

ALL 2009 Backcountry Magazine Editors Choice Selections

Contributed by The Editors
Friday, 31 October 2008

Colorado to California, Massachusetts to Montana; more than 40 men and women testers from ten states converged on the slopes of Powder Mountain, Utah for Backcountry's biggest-and-best ski, boot, and binding test ever. ALL 2009 Backcountry Magazine Editors Choice Selections

Colorado to California, Massachusetts to Montana; more than 40 men and women testers from ten states converged on the slopes of Powder Mountain, Utah for Backcountry's biggest—and best—ski, boot, and binding test ever. Frozen chickenheads to boot-top powder, inbounds bumps to slackcountry buff, conditions were perfect for real-life testing and over 170 skis, 60 AT and tele boots, and 26 bindings were pounded for six long days. Only the best survived—and you'll find best of the best here: The Editors Choices in each category.

SKIS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Movement Goliath Ski|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Goliath_Movement.jpg{/rokzoom}
Movement Goliath

Size[CM] 191

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 135-108-124

Weight/Pair: 10LBS 1OZ

www.movementskis.com

Testers described this ski in single word sentences: "Solid." "Powerful." "Stable." "Damp." "AWESOME." One of the longest skis in the test, the Goliath won over testers with its raw power and edge hold, but surprised many with its agility. "Skied much shorter than it is," one tester said. "Screams out to go fast, fast, fast, but will patiently arc through the trees," said another. If perfect big mountain dimensions, oversize two mm edges, and a stiff flex are the chassis and suspension of this ski, then an okume/poplar/power-rail beech composite core is the engine.

"I loved giving this ski everything I've got and getting equal return from my investment," said one giddy Montana skier. "A Caddy Eldorado with a penchant for speed," said another, "this ski has no speed limit, and no fear of any terrain." For dedicated touring, this category dominator is heavy underfoot, but for sidecountry forays or day trips into the steep and deep, the Goliath inspires; "Pure confidence."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Rossignol Ravyn Ski|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Ravyn_Rossignol.jpg{/rokzoom}

Rossignol Ravyn

Size[CM] 174, 186

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 140-110-133

Weight/Pair: 9LBS 12OZ (186)

www.rossignol.com

So the name's spelling has changed. But that's no raven on the black-to-black topsheet, it's still the Rossi coq; French avian of choice. This is the widest ski in Rossi's line, but only a few testers found it fledged for long, full-bodied turns. Most preferred to wing it through narrower turn shapes, and softer snow.

"Powerful, a fantastic resort and sidecountry powder ski for the hard corps contingent." And then: "Love it in crud and pow. Great edge-to-edge and very forgiving. Easy to slide a turn at any point." And finally: "Awesome all terrain/all mountain ski; the harder it's pushed, the easier it is to ski."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|K2 Coomba Ski|images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Coomba_K2.jpg{/rokzoom}

K2 Coomba

Size[CM] 167, 174, 181, 188

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 135-102-121

Weight/Pair: 8LBS 3OZ (174)

www.K2alpinetouring.com

Coomba yeah! This tribute ski to the late Doug Coombs first appeared in K2's alpine line last year, and this year has been added to the backcountry line. It has the footprint of the Anti Piste without the latter's soft-flexing tip. And that made a noticeable difference in how it grabbed a turn, making it one of the best skis tested.

"Awesome," said one tester. "Does everything the Anti Piste can do, but better, quicker—initiates a turn, unlike the Anti Piste. A lightweight, stiffer fatty that is playful and forgiving. A fun, all-mountain ripper." "Versatile dimensions and accommodating flex," said another. And beyond that, "Very diverse, very adaptable," added another. Many testers remarked on its light feel—"Could be your primary touring ski or your everyday inbounds ski," said one.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Karhu Storm Ski|images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Storm_Karhu.jpg{/rokzoom}

Karhu Storm

Size[CM] 170, 177, 184

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 128-96-117

Weight/Pair: 8LBS 6OZ (177)

www.karhuskico.com

This Storm didn't leave any destruction in its wake—just impressed testers. "A smooth ride," said one. "Give these babies an aggressive skier and they'll give the sugar."

With a robust Macroblock core, in which strips of maple and aspen are laminated in parallel, and Karhu's visible Titanal 3 metal construction technology, the Storm scored highest in dampness, long turns, and busting-through-tough-snow aptitude. "Easy turn initiation with a smooth, buttery pop to the turns," said one Green Mountain transplant. "A great all-around powder touring ski," said another, "awesome at high speeds, and also at slower speed, short turns."

Some skiers found the Storm a bit much in tight quarters, "Not great in tight trees," said one. Another found the flex unusual, "Soft shovel and stiff tail made for a tough balance." But consider this from a young tele-tester: "The stiff tail is great for snapping out of turns."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Dynafit Manaslu Ski|images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Manaslu_Dynafit.jpg{/rokzoom}}

Dynafit Manaslu

Size[CM] 169, 178, 187

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 122-95-108 (178)

Weight/Pair: 6LBS (178)

www.dynafit.us

Named for the 8th highest mountain in the world, the Manaslu ("Mountain of the Spirit" in Nepalese) gave a lively performance for testers who had Dynafit-compatible boots. And for a few reasons, this might be the most important ski of '09. One, it's got Dynafit inserts, which means the home mount is finally attainable for the everyman. Two, it's actually a freeride ski with a rockered tip for massive float. Finally, it's mega-light, lighter by far than any other ski in its width range.

For testers this was not a hard-snow ski, but for western backcountry, all agreed on its validity. "A solid-skiing and LIGHT, ski," said one of our larger skiers. "Long turns are stable and it locks in nicely once initiated." Another added, "It rules on everything in the fast, far and deep category." A pleased Colorado tester said, "I'll be mounting these up as my everyday touring ski."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Atomic RT86 Ski|images/stories/editors_choice_2009/RT86_Atomic.jpg{/rokzoom}}

Atomic RT 86

Size[CM] 162, 169, 176, 183

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 127-86-113

Weight/Pair: 6LBS 5OZ (186)

www.atomicsnow.com

"Don't they spray that stuff on corn in the Midwest?" asked one agro tester. No, but for farming multiple laps most testers felt the newly overhauled, feathery-light RT 86 (for 86mm under foot) was at home on any mountain. Said our 6' 4" 200 pound Alta local: "Clamps on and turns when you want. Blink and switch edges. Light and airy, but definitely stiff enough to ride anything."

Another large-breed liked the RT's "pop," adding that it was, "Super forgiving, predictable, and versatile, with enough girth to ski deeper snow." There were a few exceptions to the accolades among testers; its high-speed scores fell off due its deep sidecut. "A little chattery on hardpack when arcing across the fall line," one of our Big Sky freeheelers noted.

WOMEN'S EDITORS CHOICE SKIS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|Black Diamond Joule Women's Ski|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Joule_Black_Diamond.jpg{/rokzoom}

Black Diamond Joule

Size[CM] 155, 165, 175

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 125-95-112

Weight/Pair: 7LBS 4OZ (175)

www.bdel.com

Testers found the Joule was again a measure of power in the women's ski world. And of all the wide-bodied women's skis on the market, only the Joule measured up to our expert women. Like the men's Kilowatt, the Joule boasts Formula 1 wood core construction. "Not quite as demanding (as the Kilowatt)," said one veteran telemark diva. "Lets you drive AND goes where you want to go.

A sturdy, responsive, solid All Mountain ski with even transitioning." A Montana AT tester agreed. "Responsive, and lets you stay in control," she said. Several testers felt the Joule was perhaps the best Quiver of One choice in the test. "Dynamic," our Steamboat transplant said. "A great pick for women seeking a single all-around backcountry ski." Still, she said she might upgrade to the Kilowatt, given her hard-charging ways.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Skis| title=|G3 Viva Women's Ski|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Viva_G3.jpg{/rokzoom}

G3 Viva

Size[CM] 157, 166

Tip/Waist/Tail:[MM] 121, 88, 109

Weight/Pair: 7LBS (166)

www.genuineguidegear.com

Both intermediates and experts—producing rare solidarity among our women testers this year—celebrated the fattest of three new releases in G3's Elle series, la Viva. One freeheeler found it an "incredibly sturdy, solid ski that makes each turn sure-footedly." She gave it a nine of ten overall with high marks throughout for aptitude in crud, variable snow, and dampness.

On the AT side, our PSIA instructor offered this: "Good solid ski. It did exactly what I wanted it to do without too much effort. It held an edge on hardpack and crushed the chunder. I could work these skis into my quiver EASILY!" A veteran tester said this of the Nectar: "Very damp," adding the Viva was, "Stiffer than the [K2] Dawn Patrol, fairly predictable, and not squirrely; no turning where you don't want to be headed."

MEN'S EDITORS CHOICE TELEMARK BOOTS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boots| title=|Black Diamond Push Boot|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Push_Black_Diamond_Boot.jpg{/rokzoom}

Black Diamond

Push

MSRP: \$679

Specs: 4lbs 2oz.; Sizes: 24.0-30.5;

www.bdel.com

By BD's reckoning, this is a mid-stiff boot, but don't let that fool you into thinking it delivers middle-of-the-road performance. Rather, it's the "ah ha" feeling of striking a perfect balance thought one eastern tester. According to one aggressive-skiing jurist, "though the cuff is firm, it activates with a smooth forward transition into a much stiffer bellows which allows one to really get down and dirty with the boot."

The Push's stock BOA-laced liner feels like a custom fit without needing to be molded, though it can be molded to provide a more precise fit. Testers loved the "heel hug," a sensation enhanced by the well-placed in-step buckle. Again,

the cuff felt a bit high to some, and thus less appropriate for long tours, but perfect for side country. For most testers, this was the boot of choice from BD offering plenty of power for big skis and vertical appetites, but not too big to lug uphill.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boots| title=|Scarpa Terminator X Pro Boot|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/TxPro_Scarpa_Boot.jpg{/rokzoom}

Scarpa

Terminator-X Pro

MSRP: \$685

Specs: 3lbs 12 oz.; Sizes 26.5-30.0;

www.scarpa.net

The four-buckle Terminator-X Pro proves that with the NTN system, you don't need to have stiff bellows to have tons of power and edge control. With dramatically softer bellows (than those of last years T-X), the Pro brings the classic, sensually smooth engagement of tele back to the NTN realm. Not only that, but without the duckbill in front, that soft bellows and free flexing cuff (in walk mode) make jaunts across the parking lot, or on a dry trail uncharacteristically (for tele) "natural," said one tester. "This boot proves that NTN isn't a one dimensional system. The power to edge transfer is a sensation I've never had like this, in tele. It's like I'm [expletive] the mountain bareback."

Don't worry about the soft bellows compromising torsional rigidity, Scarpa adopts triple injection technology with all their NTN boots, providing an extra stiff frame around the base of the sole, and looping over the toe box in front of the bellows. The Intuition liner is heat moldable, but for many, pre-lasting should eliminate that step unless you want a super snug, customized fit. Don't forget, it has Dynafit inserts too, so you can ride free, or locked heel. One California testers summed it up best: "An excellent boot in fit, form, and function."

MEN'S AT BOOTS EDITORS CHOICE

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boots| title=|Black Diamond Factor Mens AT Boot|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Factor_Black_Diamond_Boot.jpg{/rokzoom}

Black Diamond

Factor

MSRP: \$730 [\$40 for AT soles]

Specs: 9lbs. 2 oz.; Sizes 24-30.5;

www.bdel.com

Not since Ghostbusters has the color combo of lime puke and moss been this alluring. The Factor stole the show this year as a hard-driving AT gun designed for aggressive skiers with alpine aspirations. Picture an alpine boot: Four buckles atop an overlap cuff, no tongue, and progressive forward lean. Now picture the same boot with a deft walk mode. "We've found the missing Factor!" charged one tester. The overlap design gives the Factor a stiff, consistent flex—laterally and longitudinally—that steers any ski.

"It's the ultimate in and out of bounds boot," declared one of our more aggressive testers. "Great front country boot with a nice flex and incredible walk mode," gushed another. Testers found the exclusive BD Boa liner closure system—ala snowboard boot—provides intimate power transfer from shin to tongue, with better uphill ergonomics and reduced shin rash. "Super plush," said one tester. But testers did have trouble pulling the liner from the shell, making it difficult to switch footbeds or dry boots after long days. The Factor also features easily-swappable ISO DIN and Dynafit compatible lugged AT soles (sold separately) swappable with.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boots| title=|Garmont Radium Mens AT Boot|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Radium_Garmont_Boot.jpg{/rokzoom}

Garmont

Radium

MSRP: \$760

Specs: 7lbs. 7oz.; sizes 25-30.5;

www.garmontusa.com

Garmont's new Radium is a giant leap forward in boot design from the already popular Megaride. Made with a progressive bi-injection Pebax upper cuff, four-buckles, and a new overlap shell construction, the Radium hugs the instep for a more responsive boot overall. A new G-fit Rapid liner features the "T-bar" plastic tongue reinforcement, which augments leverage and shin protection. "Good ratio between flex/weight and lateral stiffness," mentioned one tester. "The soles are super nimble, too" said our token Jacksonite, "just walking around in them, they make you want to scramble over rocks."

Testers did feel the walk mode was a bit stiff, and a little tricky to operate with gloves, but being relatively lightweight, with Dynafit-compatibility, the new overlap Radium is solid as an all-around backcountry boot, and can easily give the Scarpa Spirit 4 a run for its money. The Radium is also available with women-specific liners and shell sizes.

WOMEN'S EDITORS CHOICE AT BOOT

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boots| title=|Scarpa Diva Women's AT Boot|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Diva_Scarpa.jpg{/rokzoom}

Scarpa

Diva

MSRP: \$679

Specs: 6lbs. 7oz.; sizes 22.5-27;

www.scarpa.net

The Diva won't improve your singing voice, but might have you screaming with delight. For the second year, the Diva's four-buckles and Dynafit compatibility made it a favorite among testers. "I put them on and loved them—with few adjustments," said one of our female testers. "I could rip large-radius turns with confidence." The Diva features a women-specific Intuition Precision Lady liner that comes pre-molded to a medium-size women's fit (narrower heel, lower volume) with a calf scallop (to accommodate lower calf muscle) on the back of the liner to give women a comfortable and powerful AT gun.

The specifically placed heel retention buckle holds the ankle securely into the back pocket. "Closest to an alpine style fit of all the boots tested," said one die-hard alpine gal. "It felt like a custom boot right out of the box." The Diva also comes with two tongues: one downhill, and one hinged touring.

EDITORS CHOICE AT BINDINGS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Bindings| title=|Dynafit Vertical FT 12-Free Touring|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/FT12_EC_Dynafit.jpg{/rokzoom}

Dynafit

Vertical FT 12-Free Touring

MSRP: \$570 (w/92mm or 100mm brakes; one size) Crampons: 92mm \$65. 100mm \$75.

Specs: 2lbs. 3oz. (w/ 92mm brakes/pair); DIN: 6-12; Brakes: 92mm, 100mm

www.dynafit.us

The big news for bindings this season is the introduction of the Dynafit FT 12-Free Tour, with a beefier, redesigned carbon base plate and heel body supporting a DIN to 12. Naturally, the FT toured incredibly well, "Smooth, natural pivot from the toe, not under it," said one Colorado tourer. Another impressed tester added, "Nothing better for covering ground efficiently." Although several testers noted that getting into and out of Dynafits takes some practice. "A little tricky on steep terrain," said one.

Testers were both impressed, and confused in DH mode. "Really solid downhill, and the option of locking the toe is great

for serious lines—but why pay a premium for DIN 12 if you’re going to lock them anyway?” said a practical tester. The healthy crop of sturdy, Dynafit compatible four-buckle boots this year points to an obvious trend. “Put this on a freeride ski, and use one of the new overlap boots for incredible downhill performance that still tours well,” said a Montana tester. The 10 DIN Vertical ST-Ski Touring remains a strong overall performer for those not requiring a 12 spring. [\$470 (w/92mm brakes; one size); 2lbs. 5oz. (w/ 92mm brakes/pair); DIN: 5-10; Brakes: 92mm, 100mm \$75; Crampons: 92mm \$65]

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Bindings| title=|Marker Duke At Binding|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Duke_Marker.jpg{/rokzoom}

Marker

Duke

MSRP: \$495 (w/110mm brakes; two sizes) Crampons: 92mm, 113mm \$70.

Specs: 5lbs. 12oz. (w/ 110mm brakes/small pair); DIN: 6-16; Brakes: 110mm, 130mm

www.markerusa.com

Marker’s Duke returns unchanged for its sophomore season, after taking the crown for king of burl last year. “A more versatile alpine binding replacement,” said one tester, “but not a backcountry specific set-up.” With a Sumo-capable DIN range and over five and a half pounds of heft, the Duke is clearly for the burgeoning sidcountry crowd bent on accessing the backcountry from resorts in search of deep snow and huge cliffs. “The only binding that instills confidence immediately upon clicking in,” said one Colorado ripper. “Rock solid connection,” said another. But stiffness and confidence come at a price. “Big, oafy, clumsy, clunky, heavy; not for frequent—or long—trips to the backcountry,” commented one tour-centric tester.

Every single tester lamented having to remove the skis to switch modes, and the riser bar was “the biggest hassle of any binding” for one frustrated Utaher. And new this year, Marker’s Baron features a lower DIN and (slightly) lighter nylon toe wings and heel brackets in place of the Duke’s magnesium components. [\$435 (w/110mm brakes; two sizes); 5lbs. 6oz. (w/ 110mm brakes/small pair); DIN: 4-12; Brakes: 110mm, 130mm \$TK; Crampons: 92mm, 113mm \$70]

EDITORS CHOICE TELEMAR BINDINGS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Bindings| title=|Black Diamond O1 Telemark Binding|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Black_Diamond_Clip.jpg{/rokzoom}

Black Diamond

O1

MSRP: \$299.95

Specs: 3.7 lbs 4-Hole pattern, Optional ski crampons available (82mm & 100mm)

When asked what the O1 was best for, one strapping female tester boldly quipped, "It does it all! A jack of all trades." Said one of the California boys: "Possibly the best free pivot tele binding on the market." Testers liked the under-foot cable routing, saying it delivered "quick", "smooth", "linear" engagement.

Testers felt the O1 was the easiest binding to switch to tour mode, hands down. Put the tip of your pole in the rear dimple of the green toggle switch in front of the toe plate and smack it down. Presto! You now have a solid 60°+ of frictionless free heel motion, with a pivot point behind pin line for a more efficient stride. The only knock on the O1? The climbing pegs are easier to lift than older BD designs, but still not as easy as spring loaded offerings from competitors.

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Bindings| title=|Rotafella NTN Telemark Binding|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/NTN_Clip.jpg{/rokzoom}

Rottefella

NTN

MSRP: \$395.95

Weight: Std - 4.27 lbs (1.94 kg), Small – 4.07 lbs. (1.85 kg);

4-Hole pattern

www.rottefella.com

Revolutionary last year, and now refined, the second-year NTN, testers found, was at home only on the fattest of boards. This totally new interface system, which attaches to a duckbill-free boot, provides what many felt was superior "edge feel" especially on wide skis. "Simply overpowers narrower-waisted skis," one purist tester quipped. "Not for this old man." But when paired with skis 100 mm at the waist or more the NTN came alive. "Like Hammerheads on steroids," one tester said, running them on monster fatties. Said our teen phenom: "It's really responsive edge to edge."

New for this season: a smaller version of the binding for boots smaller than mondo size 27. Some testers found their ski tips diving while breaking trail in champagne pow, but compared to classic cable bindings the "NTN felt frictionless," to one tester. And some noted that there was an inordinate amount of force necessary to flip the climbing posts up. But one of our most powerful testers had this to say: "With 40° of free pivot, release, brakes and the fact that I don't have to bend over, I'm sold."

EDITORS CHOICE SNOWBOARDS

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boards| title=|Prior Spearhead Snowboard|}images/stories/editors_choice_2009/Spearhead_Prior.jpg{/rokzoom}

Prior

Spearhead (w/ Voilé hardware and skins) 161, 166, 172, 178 [Tested: 166cm]

MSRP: \$1187

Weight [172cm]: 9lbs. 6 oz.

www.priorsnowboards.com

The latest addition to Prior's split fleet, the Spearhead merges a moderate taper with an upsloping tip for turnability in tight spaces and maximum flotation in pow. Testers praised Prior's bomber construction and solid-feeling ride.

"Smooth, solid ride, with a slightly set back stance for quick turns and smooth pow turns," one tester said. "Pretty quick and snappy through the trees." "Nice stable ride, like a classic longboard for big waves that lets the rider cutback and slash at will," said another. "Even in crud and chopped powder I couldn't pearl the nose of the board under the snow no matter how hard I tried."

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boards| title=|Lib Tech Travis Rice BTX Snowboard|images/stories/editors_choice_2009/TRiceBTX_Lib_Tech.jpg{/rokzoom}

Lib-Tech

T. Rice BTX 153, 157, 161.5, 164.5 [Tested: 161.5cm]

MSRP: \$529

www.lib-tech.com

Think the "Lib" in Lib-Tech doesn't stand for Liberty? Well consider this: "Cambered snowboards hate freedom." This from the autonomous at Lib-Tech. So they've infused banana technology (a.k.a. rocker, sort of like reverse camber) and Magne Traction (wavy, almost serrated edges) throughout most of their line.

It took our testers a run or two to adjust their riding style, and most had a "what the f\$*&" moment before finding that banana boards present a new way to engage the mountain. "It took some getting used to, but after two runs I found it carved fairly well," said one tester. "Super quick, doesn't slide through a turn—felt like I had claws on the edges." "Doesn't 'hook up' at the tip and tail like a cambered board; you use the edge between your bindings instead, which makes it tougher to catch an edge, and easier to hold one," said another.

EDITORS CHOICE SNOWBOARD BINDING

Click Image to Zoom{rokzoom album=|EC Boards| title=|Spark R&D Ignition Two Split-Board Binding|}
{images/stories/editors_choice_2009/ignition2_Binding.jpg{/rokzoom}}

Spark R&D

Ignition II

MSRP: \$365. Crampons: \$85

Weight: 69.8 oz./pair

www.sparkrandd.com

The Ignition II features Bent Metal Restraint components (straps, highback) paired with Ritter's custom-engineered baseplate, and is compatible with the standard Voilé puck mounting system. The slider track is built into the baseplate, so the binding sits flush on the board, instead of off the deck with the separate slider track and standard strap binding. Forward lean is easily adjustable by spinning the cube on the back of the highback, which is essential for ski and ride mode transitions. The toe pivot is slop-free, seated flush in the touring bracket and anchored by a thicker, stronger touring axle.

Dr. Rob Williams, one of our top gear testers, spent 50-plus days riding the first generation Ignitions in the backcountry last season. Here's his take: "In ride mode the most obvious advantage is the lower weight. Perhaps of greater significance is the lower profile of the binding. The slider track on the standard Voilé setup elevates the binding base up off of the board surface. The Ignitions provide a more intimate feel with the board and snow surface, and allows for a more accurate interpretation of the rider's desires."

"The biggest surprise I noted was in ski mode," Williams added. "Again, the reduced weight is the most obvious advantage and sure feels good on the way up. However, the binding interface is much more substantial in the Spark design, including a beefy, solid overlap at the toe bar rather than the standard, somewhat wobbly pin. This provides much better torsional stability while traversing, performing kick turns, etc."

"Over the course of 50-plus days a few minor problematic areas emerged, mostly concerning the adhesive padding on the Generation One highbacks," he concluded. "These issues should be resolved with the change in highbacks in the next generation [Ignition II]. Overall, the performance of Spark's binding is a noticeable upgrade. It is probably only a matter of time until Spark R&D's design becomes the industry standard."

{easycomments}