2009 Editors Choice Selections - Bindings

Contributed by The Editors
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2009 Backcountry Magazine Editors Choice Binding 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 binding test ever. Frozen chickenheads to boot-top powder, inbounds bumps to slackcountry buff, conditions were perfect for real-life testing 26 bindings were pounded for six long days. Only the best survived—and you'll find best of the best here: The Editors Choices for bindings are...

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 sidecountry 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 Utard. 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 TELEMARK 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."

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