2009 Editors Choice Selections - Snowboarding

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

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 Ingnition 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.”