both for Best Female Performance and Breakthrough Performance. In the following years, Ingrid kept pushing her limits, straightlining whole AK faces, dropping big cliffs with front- or backflips, and doing things that before only male skiers would do while skiing big mountains. Ingrid Backstrom has legitimised to call female skiers real big mountain rippers, and is far from being finished!



ROBIN BARNES

"I only get to ski about 275 days a year, but in that time, I ski all conditions. I love ripping it up in a GS course, frolicking in the bumps, or tracking up fresh snow." Robin is a member of the PSIA National Alpine Team. She is the Ski and Snowboard School Director in Portillo Chile. Robin is also a Contributing Author and Reviewer of PSIA's 32 Degrees Magazine.



KIM BEEKMAN

Kimberly Beekman is the former editor-in-chief of the late, great Skiing Magazine (RIP), and a longtime editor of SKI Magazine before that. She currently uses the titles of "freelancer" and "professional ski tester" as a beard to ski powder all over the world. She lives in Denver, Colorado, with her wonderful daughter and terrible cat.



JILL BEERS

Jill Beers is a 26-year-old East Coast transplant now living in Salt Lake City, Utah. She grew up racing on Vermont ice and has been recreationally skiing the Wasatch for four seasons. “I love to rip fast groomers in between storm cycles but a blower Utah pow day will always top the list,” she said. When she’s not taking laps on the Wildcat chair at Alta, she goes backcountry in search of fresh snow and avoiding crowds.



CLAIRE CHALLEN

Outside the rustic family ski cabin on Hudson Bay Mountain in Smithers, British Columbia, Claire strapped on her first pair of skis at the age of two. Since then she’s travelled the world as a racer, coach, TV host, journalist, action model and Rossignol athlete. Claire loves to travel and share her passion for skiing and now spends her winters teaching skiing anywhere she can. In the off-season you’ll find Claire whipping skiers and fitness enthusiasts into shape at her high-energy outdoor workouts. Claire is an ACA-CSC Performance Level III Coach, CSIA Level III Instructor and NCCP Level III.



SILVER CHESAK

Silver Chesak grew up in California wine country surrounded by the great outdoors. Skiing consumed his life, which led to a series of ski area jobs and a career as a professional skier. His accolades include finishing 9th in the 1995 Freeskiing World Tour. As a pro, he traveled around the world competing and creating beautiful images. “The experience taught me more than any college experience and introduced me to the interesting world of marketing,” he said. He eventually settled in the Mammoth area, working at Footloose Sports. He is currently the marketing/information manager.



MEGAN DINGMAN

Megan Dingman is a 22-year-old former collegiate ski racer turned big mountain skier from Park City, Utah. Racing from a young age, Dingman learned the fundamentals and went down the path of college racing. While in college, her mindset shifted to taking time to ski for herself. As a big mountain professional skier, she tries to ski as much as possible at Alta and Snowbird, where she is now based. “I strongly believe that there is no such thing as bad snow. My favorite days are when you need a snorkel for blower pow,” she said.



MADELINE DUNN

Madeline Dunn is a professional ski-mountaineer, avalanche educator, and outdoor sports model. She grew up ski racing in Michigan's Pine Knob resort and competed in the Junior Olympics and NorAm competitions. In addition to being a ski tester for Nordica, she has worked in the industry as a professional athlete, ski model and professional guide. Her ski career recently led her to teach certified AIARE Avalanche Education Courses. She lives in Aspen and recently started her own company Aspen Art Curation. *Photo by Alexis Ahrling.*



BROOKE FROELICH

Although she didn't learn to ski until her mid 20's, Brooke Murray has made up for lost time by skiing 90+ days most seasons. Before the kids came along, she was chasing after lines in the Wasatch backcountry. After the birth of her second child, Brooke began dividing her time between pulling the kids up backcountry roads on her skis, helping her 5-year-old learn to cruise down moguls at their home mountain in Colorado, and sneaking away for the occasional "mom ski trip" with friends. In the off season, Brooke loves to take her kids camping, biking, hiking, climbing, and doing anything to keep her quads and glutes strong.



ELAINE FURTNEY

El Furtney started skiing at three and grew up chasing her big brother around Okemo and Bromley before moving out to California. After graduating from UC Berkeley, where she raced with the ski team, El was hired as a ski instructor at Alpine Meadows, where she relearned everything she thought she knew about skiing. Today, she is equally at home dissecting the finer points of counter movement in technical skiing or finding the smooth line through the steeps and chutes. Her favorite non-skiing activity is mountain biking, both cross-country and downhill. Currently, El is the managing director of Squaw/Alpine's ski & snowboard schools. She is also an active examiner & clinician with PSIA-W.



BOB GLEASON

Gleason is founder and director of the BootDoctors in Telluride, Colorado. For 41 years he has been teaching the ski industry the science and art of fitting boots. Skiing has been his passion since he was a toddler. It is a rare day when the lifts are spinning that he is not on the mountain.



JACKSON HOGEN

Hogen has labored as ski designer, binding and boot product manager, freestyle competitor, bootfitter, lecturer on risk management, ski instructor, marketing director, resort feature writer, ski tester for 30 years and boot tester for 20, OLN and RSN television show host, extreme camp coach, Desperate Measures co-creator, four-time Warren Miller screenwriter, R&D chief, honorary Canadian, college racer, regular contributor to at least ten different ski magazines, and his guise as Pontiff of Powder, married Paul Hochman and Carrie Sheinberg in all ways but legally. He currently serves as a bootfitter at Bobo's in Reno, Nevada, when not providing all editorial services for Realskiers.com, including his weekly Revelation from the Pontiff of Powder.



CORTY LAWRENCE

Corty Lawrence was born on January 7, 1953, in Rutland, Vermont, to David J. and Andrea Mead Lawrence (of double Olympic gold medal fame). A member of a skiing family from the very start, he does not remember learning how to ski other than his mom and dad teaching him how to sidestep, sideslip, herringbone (how many know that one?), and kick turn. Skiing with peers and race coaching provided the remainder of his technical foundation. He has been in the ski business his whole working career. He met Sven Coomer, boot designer and a founder of Superfeet and Footloose Sports in Mammoth Lakes, California, and became a boot-fitter there in 1980. He has pursued that career since then. "Anything to keep me in my habits ... skiing the primary one," he says.



THERON LEE

Theron Lee has been part of the race culture for nearly four decades. He spent 16 years providing tech services for K2 athletes, the last three on the Europa Cup circuit. He moved on to a 6-year stint at Salomon and a 2-year tour with Nordica before transitioning to ski tuning at the retail level, where he has represented Dynastar and Lange for the past 17 seasons. His mastery of both machine and hand tuning techniques makes Lee the rare technician skiers ask for by name. He also maintains his Level 200 slalom coaching certification and remains active in junior racer development. Rounding out his technical qualifications, Lee is a Masterfit University instructor and world-class bootfitter. He currently plies his trade at Bobo's in Reno, NV.



STEVE OLSON

Steve Olson is a long time ski enthusiast and manager of Viking Ski and Snowboard Shop in Barrington, Illinois. Steve has been testing skis in the Midwest and Western United States for 28 years. He specializes in all-mountain skis and carving skis.



MCKENNA PETERSON

McKenna is the quintessential 'ski bum'. A former Freeskiing World Tour competitor, McKenna spends most of her winter backcountry skiing and chasing snow. She captains her family's 58' commercial fishing boat in Alaska during the summer months, catching salmon. McKenna has almost two decades of backcountry skiing experience with extensive trips around the world. She has worked with world renowned mountain photographers and has been a part of multiple film projects including Warren Miller, Matchstick Productions, Pretty Faces and numerous adventure documentaries. McKenna has been a K2 athlete and Alliance test team member since 2012.



KIM REICHHELM

Since starting Ski With Kim in 1989, Kim Reichhelm, has been hosting clinics, camps, corporate skiing, private trips and adventure travel for all ages and abilities around the world. A pioneer in the ski industry, Kim was a member of the US Ski Team, an NCAA All American for the University of Colorado, a professional ski racer and two-time World Extreme Skiing Champion. Most recently, Kim was named by Skiing Magazine as one of the "Most Influential Skiers of All Time." Sharing the sport she loves the most brings out the best in Kim. She is vivacious, fun-loving, detail-oriented and professional. When she is not traveling to resorts around the world, Kim is based out of Aspen, Colorado and Baja, Mexico.



KAYLIN RICHARDSON

Kaylin grew up in Minnesota skiing at Hyland Hills, a small spot with little vertical. After her first family trip to Colorado, she was hooked. "It was pure magic," she said, adding that the magic has never diminished for her. She started racing at age nine and made the US Ski Team at 15 years old. After ten years of racing internationally and competing in the Torino and Vancouver Olympics, she retired from competing on the World Cup. "I wanted to explore the mountains without gates and courses dictating where and when I could turn," she said. She began to discover the beauty and adventure of backcountry skiing. Now a reincarnated big-mountain skier, she travels to some of the most staggering corners of the world as a professional ski tester.



JIM SCHAFFNER

Schaffner has been working in the ski industry his entire adult life. Originally from the Midwest, he started in ski retail as a teen and was then picked to work with athletes in racing service for Salomon North America. His home is in Truckee, California, where he owns and operates The Start Haus ski shop. He is also a senior instructor with the Masterfit University Bootfitter Training Centers.



EDIE THYS MORGAN

Edie Thys Morgan, AKA Racer eX, is a two time Olympian, recovering downhill racer, freelance writer, and frequent contributor to Ski Racing and Skiing History Magazines. The reverse commuter grew up in Squaw Valley and now lives in NH with her family.



LARRY RHOADS

Larry Rhoads began skiing when he was 8-years-old in 1967. Growing up in Long Beach, CA, Mammoth Mountain was his place to be. He graduated from UCLA with a degree in economics. He joined the fire service and retired as a fire captain. He also served as a ski patroller and instructor at Mammoth. He has been working at Footloose Sports for the past decade and manages the rental tech department. He spends his winters in Mammoth and summers surfing and cycling in Long Beach.



JACK WALZER

General manager of Jan's LTD, which includes Jans MT Outfitter, White Pine Touring and Rennstall World Cup tuning service, Jack Walzer is a ski industry veteran. He is an avid Alpine skier, Nordic skier, MTB and road biker with a fly-fishing fetish. With over 30 years of specialty retailing experience, he has experienced all trends and product improvements over the years. He has served on numerous product advisory panels and has tested hundreds of skis over the years. He grew up in Vermont before settling in Park City. He is also a longtime bootfitter and equipment connoisseur.



JENNIFER SIMPSON WEIER

Jennifer Simpson Weier is a PSIA National Team member. She began instructing in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and has been teaching at Minnesota's Hyland Ski & Snowboard School and Vail Snowsports School. In the early season, usually at Loveland, she has held the Simpson Camp for instructors to help them kick off their season. She is a registered nurse and has worked at Minnesota's Fairview Ridges Hospital in the ER. Since she hasn't been going to the gym during this time, she does her own workouts to keep herself busy. She recommends Fitness for Skiing and Snowboarding offering exercises with video links and 12 weeks of programming. "The early end to last season made me realize how special it is to spend time on snow with friends," she shared.



EMMA WHITELANDE

Emma was raised in Vermont, navigating the bumps, trees and often variable conditions of her home mountain, Mad River Glen. During her college years she was drawn West to the Rocky Mountains and started to compete in big mountain skiing. She later found a love in coaching youth freeride skiing at Aspen Valley Ski Club. Emma is a member of the K2 Alliance and works with K2 to develop the women's ski line. She resides in Snowmass, Colorado with her husband, Stephen, and daughter, Merritt, who will be on skis shortly after taking her first steps.



CARA WILLIAMS

Cara Williams is a former world-ranked professional Big Mountain Freeskier & Ski Cross athlete. She spent over 10 years coaching and guiding with Extremely Canadian Steep Skiing Clinics in Whistler, South America and Europe. Cara also worked as PR and Communications Director of the Freeskiing World Tour, US Freeskiing Open, The Honda Ski Tour, and The North Face Masters of Snowboarding with Mountain Sports International, a Utah based sports marketing company. Since moving back to Canada, Cara has been working as the Editor-In-Chief of Escarpment Magazine, and is the Southern Ontario Division Head Coach at Georgian Peaks Ski Club—Alpine Canada's 2020 "Club of the Year."



JULIETTE WILLMANN

Juliette is a 23-year-old French freeskier based in Chamonix. She has spent the past two seasons on the Freeride World Tour and have worked closely with the development team at Rossignol on the new Blackops range.



ZACH YATES

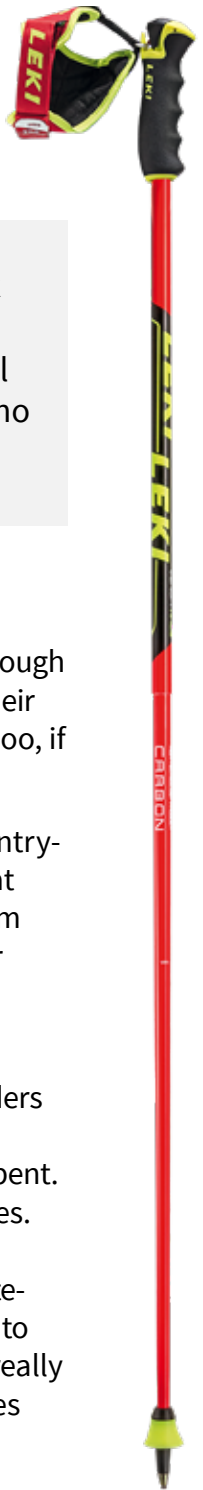
Zach Yates is co-owner of Footloose Sports in Mammoth Lakes, California. He did not grow up in a ski family and spent lots of time skateboarding and snowboarding. Eventually he started skiing at Mt. Hood Meadows when his mother got a job there. He became one of the youngest certified instructors at 15, teaching skiing throughout his high school years. He moved to Kirkwood where he met Silver Chesak. There he got his first chance to ski more technical terrain and with heroes of the time like Glen Plake and Darren Johnson. He's known as the tall quiet source of sophisticated race tunes in his local Mammoth area.

PHOTOGRAPH BY 1987

THE J.L. HILLMAN COMPANY YOUR HOME BATTERY FUEL



HOW TO PICK YOUR PERFECT POLE



If you're a new skier, you'll be amazed by the variety of options for a seemingly simple stick with a grip on one end and a point on the other. But entry-level and occasional skiers need not complicate a pole purchase. Getting the right size with a grip that feels comfortable will get the job done. Skiers who get hooked on the sport will inevitably want to upgrade if for no other reason but personal style. Here are some of the options to consider:

The one part of the pole you feel most intimately about is the grip. Better grips are more ergonomically shaped and multi-material, for better feel. All grips include some form of strap, which comes in a variety of materials and configurations. The most common strap is an adjustable loop designed so your hand can rest against the strap when skiing. The most common mistake is grabbing the grip by putting your hand down through the loop; the strap only works for you if you put your hand up through it.

Sizing poles is simple. Turn the pole upside down, so the tip is pointed upwards. Grab the pole under the basket and put the handle on the ground just in front of your feet. If the size is right, your elbow will be at a right angle, with your forearm parallel with the ground.

As with grips, shafts come in a variety of materials and configurations. The most widely used material remains aluminum, although carbon and carbon-laced composites have their fans. You can even find poles made of bamboo, if that fits your retro style.

Aluminum comes in many grades, from an entry-level price around \$40 to high-end styles that can cost as much as \$250. The best aluminum shafts are lightweight and tapered for better balance.

The first carbon poles were dubbed “pencil poles,” for these highly flexible, narrow cylinders were about pencil-thick. Carbon’s edge over aluminum is its resistance to crimping when bent. Today carbon is available in several shaft styles.

Composite shafts mix carbon with cheaper materials to provide a sturdy, lightweight alternative to aluminum at less expensive prices. And if you really want bamboo, this all-natural solution comes with a long, padded and strapless grip.

–Jackson Hogen

[Leki's Trigger S system grip](#) is a clever design favored by our test team and many other frequent skiers. It uses a link built into a lightweight glove harness (or proprietary glove) to clip into a latch on the top of the grip. It's a snap to click in and out while providing a secure link without the nuisance of a flapping strap.





Ski Talk at a Higher Level



Tricia Pugliese

Listen to what our members and industry icons are saying!

These guys work so hard to bring you honest, up-to-date info on the best equipment, the best skiing, and the most fun! Kudos to Phil and Tricia for the level of professionalism they bring to the ski industry! Thank you.

Genia Fuller Crews
Hall of Fame Member

Great information about all aspects of alpine skiing and great people all in one great place! #plugthepug

Doug Briggs

I love Pugski.com! Brings back great memories with past magazine advertisings while keeping us up to date with what's new and what's hot in the ski industry!

Ettore Casati

Great reviews and advice from someone who lives and breathes the ski industry!

Chad Bowen

Pugski is a great place for information on skiing, a civil, informed, knowledgeable and personable forum of caring and fun folk!

Mike King



**PROUD SPONSOR OF
U.S. SKI AND SNOWBOARD
HALL OF FAME**

Ski Reviews and Discussion Forum



pistil



headwear & accessories
Hood River, Oregon



Shown here: Chris Wilde

BOOT TEST HEADQUARTERS:

SILVER MOUNTAIN RESORT, KELLOGG, IDAHO

Still The Best Ski Resort You May Never Have Heard Of

If you've never heard of [Silver Mountain Resort](#), you've probably also never heard of its previous name, Silverhorn, or its name before that, Jackass Ski Bowl, which opened in 1967. Part of our original reason for moving the test to Silver Mountain two seasons ago was to see how the place is running under the vision of its new owner. In one of those rare ski business success stories, a Silver Mountain pass-holder, Tryg Fortun of Seattle, WA, purchased the resort in 2016 with the simple goal of making the Silver Mountain experience better for guests without significantly increasing the cost of a lift ticket or season pass.

Fortun's vision notwithstanding, the ski experience there is already a good one—so long as you like skiing untracked pow, especially in steep, open trees and without crowds. We don't want to make Silver Mountain sound too good, lest we irritate the locals, so we'll end this promotional paragraph with the mention that all the chairs remain old-school fixed grips which we kinda liked for some needed rest, a chance to fill out test details and the fact that the chairs always ran.

With adult day tickets at \$58 and early-bird pricing for adult season passes reduced this year to \$469, we think Silver Mountain remains one of the last great ski area bargains in the country.

--Mark Elling



At left: Marc Stewart, Emily Poore, Liz Elling



Boots in the Time of Covid-19

by Mark Elling

The world may not be changed forever but it certainly is for the near future, and as skiers we're all wondering how participation in our sport will be altered in the coming season. We bootfitter types (like you) wish this virus would simply disappear but in the case that it doesn't we're already changing how we do things as it relates to selling boots and working on them. We're optimistic that what we do will still be essential and possible and safe, and we know for a fact that getting in-person time with a skilled bootfitter is still the only way to buy the right boot and get it dialed--but here are some things to think about when strategizing your return to boot world.

The walk-in boot try-on or fitting session may simply be a thing of the past. Many specialty bootfitting operations may make pre-set appointments the only way to get with a bootfitter. Fit bench seating will be limited for sure, so at the very least expect a queue to get a time slot if walk-ins are still available. Be sure to call your shop ahead of time to see what its preferred scheduling program is and find out if you can bring family or friends with you—shopping space may be limited too. Many shops may also employ ways to maximize customer flow but limit in-person time, like collecting customer information ahead of an appointment and utilizing digital imaging systems to get initial assessment data in a waiting room style environment, so don't be surprised if your bootfitting session feels a little more clinical this season.

You can expect that good bootfitting operations will be sanitizing the seating and fit areas between customer interactions, as well as sanitizing touch tools like Brannock measuring devices and custom footbed casting systems. You can expect to be asked to wear a mask—your bootfitter at your feet (most likely also in a mask or face shield and possibly safety glasses) is downstream of your droplet dam, so please don't be offended, just help out him or her and play by the shop rules. Plan to bring clean ski socks or be prepared to buy a new pair—that try-on sock bin has probably been 86'd.

Trying on boots is a touchy subject, so to speak, so you can expect that either every boot tried on will have been disinfected with an approved spray before it was last re-boxed and returned to the stock room, or you, the customer, may be asked to don gloves for try-on.

More than anything the boot search and bootfitting experience this season will become more of a targeted, surgical strike where both the customer and bootfitter go in prepared to get some good work done, quickly, so that others can be helped, too. Boot modifications may be marked-up in-person but completed after hours with pick-up happening later, perhaps at the front of store. Custom footbeds may be molded at the time of appointment but similarly picked up later. One way you can maximize the effectiveness of your time on the bench is by knowing what type of boot you're looking for and perhaps having a short list of models in mind—we hope our reviews here speed you on your way. Good luck with your boot endeavors this season and we hope to see you in the shop and on the hill soon!

A NEW KIND OF BOOT TEST ...

Our late March Boot Test scheduled at [Silver Mountain Resort](#) in Idaho is typically attended by testers from around the country and by boot brand liaison teams, often comprised of boot design engineers, many of whom are from Europe. It became apparent that the boot test as we knew it was going to be different when boot companies began banning international travel due to Covid-19 concerns in early March. It only got more dire when the Italian government locked-down the entire region of Veneto, where the towns Montebelluna, Asolo and Treviso all reside—homes to Dalbello, Full Tilt, Head, Lange, Nordica, Rossignol, Roxa, Scarpa and Tecnica. It wasn't much later that ski areas began to shutter their ops, including Silver Mountain. The 2020 Boot Test was officially over before it began.

Luckily, a large part of our boot test team is comprised of shop owners, managers and bootfitters who had opportunities to both try-on new boot models at a variety of national and regional trade shows as well as a chance to ski many of this year's new models at regional on-snow demos in January and February and then even again in May when [Mt. Bachelor resort](#) in Oregon managed to re-open its doors for a limited time. This year's boot reviews are based both on testers' previous experiences with unchanged models and the team's combined tests of this year's new boots. No, it's not

the same as boots going head to head by category and width with similar snow and temperatures over a five-day test period, and as such we can't rightly rank boots, but we still feel confident that the information we're presenting here is objective and fair. We hope these selected Editor's Choice reviews help narrow the search for your next great boot and we're looking forward to joining you for an epic return to skiing this winter.

– Mark Elling



How We USUALLY Test Boots

BY MARK ELLING

We start the boot test process in early winter by working with our brand partners to determine which boots will be tested in each of five categories: Frontside, All-Mountain Traditional, All-Mountain Walk, All-Mountain Freeride and Backcountry. Virtually every boot brand participates in our boot test as it remains the only one like it, worldwide.

Unfortunately, that's as far as we got this year since the pandemic shuttered ski areas, including our test site at Silver Mt., ID. Instead we were forced to use DATA and reviews from previous years on holdover models as well as our impressions from skiing new models at on-snow demos held in January and February.

Normally, our test team is comprised of a core group of Masterfit University trained bootfitters and boot sellers who know boots inside and out (and who also are good skiers and have been testing boots for many years). We also invite ski industry professionals like coaches, instructors, patrollers, rental technicians and resort administrative staff to test boots--these are folks that spend long hours in ski boots for many days throughout the season and know what skiers are looking for in terms of fit and performance. On top of that, we have testers that are avid skiers that come to us from outside the industry--doctors, photographers, marketing folks, moms and dads.



Shown here: Kori Coggin, Mark Elling

Boots are tested using a phone app unique to Masterfit for a variety of elements in five key parameters: Anatomical Fit & Initial Feel, Dynamic Balance, Edge Power & Fore-Aft Support, Quickness & Agility and Convenience Warmth & Features. Within each of those broad parameters testers consider many factors. For example, Anatomical Fit and Feel is broken down into specific sub-sets, like entry-exit, stance, flex feel, closure system and individual fit tension scores for *toebox*, *forefoot*, *navicular*, *lateral column*, *ankle*, *heel*, *instep* and *calf*. Good boot testers can evaluate all these elements fairly, even when a boot isn't necessarily *right* for his or her foot—and they enjoy it. Yes, strange indeed.

This year we reduced the total number of boots in the test to offer reviews of only a select crop of new and unchanged models, and as such, we've awarded each of these boots our 2021 Editor's Choice award. To be as fair as possible, we present them in alphabetical order within each category and width. Thanks for checking them out here and be sure to click the link on any model of interest back to its complete review at www.bootfitters.com where you'll find loads more info as well as which America's Best Bootfitters dealers close to you will have that boot.



Frontside Boots

For technically skilled, aggressive skiers who aren't willing to compromise when it comes to ski edge driving power on hard snow and at high speeds, the Frontside category boots will deliver the goods. These boots aren't World Cup "plug"-style race boots, but they're only one step away. Here, you don't have to lace-up your liner before you put on the shell, and these narrows won't require the kind of shell modifications that plug boots do. But they put skis on rail and trench at a level that will suit all but the burliest of gate bashers.



Shown here: Mike Evans



MEN'S BOOTS: FRONTSIDE



Head Raptor 140 RS

Last: 96 Flex: 140

\$825

The last time we tested the Raptor 140 RS, testers said it was like seeing a big arena show featuring your favorite rock band from the 70s, and they *didn't* play any of their new crap—they played all the killer old stuff and sounded every bit as good! The Raptor 140 RS *has been, and remains, the perfect Frontside boot*, said testers—so *why would you change it*—and they haven't over the years, save some minor cosmetics and liner tweaks (now with a Liquid Fit liner). With only such minor changes, the boot is *a refreshingly aggressive throwback*, commented veteran testers. [Read More](#)

Salomon S/Max 130 Carbon

Last: 98-104 Flex: 130

\$975

Testers say that speed is less gateway drug and more invitation to the party when it comes to the S/Max 130 Carbon, as they only got stronger and more connected to the arc the faster they went. They've called the fit *painted-on* and *gapless*—essentially perfect for the low-volume foot and instep. Built to absolutely crush early morning groomers, testers couldn't get enough of the close-to-snow feel of the lower shell and directly linked attitude of lower leg to cuff. This remains a responsive, lightweight ride that puts stiff skis on edge and hammers hard snow into submission with ease.

[Read More](#)



All-Mountain Traditional Boots

This broadest boot category offers skiers the widest array of fit and on-area performance options and, as such, commands the largest part of the boot market. All-Mountain Traditional boots are available in narrow, medium and wide lasts and in a huge spectrum of stiffnesses to suit skiers of any size or ability. The All-Mountain Traditional boot as we defined it for our boot test does not have a releasable cuff for hiking—it's designed to perform everywhere on the hill, but it typically won't stray far from the chairlift.



Shown here: Kevin Gabriel



MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-NARROW



NEW!

Atomic Hawx Ultra 130 S

Last: 98 Flex: 130

\$850

In this, its fifth encore performance for our test team, the new Hawx Ultra 130 S continues to impress, reminding testers why it consistently scores within the top group in a highly competitive category. *Light, tight, and right* is what testers still agree on, comparing its fit to cushioned compression socks. Boasting a snug fit everywhere, especially in the cuff, but with extra room in the toebox and forefoot, testers applauded its connection to the ski. It remains *tall-ish* on the leg with a spring-loaded flex feel. Testers love it in all conditions. It returns this year with an all-new Mimic Platinum liner and a stealthy Dark Knight look.

[Read More](#)

NEW!

Dalbello DS Asolo 130

Last: 98 Flex: 130

\$900

The DS Asolo 130 is a traditional, 4-buckle overlap narrow-width boot made with regular ol' polyurethane in the shell and cuff. *Bravo!* Take the creature comforts of the medium width DS, keep its Power Cage shell construction to maintain strength while reducing weight, add a little of the race-bred fit characteristics from the DRS line (while keeping the convenience and traction of GripWalk soles) and you've got one in the winner's column. Last year's Grilamid-built DS Asolo Factory 130 is still around, but both boots sport all new liners this year—good move, testers said. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Fischer RC4 The Curv GT 130

Last: 96 Flex: 130

\$799

This is an all new player on the All-Mountain narrow field for Fischer. The RC4 The Curv GT is a completely unique animal this year, distinct from the Podium race boot line, with its own mold, new forward lean mechanism, new liner, and new shell material. Its last is designed from the data pulled from almost 30,000 scans from Fischer's iFit 3D foot scanning system, and those pointed toward this new 96mm as the optimal All-Mountain narrow shape. Fischer core technologies like Vacuum and Somatec stance position remain on board but with a move toward great out-of-box fit and performance. [Read More](#)





K2 Recon Pro

Last: 98 Flex: 140
\$850

The new Recon Pro delivers on our test team's wish for a stronger-feeling Recon. Beefed to a 140-flex rating using a Pebax cuff and all new PowerFit Pro liner, this is the Recon we've been waiting for. With a stealthy, murdered-out look and an optional power plate in the box for an even burlier flex-feel, it's apparent that this boot means business and will appeal to those all-mountain chargers who felt the Recon 130s were a touch under-gunned. However, all this manliness doesn't mean the Recon Pro doesn't remain what testers have called *the most comfortable boot in the category*—that it still is. [Read More](#)

Nordica Promachine 130

Last: 98 Flex: 130
\$850

As you buckle, the engine revs! Last year, out of more than 20 individual tests, the comments about a *tight yet perfectly-mapped fit* were virtually universal. The combination of a snug, deep-seated heel fit with just enough room over the top of the foot for circulation and uniformly firm contact throughout the rest of the Promachine 130 had testers fired up to ski. The light-but-strong Tri Force shell construction did not disappoint while on edge (trenching) or in rapid fire transitions to set the next rail. It was the highest scoring boot in its category and this year remains unchanged outside of cosmetics. [Read More](#)



Tecnica Mach1 LV 130

Last: 98 Flex: 130
\$900

Last year the Mach1 LV 130 gained new momentum with its mold makeover, testers said, and pushed it onto the podium in the All-Mountain narrow group. It's unchanged this season and they still like the revised, taller-feeling cuff and its firm but well-distributed feel against the shin. The Custom Adaptive Shape liner employs more customizable material throughout, and testers appreciated the tongue's revised design over the top of the foot. Its stance and balance scores topped the field last time around, and testers say its power and quickness is still limited only by the driver. One tester summed that up—*skis like it should, fast!* [Read More](#)



MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-MEDIUM



NEW!

Atomic Hawx Prime 130 S

Last: 100 Flex: 130
\$850

The Hawx Prime 130 S exoskeleton returns unchanged this season and for good reason. Testers said that its winning combination of light weight, instant connection, and strong skiing skills remains intact. Testers also noted that the thin-shell wall polyurethane put the foot in direct contact with the ski and snow surface and gave it high marks for its feel and precise steering moves without being twitchy. The new Mimic Platinum liner improves the already snug heel and ankle pockets to provide a solid anchor within the medium-width fit, and its slender lower leg grip flares nicely at the top for muscular calves. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Full Tilt First Chair 130

Last: 99 Flex: 12/130
\$850

We've tested this boot in many different iterations and stiffnesses, and while it has always appealed to cabrio stalwarts and jib kids, for the old guard, there's always been the nagging question about whether the Full Tilt spiral Intuition liner has somehow besmirched the legendary Raichle Flexon lineage—*oh, for a traditional tongue liner again (and made with wool! they say)*. Well, no heavy mid-80s wool liner in this boot, sorry guys. But this year you can have a traditional-tongue-style Intuition Pro Tongue liner, thank you very much. Yeah, we're old-school, and we're pretty stoked about this new development! [Read More](#)



Lange RX 130

Last: 100 Flex: 130
\$850

Last year, the Lange RX 130 continued its domination of the medium-width group, with our test team noting its simple recipe for success: ease of use (*goes on and off well, and it's warm*), anatomical fit (contours around the shape of the foot and leg), power and stability (*real plastic drives the ski damply, at speed*), quickness and agility (*goes where you tell it, not the other way around*), balance (*the Lange angles work*). Pretty simple, testers said, *it's a great boot*. It returns this year unchanged, and testers agreed that it maintains its status as the medium-width, performance benchmark to judge all others by. [Read More](#)



Nordica Speedmachine 130

Last: 100 Flex: 130

\$800

Last year's Speedmachine 130 returned to our boot test beefed up with a revision made to the 3-D Cork Fit Primaloft liner that tightened and firmed the interior feel throughout. Testers said that this modification transformed the formerly fluffed Speedmachine to a fully-hardened All-Mountain medium-width warrior, as evidenced by the highest score in the edge power and transmission category. However, testers assured that it hadn't lost its signature easy entry and well-loved, evenly-draped Nordica initial fit. It's just toughened up enough to be perfect—and remains so this year with only a graphic update, which testers appreciated. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Tecnica Mach1 MV 130

Last: 100 Flex: 130

\$900

The medium volume Mach1 MV line-up got Tecnica's revision love this season with an all new mold shape for the shell and cuff, along similar lines to the LV's more anatomical shape makeover last year, and testers said it nails the right mix of tight *here* and relaxed *there* for the average foot. Unique to the MV is the new T-Drive shell-to-cuff connector technology, which anchors the boot spine with loaded-up energy and simultaneously allows for softer, better wrapping plastic over the top of the foot. Testers said the combination creates a more lively, stronger feel and a higher comfort level, too. [Read More](#)



MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-WIDE

NEW!



Fischer RC4 The Curv One 130

Last: 101 Flex: 130

\$799

The all-new The Curv One 130 takes the top spot on Fischer's all-mountain wide team, sitting close to the hike-enabled cousin Ranger One 130 and just to the roomier side of medium-width fixed-cuff bro, The Curv 130. The Curv One boots are designed for the widest common foot shapes based on over 25,000 3D foot scans using Fischer's iFit device. They come appointed with all the same performance tier features as the medium and narrow Curv boots, along with a specially modifiable, easy-access liner tongue for tricky fits over the top of the foot. [Read More](#)

Head Edge Lyt 130

Last: 102 Flex: 130

\$725

The Edge lives on, again and again! And testers agreed that the Edge Lyt 130 is the best wide boot we've ever tested from Head, and last year, it was in our top two wide rides of the test. Testers could find no fault with this boot—its liner is lush but not spongy, its flex feel is solid but even on the shin and adequately cushioned, and its ability to transmit foot and leg movements to the ski was top notch. For a lightweight model, its edge power and stability were a welcome surprise. *Bravo Head!* It returns this year unchanged outside of minor cosmetic updates. [Read More](#)



Lange LX 130

Last: 102 Flex: 130

\$750

Lange always said they'd never build a bucket of a boot, and while testers said the LX 130 was the second widest fitting boot of the group last year, they also proved Lange right. Coupled with the comment that it fit like a warehouse, one tester made clear that he also had no problem controlling the ski. Testers said things like *huge width but with definition*, but assured us that the classic Lange fit, stance, and performance heritage lives on here—just in outsized proportions! The comfiest Lange we've ever tested, and one of the very best performance wides we've found. [Read More](#)





Rossignol Allspeed 120

Last: 102 Flex: 120
\$600

The Allspeed Elite is narrow, the Allspeed Pro is medium and the Allspeed is wide. Every year testers comment that as the lasts get wider, they maintain the Rossi performance lineage across the board; stance angles, closure, and energy transfer to the ski all hold true. Testers dig the Allspeed 120's tallish cuff against the leg and a strong but energetic flex feel—not rigid, not soft but somewhere right in between with a proper stopping spot. The fit over the midfoot and into the instep is generous, and with the well-flared calf the Allspeed offers enough room for some manly men here. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Roxa R/Fit 130 IR

Last: 102 Flex: 130
\$750

A lightweight, roomy, comfy, easy-on, go-everywhere, do-everything, what-else-could-you-want kinda boot is how testers described the new R/Fit 130 IR. Roxa took last year's 120, juiced up the horsepower a notch, and threw in a full-thermo Intuition liner for a more personalized (and slightly more open) fit. Testers said that without molding, it's on the snug side of the wide group, but they loved the evenly anatomical contours and just enough grip on the heel and ankle. They said the flex feel is progressive and strong but still cushioned just enough against the shin. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Salomon S/Pro HV 130

Last: 102-108 Flex: 130
\$900

Our test team was stoked to get our feet into the new S/Pro HV 130 to see how the first true performance wide ride from Salomon—since the Mission RS—would feel. Its design is modeled after the popular S/Pro medium width, but opened up in width, instep height, and cuff circumference. Testers liked the way the amplified room along the shell's lateral border of the foot let the foot sit flat to the floor with room to spread out, and said that while the cuff grips the leg closely, it flares enough at boot top to handle the bigger calf that probably goes with this foot. [Read More](#)



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WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-NARROW



NEW!

Atomic Hawx Ultra 115 S W

Last: 98 Flex: 115

\$725

In addition to graphic changes made to this category star, the Hawx Ultra 115 S gets a completely new Mimic liner designed to start with a better anatomical shape but closely heat mold to a perfect match for the foot and shin. Testers maintain *she's still stripped and ripped*—right down to the bare essentials of what makes a ski boot great. They like the new, well-shaped liner that *provided just the right amount of padding for comfort without muting the connection of the foot and leg with the shell*, and said that *the boot and body felt morphed together into one cohesive performance unit!* [Read More](#)

NEW!

Dalbello DS Asolo 115 W

Last: 97 Flex: 115

\$800

The DS Asolo 115 W is a traditional, 4-buckle overlap narrow-width boot made with polyurethane in the shell and cuff. Testers felt last year's Grilamid-built Asolo Factory was good for the weight-conscious, but they'd prefer a couple hundred more grams and the dampness and stability of PU, thank you very much. Take the creature comforts of the women's medium width DS, keep its Power Cage shell construction that maintains strength while reducing weight, add a little of the race-bred fit characteristics from the DRS line, and you've got one on the podium. And it's got an all-new liner this year. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Fischer RC4 The Curv GT 115 W

Last: 96 Flex: 115

\$699

The RC4 The Curv GT 115 W is a completely unique beast this year, distinct from the Podium race boot line, with a unique women's specific mold, new adjustable forward lean mechanism, new liner, and new shell material. Its last is designed from the data pulled from almost 30,000 scans from Fischer's iFit 3D foot scanning system. Fischer core technologies like Vacuum and Somatec stance position remain on board but with a move toward great out-of-box fit and performance. Testers like the stealthy bootfitter's access to the liner tongue for clean modifications made over the top of the foot. [Read More](#)





Head Raptor 110 RS W

Last: 96 Flex: 110
\$725

After receiving many perfect scores the last time we tested it, the Head Raptor 110 RS W returns with a new Liquid Fit liner. The boot dominated the women's Frontside category and scored highly enough to put it in the top 3 of all the women's narrow All-Mountain boots last time around. Testers have simply loved this boot over the years for how well it made them ski and it's been hard for the new Nexo narrow to compete with the traditional construction found here for aggressive female skiers with truly low volume fit needs. This remains one of the most snug narrows going, testers declared. [Read More](#)

NEW!

K2 Anthem Pro

Last: 98 Flex: 120
\$850

The Anthem Pro answers our testers' wish for an upgrade to last year's Anthem 110. At a sturdy 120 flex with a rebuilt Pebax cuff and an all-new, thicker, denser PowerFit Pro liner, the Anthem Pro is the performance-based answer to the question: Can a boot be too comfortable? Believe it or not, that was a negative on the Anthem 110's report card last year. The Pro puts that notion to rest, literally squeezing its former doubters into happy submission—tight like a 98mm should be and ready to ground-pound the entire mountain, assuming it's guided by an aggressive skier. [Read More](#)



Lange RS 120 SC

Last: 97 Flex: 120
\$700

In the past ten years of testing the RS 120 SC, our women's test team has appreciated one thing most of all—Lange has never ruined this boot by changing it too much! Yes, it's seen a shell change and a variety of liner upgrades, but those changes have come incrementally and have always enhanced an already great boot. Now, four years after our team's last go-round, the RS 120 SC comes made with Dual Core polyether in both the shell and cuff. Our team doesn't know what might possibly improve the boot going forward, but they're sure it's one of their favorites as it is. [Read More](#)



Nordica Promachine 115 W

Last: 98 Flex: 115

\$750

Edged for a category first place last year by a mere two-hundredths and sporting a nearly perfect score for edge power and stability, the Promachine was an absolute powerhouse that needed not a single fit modification out of the box, according to testers. Lively and balanced, it's also tall and firm against the leg, and they liked that just fine. This is a real skier's boot, testers said, the kind that appeals to the all-mountain shredder who might often opt for a stiffer men's model. One tester commented, *this boot has your back!* This year, the teal highlights are gone—oh well. [Read More](#)

Rossignol Pure Elite 120

Last: 98 Flex: 120

\$750

The Pure Elite 120 has always earned the highest marks for its balanced stance, rapid-fire quickness, and its high level of comfort, warmth, and convenience. Testers remind not to let its fuzzy, furry liner fool you into thinking that this isn't a top-tier performer. They said it's one of the stiffest and strongest of all the women's all-mountain boots, and while it is the roomiest of the narrow class in virtually every fit parameter, it doesn't stray into true medium volume. Ease of use, good looks (testers liked this year's graphic update), and great skiing get it perennial gold. [Read More](#)



Salomon S/Max 120 W

Last: 98-104 Flex: 120

\$850

The debut of the women's S/Max was met with widespread tester approval last year, and it returns unchanged for another go this season. While some boots are powerful but heavy, and others might be agile and light yet unstable, testers said that the S/Max 120 W combines all performance elements in a perfectly even blend. They also liked its true to narrow class fit—very snug in all the right places. One tester said, *look out ladies, there's a new boss b!#(% in town—powerful, driven, and tight.* Very quick Custom Shell HD molding made subtle but good changes, they said. [Read More](#)





RECON PRO

**A NO-COMPROMISE BOOT
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Forged out of our award-winning PowerLite shell and sporting a stout 140 flex, the ALL NEW K2 RECON PRO is the powerful performance boot you've been waiting for. Featuring a PowerFit Pro Liner, a 98mm last, fully heat-moldable shell, and all the customizable features you expect from K2, the Recon Pro offers top-end performance - from burly, technical lines to pulling G-forces on the corduroy - while tipping the scales at a svelte 1740 grams.

K2SNOW.COM

NEW!**Tecnica Mach1 LV Pro W****Last: 98 Flex: 120****\$840**

The slender-foot gals get another upgrade on the Mach1 LV W this year with a new, heat customizable tongue that molds to the shin both internally via a layer of EVA foam and externally by way of highly adaptable Surllyn plastic (also found on the rear part of the cuff where it can be molded to better match the lower leg and calf). Testers universally applauded the step up to 120 flex in the Pro W as a solution to the 105's occasional fold-over fails for aggressive skiers in rugged terrain. It's one of the tightest in the *rightest* of ways, they said. [Read More](#)



THE REAR-ENTRY YOU'RE WILLING TO WEAR

Nordica HF 110**Last: 102 Flex: 110****\$700**

The [Nordica HF 110](#) heralds Nordica's *Return of the Rear Entry* in an attempt to capture the *dammit-can't-get-my-boots-on* market, and we bootfitters agree there's a need—hard to get on boots are a barrier to entry (get it?) in a sport where our demographic is, well, *maturing*! HF stands for Hands-Free and our testers put exactly that to the test. Flipping up its rear-latching buckle (a new take on the old-school rear entry style with a spin-dial cable adjustment) opened up the boot's mega maw with one flip and even with the ratchet-strappy lower buckle still closed each tester was able to stuff his foot in without trouble--*no hands ma!* We were even able to close the rear buckle using our other foot, and strategically located holes on both buckles allow for a ski pole-tip-levered-release to avoid ever having to bend over. There's an 85-flex women's version and a heated option for both the men and women.

—Mark Elling



WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-MEDIUM

NEW!



Atomic Hawx Prime 115 S W

Last: 100 Flex: 115

\$725

A couple years back, Atomic went and took a risk to with one of our favorite women's boots, the Hawx Prime W. They changed her very mold and her name, and following in slender sister Ultra's tracks, they slimmed its wall-thickness for the sake of weight reduction. We thought she looked good before, but we have to hand it to her, the new Hawx W fits better, skis better, and does both at a fraction of its former weight. Now Atomic brings a 115-flex version of the Hawx Prime W to the game with all those same design elements in place and an all-new hyper-custom Mimic liner. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Fischer RC4 The Curv 105 W

Last: 99 Flex: 105

\$599

The new The Curv 105 W utilizes the same shell mold as last year's My Curv women's medium boot, but that is where the similarities end. The Curv 105 W incorporates new shell material, an entirely new liner, and new shell hardware. The last time we tested the My Curv 110 it was one of our test team's favorite All-Mountain boots for its even, customizable fit, its progressive flex feel, and dialed stance angles. They liked the way this boot skied through a variety of terrain and in every turn radius. We're excited to add this new successor to our growing list of favorite Fischer boots. [Read More](#)





Lange RX 110 W

Last: 100 Flex: 110
\$750

Testers this year have reiterated that the RX 110 W is the industry standard for how a medium width performance boot should fit and ski. Last year one tester said, *The boot's best qualities? All of them—the RX delivers every year, again and again.* There have been virtually no negative comments about this boot for the past three years running, with unanimous agreement on its super neutral, dialed stance angles and near-perfect scores for edge power and stability at speed. They call its V-shaped fit (party in the front, business in the back) *flawless*. [Read More](#)

Nordica Speedmachine 115 W

Last: 100 Flex: 115
\$750

Our test team liked the step up to the 115 flex women's Speedmachine last year, saying the additional horsepower helped drive big skis well without feeling unmanageable—and so they stepped it up to a second place finish in the group. This year they still love the vertical room over the top of the foot and said that the ankle pockets are firmly performance oriented (*read: mold the 3D Cork Fit liner*). They appreciated its useful features, like the Power Driver power strap spoiler, adjustable calf, and a functional cuff adjustment for dialing lateral stance angles—all with a high comfort to performance ratio. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Tecnica Mach1 MV 105 W

Last: 100 Flex: 105
\$780

Year after year, test after test, the Mach1 MV 105 W has amazed our test team by how well it pairs comfort with downhill performance, and this year's all-new version is no different. One tester said of the MV, *there's a magical power fairy onboard* for translating its luxurious fit into deep trenching edge engagement. Another's comment was that the MV *takes any skier to the next level*. A third said, *cushion that rips*. All mentioned that the polyurethane shell felt strong underfoot, and they agreed that now it has an even better fit across the bony top of the foot. [Read More](#)



WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN TRADITIONAL-WIDE



Head Edge Lyt 100 W

Last: 102 Flex: 100

\$600

Head did right with their wide one—that was what one tester said of the new Edge Lyt 100 W, which returns unchanged this season save minor cosmetic changes. And that sentiment has been mirrored universally among the team. A fault-free performance from this light and airy cavern was what they agreed on—no problems with fit for the high volume foot and leg, no problems with speeding up the cadence when needed, no problems putting a big ski on edge at speed, and certainly no problems sliding this one on and off. Extra leverage buckles and Liquid Fit liner technology sweeten the deal. [Read More](#)

Roxa R/Fit W 95 W

Last: 102 Flex: 95

\$500

Last year our testers found their favorite wide Roxa boot ever in the R/Fit W 95, and this year it returns with the addition of GripWalk soles. It has an ample toebox and forefoot for impressive *spreadability*, testers agreed, and it skis with more gumption than they expected out of a 95 flex (it's stiffer than that, they said). They also agreed that the cuff is slightly taller and more snug than average for the category, so will favor the longer, more slender legged. It's a traditional polyurethane build, but testers said it's still light on the foot for all-day charging. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Salomon S/Pro HV 90 W

Last: 102-108 Flex: 90

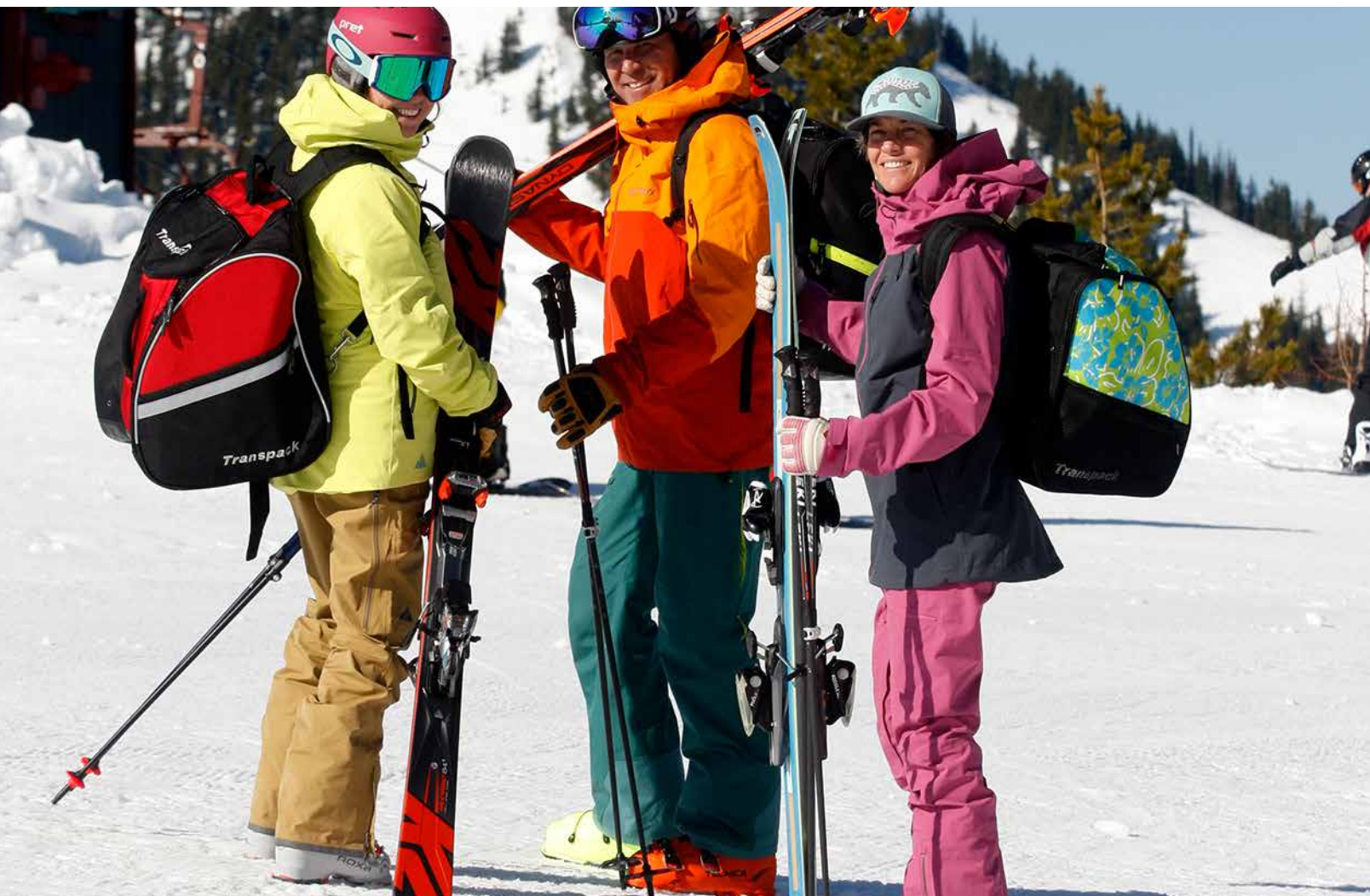
\$675

Testers who loved the S/Pro medium width all-mountain boot last year but wanted a touch more room—*everywhere*—get it this year in the new S/Pro HV 90 W. The entry and exit is even easier than the medium S/Pro due to increased instep height, and testers said the forefoot and toebox room is massive but not quite cavernous. They liked the open calf fit of the HV, though the upper cuff still grabbed the leg with performance-minded intentions. They said the flex feel is even and a touch stronger than the listed 90 and said this was the highest performing wide ride from Salomon they'd ever tested. [Read More](#)



All-Mountain Walk Boots

Take a go-everywhere, do-anything All-Mountain boot and give it a cuff release for more convenient walking and standing around in lines and you get the perfect match for comfort-conscious skiers who may do more packing of kids to lessons or sunny bar-deck apres lounging than they will boot packing along a wind-shredded ridgeline. These boots often have more insulated, cushioned liner construction and in our tests they have trended more toward the medium and wide side of the fit spectrum.



Shown here: Emily Poore, Marc Stewart, Liz Elling



MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN WALK-MEDIUM & WIDE



Dalbello Panterra 120

Last: 102 Flex: 120

\$650

Lighter and more agile-feeling underfoot than older versions, the Panterra 120 continues to please our crew with a re-styled walk mode and a more streamlined exterior. A new mold last year gave the Panterra a ripped new look borrowed from the medium-width Dalbello DS's Power Cage construction. On snow, testers thought this newest version was crisper and stronger than its predecessor—lighter and stronger, without the turbo-lag of old. The fit still remains generous in the toebox, forefoot, and up through the instep (where it ranked in the top 5 hike mode boots for most room last season). [Read More](#)

K2 B.F.C. 100 Heat

Last: 103 Flex: 100

\$700

Testers love the massive amount of hangar space in the B.F.C. 100 Heat, calling it (like the other B.F.C.s) *absolutely, positively, without question, hands down a whole lotta room!* In fact, it has had the roomiest scores of the boot test for three years running in instep height, navicular, ankle pockets, and calf—and third roomiest of the bunch in the toebox and forefoot. So yeah, large feet and legs belong here! Testers continue to applaud how well the B.F.C.s ski—much better than they've expected for something so big and luxurious. In addition to its sweet *apres* mode, it has an on-board Thermic heating system.

[Read More](#)



Rossignol Alltrack Pro 120

Last: 100 Flex: 120

\$650

The Alltrack Pro 120 is reviewed in the so-called All-Mountain Walk category because it has a hike modality but no tech binding compatibility. But don't let that fool you! This boot is not about walking, it is all about skiing! The Alltrack Pro line-up remains one of our test team's favorites for a near-perfect combination of convenience, warmth, comfort, and absolute skiing power—all wrapped up in a releasable cuff. Where many walk mode boots sacrifice performance for convenience gains, the Alltrack Pro flips that script, maintaining a downhill performance priority, and takes creature comforts and walkability in stride. [Read More](#)





Roxa R/Fit Hike 110

Last: 102 Flex: 110

\$575

Last time around testers didn't see this one coming! The sleeker and lighter R/Fit Hike 110 was a sleeper contender for best walk-mode boot. Testers said its shape was surprisingly well-matched to the foot and leg, with a firm enough grip to light up quick turns on demand but without negatively affecting comfort. Testers called it *a vacation home for your feet* and *the best newcomer to the boot test*. Its lowest scores were for fore-aft support but testers said aggressive skiing average and smaller guys with thicker feet will be just fine, and intermediate to advanced skiers of all sizes will find a great all-mountain option here

[Read More.](#)

WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN WALK MEDIUM & WIDE



Dalbello Panterra 95 W

Last: 101 Flex: 95

\$600

Last season, an all-new women's performance three-piece line-up took up the mantle from the softer, *cruise-ier* Kyra boot. Our testers loved the stronger, quicker Panterra 105 W for its higher performance character, but felt it ran stiffer than billed and a tad firm against the shin. Enter the Panterra 95 W this season—a softer and gentler beast of a cabrio that clocks in at 100 bucks less. The Panterras are all supremely easy to slide on due to their 3-piece architecture, and spiral ID (Intuition-Dalbello) liners are available in top tier models, which bump up custom moldability and ease on and off. [Read More.](#)



K2 B.F.C. W 90 Heat

Last: 103 Flex: 90
\$700

Many testers rated the fit of the top-shelf B.F.C. W 90 Heat last year in 5s across the board (that's the roomiest score possible) and another's fit commentary was just one word: huge. Another tester, discussing the initial fit and feel, said, *put this boot on and try not to smile—I dare ya!* This one's big for sure and returns unchanged this season, rating most room in almost every fit parameter except the ankle and heel where testers said there was a little more retention. They did also say it skied head and shoulders above their expectations—*sleeper slippers*. [Read More](#)

Rossignol Alltrack Pro 110 W

Last: 100 Flex: 110
\$700

The women's top of the line Alltrack Pro has gained a reputation as the perennial best-looking boot of the test, and its pale Ice Blue hue still wins over our test team. They said that while it has a hike mode, it looks, feels, and skis like a full-on Alpine boot, with no power or quickness demerits. The fuzzy liner eases entry and exit, but testers also said it belies the beast within—this is an expert's boot that still welcomes intermediates. The solid and damp Dual Core polyurethane shell mates with a lighter, snappier Dual Core polyolefin cuff to marry power and agility seamlessly. [Read More](#)



Roxa R/Fit Hike W 85

Last: 102 Flex: 85
\$700

Take the successful R/Fit W four buckle overlap traditionalist, shave a buckle off the top for weight and convenience, add a cuff release for easier walking and hiking, and put a \$450 price tag on it, and our test team says you've got a bang-for-your-buck winner. The R/Fit Hike W 85 shares the same wide lower shell fit that testers loved in the R/Fit boots, and the single buckle cuff with a calf adjustment opens up the fit for average and thicker legs. Testers said the R/Fit flex is stronger than advertised, so good skiers shouldn't let the 85 flex dissuade them. [Read More](#)



FIRST CHAIR COLLECTION

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All-Mountain Freeride Boots

It used to be that the *hike*, or *walk*, mode pigeon-holed a boot into a less-powerful-skiing sub-class. That isn't the case anymore for the best boots in this large group which combines lightweight yet stiff plastics and solid metal-to-metal cuff connections to create serious descenders—all with tech binding compatibility. Skiers of all shapes and sizes can now find a boot that will suit his or her foot width as well as uphill and downhill performance needs—narrowes, mediums and wides in a broad range of stiffnesses are available in this still-growing category.



Shown here: Mark Elling, Brian Elling



MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN FREERIDE-NARROW



Dalbello Lupo Pro HD

Last: 98 Flex: 130

\$900

Last year, testers liked the then-new Lupo Pro HD for the polyurethane shell's more-damp feel on the snow versus the stiffer carbon cuffed Lupo Factory, but appreciated that it didn't lose any of its quickness or power when it lost \$150 off the Factory's price tag! This year it's no different—except now it's 200 bucks cheaper! They found it easy on and off and loved the touring range of motion when the removable tongue was off, allowing unhindered forward cuff movement, matching its long rearward travel. One tester said it got better with every run and the faster he went. [Read More](#)

K2 Mindbender 130

Last: 98 Flex: 130

\$850

Last season, the Mindbender 130 got testers thinking about how comfortable this category has become—its silky, luscious liner had them salivating on the first slide in. And while it received the roomiest fit scores within the narrow group, testers loved the ample room for warm and compression-free touring. The toebox and forefoot offers lots of space in width and height, but the fit tapers to a snug grip for the ankles and heel. Testers said *great power-to-weight ratio with a trick set of features like GripWalk soles and a quick-releasing cam buckle strap*. This year it returns with a bold new paint job but otherwise unchanged.

[Read More](#)



NEW!

Lange XT3 130 LV

Last: 97 Flex: 130

\$900

With every new version of Lange's freeride boot, our test team has affirmed that it has always been the most *real boot like* of the category. That remains the same with the newest iteration, the XT3, along with a few improvements. The all-new shell and cuff mold bring a cleaner, more anatomical fit that's properly padded with a Dual 3D full-thermo Ultralon liner. Testers loved the close-wrapping feel of the XT3 130 LV—tight like a narrow should be, with an open toebox for comfy, warm ascents. Testers also said, *finally*, to the fact that the XT3 tours more like a BC boot. [Read More](#)



Rossignol Alltrack Elite 130 LT

Last: 98 Flex: 130
\$850

The last time we tested it, the Dual Core Grilamid shell Alltrack Elite 130 LT was the highest scoring narrow hike-mode boot and the third-highest scoring hike-mode boot. So, it's good. And it's back again unchanged except for a new, sandy cosmetic. Testers liked that it shaved weight without losing its boot-ness. It still fits and skis like a Rossi (anatomically contoured, strong and quick), just a lightweight one. The Dual Core polyolefin HD cuff is *light but snappy*, testers said, claiming it remains *tall and strong* against the leg for solid charging through variable, manky piles on big, fat skis. [Read More](#)

NEW NARROWEST

HEAD RAPTOR WCR

LAST: 93 FLEX: 160-100 \$900

Yup, there's a new *plug* in town and we ain't talkin' about a plodding horse or old timer's tobaccy—it's a new World Cup race boot from Head, the Raptor WCR which replaces the venerable but long-in-the-tooth B-series boots. If you're not clear where the narrowest lasted, *lace-up liner then cram into shell race boot* gets its nickname from, it's because the narrowest internal mold a boot company uses on their true race boots is referred to as the "plug." Often, more consumer market narrow boots may be based off that plug but with more anatomical curves added to the internal mold to make them initially more comfortable and saleable. The true plug boot is a stripped-down, spartan affair built to be *tight as heck* and a powerful transmitter of movement to the ski, period. Like the interior of a race car, the plug is generally not about comfort but of performance necessity. The fit of a plug boot, for all but the most elfin of foot is a bootfitter's responsibility, commonly via grinding the typically super-thick shell wall from the inside.

Well, enter the new Raptor WCR in five stiffness levels—the WCR 2 is the stiffest flex currently at 150/160, down to a 100/110 flex WCR 5. It has an (unusually) sculpted interior by comparison to its predecessor and the revised mold shape opens up newfound length in the toebox while only increasing the external boot sole dimension by 1mm and improving torsional transmission of energy to the ski. Its angles remain unchanged, but offers a revised cuff adjustment design



and a new polyurethane plastic blend that has increased fore-aft elasticity for more forgiveness without losing lateral edging power. But most importantly our testers say it fits pretty dang well right out of the box and skis with a sneaky, silky, powerful touch that's all new. We're excited to see what design changes may trickle down from the WCR to the consumer Raptor in the near future.

MEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN FREERIDE-MEDIUM

NEW!



Atomic Hawx Prime XTD 130

Last: 100 Flex: 130
\$975

If Ultra conveys skinny, like salad and a Michelob Ultra, then Prime says *hell yeah, give me meat and a friggin' real beer, dammit!* The all-new Hawx Prime XTD 130 is a medium-width Freeride charger made to house the foot of a real man, the kind of guy who's out to stomp some Lycra-clad Sallies in the skin track to get that stash first! Well, maybe not exactly like that. But the Prime XTD opens up the fit in width, instep height and calf circumference so the vast majority of skiers can have a crack at one of the absolute best boots for going both up and down the mountain. [Read More](#)

Fischer Ranger 130

Last: 99 Flex: 130
\$849

Two years ago, we thought the first generation Ranger was Fischer's best boot ever and one of the best boots in our test. Last year, with the arrival of its wider brother Ranger One, we thought Fischer had two of its best boots ever. This year, the Ranger 130 returns with a fortified lower shell to increase its power and stability without substantially affecting weight and while maintaining its huge range of motion in walk mode. Testers have always loved how well it cradles the foot and leg—if a little like that uncle's too-firm handshake on the lower leg and ankles. [Read More](#)



Head KORE 1

Last: 100 Flex 130
\$900

The KORE 1 got a shell revision last season in the form of thickened shell walls in critical zones to stiffen the flex and provide more stability on edge. Testers could feel the difference and liked it, citing a stronger feel than the previous year's version. This year, the KORE 1 returns with additional updates of a stiffened liner cuff and a 50mm power strap with an integrated plastic Power Plate that more evenly spreads shin pressure during flexion. The hike-articulated 3D Perfect Fit liner's Liquid Fit injection feature remains a tester favorite for anatomically snugging the heel and ankle pocket. Testers agreed that the boot performed as billed. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Nordica Strider Elite 130 Dyn

Last: 100 Flex: 130

\$950

The all-new Strider Elite 130 Dyn takes the tester-favored Strider Pro 130 and squeezes it into a lighter-weight package via a new liner and buckle design this year. Unchanged is its snug-medium fit character and cork-clad liner heel and ankle pockets that grip the rearfoot fit for hard-charging lines. Testers again put the Strider in the “real-boot” sub-category among Freeride boots, meaning it won’t disappoint serious skiers on the descent, and it offers an adequate and user-friendly set of uphill skills. Testers are impressed with the rare combination of light weight and a damp, stable feel engineered by the Grilamid shell and carbon-Triax cuff. [Read More](#)

Roxa R3 130 TI I.R.

Last: 99 Flex: 130

\$875

The R3 130 TI I.R. has taken the classic three-piece shell’s flex feel to a newer, more solid level, testers have said, and this year it returns with updated buckles a new look and an option on either a tongue or spiral-wrap style Intuition liner at the same price. The 99 mm BioFit last of the R3 design puts it on the snug side of the medium width group, and the all-Grilamid construction of the lower shell, upper cuff and tongue adds up to a noticeably light feel on the foot, though testers say the tall and stiff cuff commands serious leverage over the edge. [Read More](#)



NEW!

Salomon Shift Pro 130 AT

Last: 101-106 Flex: 130

\$975

Our test team’s long wait for a successor to the QST has come to a welcome end with the arrival of the Shift Pro family. The Shift Pro 130 AT sits at the top of the heap as a legit Freeride assault vehicle. Built off the tester-favored S/Pro medium-width lower shell, the Shift Pro employs a lightweight four-buckle overlap platform and combines a polyamide lower shell and Xecarb (carbon and glass hybrid) composite Coreframe insert with a polyolefin cuff to create a crisp, transmissive boot. Testers said it’s just padded enough by its pre-shaped and seamless liner to be comfy without bulk. [Read More](#)

What's New with Custom?

What should your first thought be if you have tricky feet and a history of painful boots? Find a better bootfitter, duh! [\(DO THAT HERE\)](#)

What should your second thought be? Maybe try a [DaleBoot!](#)

It's the only truly custom-built boot on the market (we think), and it's been updated in recent years with high tech plastics and modern stance angles. There are lots of ways to customize a ski boot, but only one way to start from scratch, like a custom-shaped surfboard for your feet.



The process begins with a DaleBoot dealer taking essential measurements and tracings of the skier's feet. North American specs are sent to the factory in Salt Lake City, UT. European specs are sent to DaleBoot's European HQ in Kitzbuehel, Austria. Both locations also host DaleBoot-branded factory fit centers. As the specs are received, the lower boot is built to match the foot shape using a variety of heavy

metal lasts and a steam bath that permanently molds the thin shell-wall polyether plastic. The upper cuff is selected to match the lower leg's length and modified as needed to suit the calf's shape. Then the bespoke boot is shipped to the dealer (to meet the deadline they've stipulated, often within the week) where the Intuition liner of a variety of styles, thicknesses and densities will be molded and then stance alignment checked and modified as needed.

All of this is included in the price of \$825, which also includes any needed modifications made by the dealer down the road. Our recent boot tests have favored the [VFF Pro](#), DaleBoot's most popular model, for its long-travel flex feel, high agility scores and hyper-aware feel for the snow. Their VFF is preferred by less aggressive skiers and more petite women, and the ST is a stiff beast of a boot that big dudes and frontside carvers love for its power and stability. Any of these models can be made as narrow as a 92 mm last and as wide as a 114 mm, as well as from a size 23 all the way to a 33.

New shell and liner designs are in the works for 2022 and DaleBoot also intends to retire their unique snap-on alpine soles for a better traction screw-on style that will transmit skier inputs more directly to the ski, and they'll still offer canted options. There are also plans for a patented *tech-compatible canted sole* which will put DaleBoot on the map as the only provider of such technology, and in concert with a new, releasable AT cuff will take their already lightweight custom designs further from the chairlift.

—Mark Elling

WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN FREERIDE-NARROW



K2 Mindbender 110 Alliance

Last: 98 Flex: 110
\$750

With high scores last year for its dialed stance and its convenience, warmth, and features kit, testers affirmed that the new Mindbender 110 Alliance is a multi-playground master with more throttle response and quick handling than expected for its high level of fit luxury. This season, it returns unchanged: its thin wall polyurethane and Pebax construction keeps it light, and testers still love the slick two-position forward lean adjustment on the metal-to-metal hike mode apparatus. This is the roomiest of all women's narrows, regardless of category, so testers said *average feet should not fear this all-terrain reaper*. [Read More](#)

NEW!

Lange XT3 110 W LV

Last: 97 Flex: 110
\$800

Our team calls the new XT3 110 W LV the best freeride boot they've ever tested from Lange for its larger-than-life downhill power (it's more robust than the stated 110) combined with newly minted touring acumen and lighter weight. *It's a roomy forefoot fit for an LV, they said, with a tall fit over the top of the foot, but they liked that for some extra warmth and circulation while touring.* They also liked that the ankle and heel is held in a more typical low-volume fashion. The XT3's cuff release mechanism works better than previous models, and it enables real range of motion. [Read More](#)



Rossignol Alltrack Elite 120

Last: 98 Flex: 120
\$750

Testers agreed that for an all-day-skiing crossover boot that's at home in-bounds or on short forays into the backcountry, skiers will be hard-pressed to do better than the Alltrack Elite 120 W. It forgoes lightweight polyamide plastics, sticking with a tried-and-true Dual Core polyether shell for damp but snappy control of the ski and shaves weight with a Dual Core polyolefin cuff. Testers liked that it offers tech binding compatibility and mounted GripWalk soles for off-campus missions. A touch softer than 120 and on the roomy edge of narrow, testers said. It received the second highest score of the entire test last year, men's included. [Read More](#)



WOMEN'S BOOTS: ALL-MOUNTAIN FREERIDE-MEDIUM

NEW!



Atomic Hawx Prime XTD 115 W

Last: 100 Flex: 115
\$850

Finally, an women's XTD for the masses! Not that the already popular Hawx Ultra XTD 115 W didn't appeal to a lot of skiers, but *it's tight*. The new Hawx Prime XTD 115 W opens up the fit to, well, levels similar to the Hawx prime all-mountain boot, which is one of the best-selling women's boots in the country. The all-new Mimic liner merges classic Prime ease-of-fit with a higher level of heat moldability. This year increased shell wall thickness on both the medial and lateral sides of the lower shell adds power to the XTD chassis.

[Read More](#)

Dalbello Lupo AX 105 W

Last: 100 Flex: 105
\$650

Packed full of all-terrain and hiking features, the Dalbello Lupo AX 105 W continues to impress our test team with its dialed fit, stronger than expected flex feel, light weight, and touring skills. It is also one of only a few tech-binding compatible boots on the market that come in a size 21.5. Testers dig the ease on and off here after learning how to navigate the weatherproof gusset and cabrio-centric wraps. The fit is evenly medium-width, with a little extra room for higher insteps, and testers love the extended touring range of motion gained when the external tongue is removed.

[Read More](#)



NEW!



Fischer Ranger 115 W

Last: 99 Flex: 115
\$749

This boot checks a lot of boxes, one tester said. And another: I want this boot! The women's Ranger has been on the podium for its gold-medal pairing of stunning range of motion in hike mode (best in test) with true alpine descent qualifications, all wrapped in a noticeably lightweight package. This year the Ranger 115 W returns with an updated, stronger, stiffer shell, making it even more appealing to those demanding a dominant down. Fitwise, it remains one of those tight-mediums, testers said, and *ideal for average to slender calves*. Its *sneaky* hike mode switch location remains a tester fave.

[Read More](#)

NEW!

Head KORE 2 W

Last: 100 Flex: 110
\$775

After a couple seasons of waiting, women get the high performance KORE 2 W freeride boot from Head. It comes with all the top tier goodies that the men's KORE 1 has integrated recently, like reinforced Grilflex shell construction, a reinforced liner cuff and a new, beefier Power Plate power strap. Our women testers love how this snug medium-width grabs the foot, with a particularly descent-minded feel around the heel, and they love the on-target 110 flex feel that says *ready to rock*. The Liquid Fit liner provides an option on an even tighter heel pocket, but most didn't think they'd need it! [Read More](#)

Nordica Strider 115 W Dyn

Last: 100 Flex: 115
\$750

Coming from a group of *serious skiers*, when our testers said this was a serious performer, well, *we took them seriously!* Last year it got nearly perfect scores for its edge power and stability and also for its quickness and feel for the snow, the Strider 115 W Dyn will not disappoint rippers looking to dominate demanding pitches on big skis—it was testers' favorite medium-width freerider. This year it has a new graphic but still sits on the narrow side of the medium group. The liner's aggressive heel and ankle fit relaxed with wear time, but testers recommend a liner cook. [Read More](#)



Roxa R3W 105 TI I.R.

Last: 99 Flex: 105
\$750

The R3W 105 TI I.R. enters the fray for this season with an updated graphic and a tongue-style Intuition-Roxa full thermo liner to remain our test team's favorite three-piece freeride boot. It's a svelte 99 mm cabrio, contouring closely along the curves of the foot and lower leg and minimally padded by the custom liner to maintain a direct, connected feel with the ski. The Grilamid shell and Polyurethane cuff combine for a unique blend of lightweight and strong flex feel. The hike mode's range of travel is impressive, and GripWalk soles add to its easy rolling stride, testers said. [Read More](#)





NEW!

Salomon Shift Pro 110 W

Last: 100-106 Flex: 110

\$850

Testers loved Salomon's shift to a four buckle overlap design in the new Shift Pro 110 W AT freerider. They liked the new, easy slide on and off and particularly got on board with the newfound room over the instep and along the lateral side of the forefoot, à la the S/Pro lower mold that it's based off. Testers approved of the stability and snap of the polyurethane and fiberglass Coreframe lower paired with a light and reactive polyolefin cuff, which fits closely along the lower leg and is still rigidly connected to the lower with the tried-and-true Surelock cuff release mechanism. [Read More](#)



Shown here: Megan Johnson, Kori Coggin, Liz Elling, Ashley Teren, Mike Evans

What Goes Up...

2020-21 BACKCOUNTRY ROUNDUP

While the true Backcountry boot is an out-of-bounds animal—built for ascending with light weight, maximum touring range of motion, tech binding compatibility and a fully rockered and aggressively lugged outsole for walking and scrambling as needed—we favor Backcountry boots that trend toward a solid, dependable descent, regardless of snow conditions. This season we got a small batch of boots in the skin track in the Pacific Northwest and found a few that toured with the best but skied stronger than the rest.

Our men's test team put two models at the top of their heap, the [Tecnica Zero G Tour Pro](#) (last: 99; flex: 130; \$1080) and the [Scarpa Maestrale XT](#) (last: 101; flex: 130; \$899) for similar reasons. Testers say they both have that real alpine boot feel, both in fit and in performance, and yet they both offer great touring range of motion in a very lightweight package. Of particular mention for both models was the *tallish* feeling cuff and legit 130 flex which testers said combined for a confident descent in variable conditions.

Our women testers still favor the [Scarpa Gea RS](#) (last: 101, flex: 120; \$799) for its stable, predictable behavior on the descent and top of class touring capability, and the [Tecnica Zero G Tour Scout W](#) (last: 99; flex: 115; \$960) for its snugly even medium grip on the foot and a slightly taller, alpine feeling cuff—and they like Scout's new cosmetic, too. Also on our women's test team backcountry radar is the new Dynafit Hoji Free 110 (last: 102; flex: 110; \$799.95) for a softer version of the solid skiing Hoji Free 130.

—Mark Elling



Shown above: Allison Miles



Tecnica Zero G
Tour Scout W



Tecnica Zero G
Tour Pro



Scarpa
Maestrale
XT

2021 BUYER'S GUIDE BOOT TEST MANAGERS



STEVE COHEN 6'3", 220 lbs., 64 yrs.

Cohen is CEO and co-founder of Masterfit Enterprises. He oversees operations of the Masterfit University Bootfitter Training Centers, the America's Best Bootfitters organization of top ski shops, and Masterfit's insole and bootfitting product businesses.



MARK ELLING 5'11" 185 lbs., 50 yrs.

Elling has tested boots since 1997 and currently manages all boot test operations as well as authors the boot reviews for this guide and the America's Best Bootfitter's website. He is Masterfit University Training Centers' (MFU) curriculum director and staff manager of the MFU bootfitting workshops in the United States, Europe and Australia.

MASTERFIT INSTRUCTION STAFF BOOT TEST TEAM (by years testing)



JEFF RICH 5'9", 160 lbs., 64 yrs.

Rich is co-founder of Masterfit Enterprises and Masterfit University and leader of Masterfit's Product Development team. He's a veteran boot tester (he co-founded the on-hill testing program in 1988) and board-certified pedorthist. He is the owner/operator of the U.S. Orthotic Center in New York City, a leading pedorthic and footwear modification lab.



BOB GLEASON 5'11", 165 lbs., 68 yrs.

Gleason is founder and director of the BootDoctors in Telluride, Colorado. For 41 years he has been teaching the ski industry the science and art of fitting boots, including the last 26 with Masterfit University where he is the senior most instructor. Skiing has been his passion since he was a toddler. It is a rare day when the lifts are spinning that he is not on the mountain.



GREG HOFFMANN 5'10", 175 lbs., 64 yrs.

Owner/operator of Ski Boot Fitting of Vail, Colorado, which operates out of the Vail Sports location at Lionshead Village, Hoffmann is a senior Masterfit University instructor, former board-certified pedorthist and a long-time boot tester. He spends his summer in Cape Hatteras, North Carolina where he's the owner of Missphitty Charters and works with Outer Banks Kiting.



JACK RAFFERTY 6'2", 195 lbs., 65 yrs.

Owner/operator of Thotics Inc. at Aspen Sports in Snowmass Village, Colorado, Rafferty is a slope-side veteran bootfitter and pedorthist for over 35 years. Rafferty primarily concentrates on winter sports recreational athletes, but also works with multiple sports disciplines and prescription-based orthopedic patients. He's also a senior Masterfit University instructor and a training consultant for Vail Resorts. MFU bootfitting workshops in the United States, Europe and Australia.



CHARLIE BRADLEY 6'2", 175 lbs., 54 yrs.

Bradley has been working in the ski industry for longer than he cares to remember. Currently he is the manager of the Bootdoctors in Taos Ski Valley (the mothership) where he has worked since 1992. He also teaches boot fitting with great group of cool cats at Masterfit University. When he is not skiing you can find him on the river, in the waves, on the tennis court, or in the bar drinking record amounts of beer.



BILL HAIGHT 5'7", 155 lbs., 54 yrs.

Haight is a board-certified pedorthist and owner/operator of Green Mountain Orthotic Lab (GMOL), the premier bootfitting shop at Stratton, Vermont. GMOL is also manufacturer of industry-standard stance alignment and sole planning equipment. He is a Masterfit University instructor, PSIA level I Alpine instructor and member of the education staff for the PSIA.



JIM SCHAFFNER 5'11", 230 lbs., 62 yrs.

Schaffner has been working in the ski industry his entire adult life. Originally from the Midwest, he started in ski retail as a teen and was then picked to work with athletes in racing service for Salomon North America. His home is in Truckee, California, where he owns and operates The Start Haus ski shop. He is also a senior instructor with the Masterfit University Bootfitter Training Centers.



KEVIN GABRIEL 6'0", 215 lbs., 46 yrs.

A veteran boot tester, bootfitter, ski technician, and salesperson at Gravity Sports at Mt. Bachelor in Bend, Oregon, with over 20 years ski industry experience, Gabriel is a snowboard and Alpine bootfitting instructor at Masterfit University. He has a background in competitive hockey and splits his time between skis and a snowboard, depending on conditions.



PAT SULLIVAN 5'9", 150 lbs., 41 yrs.

A board-certified pedorthist since 2009 and Masterfit University instructor since 2002, Sullivan was the owner of Alpine Pro Performance boot lab from 2006-2013. He has been the lead pedorthist bootfitter at Jackson Hole Sports since 2013. During the off season he is a bike fitter for road and mountain at Hoback Sport in Jackson, WY. He says, *I live by work to play.*



CHRIS WILDE 6'2", 215 lbs., 49 yrs.

Wilde is a veteran boot tester and bootfitter at Gravity Sports at Mt. Bachelor in Bend, Oregon during the winter. A board-certified pedorthist and owner of "Sole Motion" mobile orthotic lab, Wilde is a Masterfit University instructor with more than 25 years experience in the ski industry.



MARC STEWART 6'1", 175 lbs., 55 yrs.

Founder and lead fitter of the Boot Lab at Windham Mountain Resort in New York, Stewart has over 20 years experience as a bootfitter, is a board-certified pedorthist, and has been a Masterfit University instructor since 2013. He is a PSIA level 3 Instructor who conducts on-hill clinics for PSIA's Eastern Division.



SAM TISCHENDORF 5'6", 140 lbs., 33 yrs.

Tischendorf comes from a clinical sports podiatry background in Australia working with athletes. She then moved to Telluride, Colorado. She is the supervising, and (currently) only female, bootfitter at Bootdoctors in Telluride. Tischendorf joined the MasterfitUniversity teaching team in 2014 in both Australia (using her native tongue) and throughout the United States.



JEREMY JOHNSTON 5'2", 150 lbs., 34 yrs.

Johnston is the owner/operator of Boot Mechanics in Golden, Co. He began boot fitting in 2009 with SkiBootFitting in Vail where he shaped his skills and philosophy as a boot fitter, before opening Boot Mechanics in 2015. Johnston is also a Masterfit University instructor and continues to spread the gospel of bootfitting in the fall months. Being a skier since the age of four and an ex-skiercross and alpine racer has helped influenced his approach to boot fitting. When he's not working, you'll likely find him on the island of Martha's Vineyard with his wife in the summer.

ABB MEMBER SHOP BOOT TEST TEAM (by years testing)



DALLAS GOLDSMITH 6'0", 145 lbs., 45 yrs.

Goldsmith grew up on the slopes of Southern California at Snow Summit. He raced for most of his youth, making it to the Junior Olympics twice. In 2007 he returned to his hometown of Big Bear Lake, California, to help with the family business, Goldsmith's Sports, established 1987. Goldsmith is also a PGA golf professional.



DANIELLE GOLDSMITH 5'7", 120 lbs., 49 yrs.

Co-owner and C.A.O. (Chief Amazement Officer) at Goldsmiths Sports Inc., established in 1987. Goldsmith started building snowboard boots (as there were no snowboard boots yet) in 1987. She was a pro snowboarder for Simms and Morrow snowboards from 1988 to 1991. She has been a Masterfit-certified bootfitter since 2012, a snowsports industry product tester since 1987 and an ABB boot tester since 2013. Big Bear Resorts (Snow Summit and Bear Mountain) in Big Bear Lake, California, are the home resorts for Danielle and GoldsmithsSports.com.



JIM MORRIS 5'10" 185 lbs., 61 yrs.

Morris is a Masterfit University graduate and bootfitter since 2012 at Goldsmiths Sports in Big Bear Lake, California. A PSIA certified instructor since 2002, he was a supervisor at the Bear Mountain Ski School for 12 years. He currently teaches the able-bodied at Snow Summit and teaches disabled skiers with the U.S. Adaptive Recreation Center.



STACY CRUMPLER 5'9", 150 lbs., 41 yrs.

Crumpler is a veteran boot tester, bootfitter and shop manager for GoldsmithsSports.com in Big Bear Lake, California. Crumpler has attended Masterfit University multiple times.



JACKSON HOGEN 5'11", 175 lbs., 69 yrs.

Hogen has labored as ski designer, binding and boot product manager, freestyle competitor, bootfitter, lecturer on risk management, ski instructor, marketing director, resort feature writer, ski tester for 30 years and boot tester for 20, OLN and RSN television show host, extreme camp coach, Desperate Measures co-creator, four-time Warren Miller screenwriter, R&D chief, honorary Canadian, college racer, regular contributor to at least ten different ski magazines, and his guise as Pontiff of Powder, married Paul Hochman and Carrie Sheinberg in all ways but legally. He currently serves as a bootfitter at Bobo's in Reno, Nevada, when not providing all editorial services for Realskiers.com, including his weekly Revelation from the Pontiff of Powder.



ADAM TUTSKEY 5'8" 168 lbs., 38 yrs.

Skiing is Tutskey's passion, and he just started his own ski shop—Montana Ski Tech—specializing in custom ski bootfitting, tuning, and mounting. Tutskey also works as a full time contractor, running the ski shop in the evenings. A ski industry veteran for 20 years, Tutskey has done everything from snowmaking and ski instructing to part time freestyle ski coaching. But he has specialized in custom bootfitting for the past 6 years.



BOB TUTSKEY 5'7" 165 lbs., 70 yrs.

Growing up in Illinois this self-described flatlander was a novice skier until he moved to Montana in 1985. Once settled in Missoula, this advertising and marketing account guy quickly immersed himself into the world of skiing and outdoor recreation, working with clients such as Big Sky Resort, Montana Snowbowl, Brighton Ski area, The North Face, Gregory backpacks, MSR, and numerous other rafting and recreational tourism businesses. He spent 30 years learning to keep up with his kids and grandson on the ski hill, and it's led to a post-retirement life that includes becoming a PSIA level 1 instructor and ski gear geek.

VETERAN BOOT TEST TEAM (by years testing)



MIKE EVANS 5'6", 160 lbs., 60 yrs.

Evans is currently a full-time ski instructor at Mt. Bachelor, Oregon, and head junior Alpine race coach for Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation. Evans coached Tommy Ford and Laurenne Ross as junior racers. He is certified PSIA level 3 Alpine, level I Nordic telemark, and childrens specialist I, and is also a USSA level 400 coach.



LANCE CYGIELMAN 6'0", 180 lbs., 63 yrs.

Working hard, playing hard, and living the dream in Jackson Hole, Cygielman is a travel professional specializing in worldwide ski destinations and is the official travel provider for Masterfit University and the Masterfit Boot Test. (Hey, we all got there and home without a hitch; he knows his stuff). When not planning travel, he tries to ski almost every day and will tell anyone who will listen the value of having the right boot fit.



NEAL SCHOLEY 6'2", 185 lbs., 39 yrs.

Scholey is a veteran boot tester and owner of Local Real Estate in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Well, really his wife Karey is the owner and brains behind the operation, and Neal has just honed his lifelong ski industry sales pitches and taken that to the next level in the real estate business.



ERIK KORMAN 6'1", 195 lbs., 55 yrs.

Korman is the manager and retail hard-goods buyer for Gravity Sports at Mt. Bachelor, Oregon, with 30 years ski industry experience. A veteran boot and ski tester, he was a ski racer, former coach and manufacturer's sales associate. When not skiing, he captains the "space shuttle" for the crazed Korman family.



LIZ ELLING 5'5", 130 lbs., 51 yrs.

Veteran boot tester and former PSIA level 2 Alpine instructor, Elling has worked in the ski industry as a retail salesperson and demo technician as well as a snowcat driver and bartender at Cat Ski Mt. Bailey. Currently a committed pow-skier and line-poacher, she works full-time as a vintage retail dealer in Bend, Oregon.



BRIAN ELLING 5'9", 170 lbs., 48 yrs.

Elling lives and works in Missoula, Montana, where he's been part of the team at family-owned Gull Ski and Snowboard since 2002, and he has a decade of ski instruction experience prior to that. When he does break free of the vortex that is Montana Snowbowl, he gets over to Mt. Bachelor, Big Sky, and Big Mountain. Since his last boot test he has become Dad to Alexandria Marie Elling-Riley!



EMILY POORE 5'6", 150 lbs., 36 yrs.

Boot test veteran and bootfitter, Poore has skiing in her blood—her parents married on skis and raised her on the slopes. She is the most recent addition to the instructor roster at Masterfit University. This winter you will find her as part of the team at Alpine Shop in Schweitzer, Idaho.



MEGEN JOHNSON 5'7", 145 lbs., 42 yrs.

Johnson grew up ski racing in Washington and went on to race in college. Currently, she is the manager and soft goods buyer for Race Place in Bend, Oregon. She started coaching in 2000 and has worked a variety of jobs in the ski industry, including lift operations supervisor at Mt. Bachelor.



HEATHER ANN JOHNSON 5'3", 140 lbs., 49 yrs.

Johnson has been in the ski industry for 25 years, working as a ski Instructor at Mt. Bachelor, a race coach for Mt. Bachelor Sports Education Foundation, and as a level III certified professional ski patroller at Mt. Bachelor. She was a K2 telemark ambassador and helped design a ski for their women's ski line in 1998. She currently skis in northeastern Oregon's Wallowa mountains, where she works at Ferguson Ridge ski area coaching "The Hurricane Rippers."



LEE ANN ROSS 5'4", 160 lbs., 69 yrs.

A ski instructor at Mt Bachelor for 18 years and a veteran boot tester, Ross holds PSIA level 3 Alpine instructor certification with a senior specialist accreditation. She was also the NASTAR national champion in 1973 and a retired Foreign Service Officer. That makes her the most worldly of our ski bum-centric test team. When not skiing, she's often found casting a fly at permit on a salt flat somewhere exotic. a vintage retail dealer in Bend, Oregon.



EINO HOLM 5'9" 235 lbs., 39 yrs.

Holm learned to ski at Crystal Mountain, in the Republic of Cascadia, from his Pa and older brothers. He has been skiing for 37 winters at various locales around the West. He prefers funky, off-radar joints like Anthony Lakes and Ski Cooper to the current push toward homogeneity and long lines at the tram. He has been a ski mechanic off and on for 12 years and generally an equipment nerd for as long as he can remember.



AMY POST 5'2" 180 lbs., 38 yrs.

Post is a ski instructor and staff trainer at Bogus Basin in Boise, Idaho, as well as a clinician and examiner for PSIA-NI. Over the past 14 seasons, she's taught skiing, supervised snowsports schools, and coached racing in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, and Utah. She loves to ski fast and go adventuring in the woods. She also enjoys the nerdier aspects of sport, like PSIA certification, as well as evaluating ski boots and movement analysis. In the warmer months, she teaches environmental education programs and owns a gardening business.



MELODIE BUELL 5'8", 160 lbs., 34 yrs.

Buell grew up ski racing through college, then coaching, and now she shares her passion for the sport at Oregon Adaptive Sports based at Mt. Bachelor where she is an instructor and trainer. She is a current PSIA Alpine level III and Adaptive level II instructor and a NW divisional clinic leader and examiner. When she's not on the hill giving lessons, clinics, goofing off, or testing boots, you can find her at the bike park riding DH or on Bend's endless single track trails, climbing, hiking mountains, or playing with her pup, Jett.



KORI COGGIN 5'6", 140 lbs., 27 yrs.

Born and raised in Central Oregon, Coggin has been skiing for over 20 years and ski raced for 12. She currently works at Gravity Sports at Mt. Bachelor in Bend, Oregon, as a salesperson, ski technician, and bootfitter. After obtaining an outdoor leadership and education degree, she has worked for several outdoor adventure organizations.



KAREY SCHOLEY 5'3", 115 lbs., 44 yrs.

Scholey has been skiing for most of her life, although only regularly after moving to Bend, Oregon, in the BIG winter of 1992. She made Mt. Bachelor her second home until her job took her to Silver Mountain Resort in 2001 to develop the resort's newer amenities such as the base village, indoor waterpark, and Galena Ridge Golf Community.



MARK KORMAN 5'10", 185 lbs., 52 yrs.

Currently a pledging member in good standing of the Midwestern chapter of SA (Skiers Anonymous) Korman hails from the hard pack of Hyland Hills Ski Area in the heart of Minnesota "nice and ice." A former top-ranked FIS slalom racer, he was a rinse-lather-repeat three-time state high school champion and later captained the Lewis & Clark race team van across the Northwest with slogans like "Bomb the hill, not Iraq." He's now a "Forgot my heart pacer pow chaser."



KIM HOLZER 5'3" 135 lbs., 43 yrs.

Mountainscape chaser, nature ambassador, and environmental educator, Holzer holds PSIA Alpine level III, children's specialist II, freestyle specialist I, telemark I, and adaptive I certifications and has been teaching skiing for 19 years. She learned to ski at Jiminy Peak in Western Massachusetts, then worked part-time at Vail and now calls Schweitzer, Idaho, her home.



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HOW TO GET FIT FOR SKI SEASON

by Peggy Shinn

Getting fit for ski season doesn't take a fancy gym membership. What it does take is general cardio training—biking, hiking, running, or even vigorous walking—wand some specific strength training that will improve your performance on snow.

Just ask Tyler White, who runs iSport, a training facility at Killington that's a branch of the Vermont Orthopaedic Clinic. Tyler has helped everyone from Olympic gold medalists and NBA players to middle-aged moms and dads get stronger for the season ahead. His emphasis is doing key movements correctly.

"If you let bad technique go, it's going to become worse technique," Tyler likes to say. Bad technique, or simply doing whatever it takes to accomplish an exercise, like a squat, means weaknesses get weaker, strengths get stronger and the imbalance can lead to injury down the road.

To improve strength and balance for skiing, Tyler suggests these six movements (don't call them exercises!), performed correctly. Doing this series for five weeks pre-season will help you ski better, reducing that early-season burn, and hopefully prevent injuries.



BENT KNEE SIDE STEP WITH A MINI BAND

With an elastic miniband around your ankles, step laterally, pushing down through your feet with each step. Toes pointed forward. Two steps right, then two steps left. Repeat three times. Do 1-2 sets. This movement strengthens hip (gluteals) and quadriceps muscles, thereby improving stability.



SINGLE LEG MULTITOUCH

Stand on one leg with the other reaching behind you. Simultaneously flex your ankle, knee, and hip in one linear plane as you lower your body and touch the floor with your fingers. Do not let your knee or hip wobble to either side (out of the linear plane). One rep involves dipping three times and touching the floor in three places: on the left, in front, and on the right side of your foot. Do four reps for each leg. This exercise will strengthen your legs individually, improving balance and leg strength.



BULGARIAN SPLIT SQUAT

Rest one foot on a bench behind you, then squat down with the other leg. Do not let your knee cave to the inside, keep it in line with your foot. Do 6-12 reps per leg, and 2-4 sets. This exercise strengthens quads, hamstrings and glutes and helps you overcome a favored side.



SIDE ROTATIONS WITH RESISTANCE CORD

Hook an elastic resistance cord to an anchor (such as a door knob), then stand sideways to the stretched cord. Take a “ski stance,” then push into your feet to anchor your legs and hips as you pull the cord across your body, twisting your core (but not your hips). Return to the start position with control. Do 5-12 reps. per side, 2-4 sets.



SIDE LUNGE

From a standing position, step quickly to one side and squat on that leg. Then quickly rebound to the other side and squat on that leg. Step on your mid-foot, then transfer weight to your heel as your lunge. Do 8-12 reps each side, 2-4 sets. This movement trains your body to handle the lateral movements of skiing.



SIDE PLANK

Lie on your side, then prop your body up on your elbow. Your body should be in a straight line (don't drop your hip) with weight on your elbow and outside of your foot. Hold for 20-90 seconds each side. Do 2-4 sets. This movement strengthens abs, glutes and shoulders.



WINTER 2021

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