

Ski Test 2007

Contributed by Mike Horn
Wednesday, 31 January 2007

If Editor Adam Howard is a tip man, Associate Editor Jonah Cantor is all about hips. "What's the first thing you notice about a ski?" Howard asks. "The tips."

But Cantor likes to point out that in spite of bigger measurements and prestigious orientation, tips are second on the list. After all, he says, the waist is the platform from where it all begins, where you initiate everything, where carving and flotation are ultimately determined.

He's right. And before we throw tails into the discussion, let's just say this: ski tests tend to be very subjective. For years, magazines have tried to fit skis into categories—fat, mid-fat, race, powder and so on. This year, in an attempt to provide the best apples-to-apples comparison of skis ever compiled, we did simply this: deferring to Cantor, all the skis that made it onto these pages are sequentially ordered by fattest waist dimension to skinniest, with tie breaks decided at the tip. (Refer to the life-size millimeter-scale ruler for convenient size comparisons. Heck, take it a step further and throw your current sticks up against the measurements of this year's crowd.)

With the new format, we created a virtual index of skis that focuses less on categories and more on character. Each ski has its intended purpose, and lumping skis together by that purpose sheds little light on the individual characteristics that set them apart.

In 2003, we reviewed 35 skis—only one was women's-specific. This year we tested nearly 80 tele and AT dedicated skis, with 11 designed for women. Throw out pipe and park skis (hey, we are Backcountry) and include only first and second-year offerings (for older skis still in the manufacturer's line, see our archived reviews on-line), and we get what you see here—40 tele and AT skis, another 10 specifically designed for women.

The stage for this year's test was Jay Peak, Vermont's northernmost ski area. We assembled an incredibly diverse group of skiers who meant to exploit all aspects of each ski and provide the most objective and well rounded reviews possible. We mounted the telemark skis with Rottefella Cobra R8s, a perfect test binding with its removable heel throw. On the AT skis, we chose Silvretta's Pure. Dig in. - Mike Horn

GOODE BC116

sizes [cm]: 163, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 139/116/123 weight/pair [g]: 2540 (183cm)

It's huge, it's light and it comes in just two sizes. The Goode BC116 needs room to roam, and will roam further this year with a notched tip and tail for skins. Plus, Goode has lost the alpine-styled binding plate of last season's line, and added internal reinforcements for binding inserts. It's not a ski amenable to making on-demand short turns. Bumps and hardpack? Not the primary calling, although several testers were surprised at its hold. Given the girth, several skiers found it was better skied parallel than tele. "Quiver ski," was frequently voiced. "A fun ski when it's fresh and wide open," said one tester.

KARHU PFD

sizes [cm]: 172 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 139/110/137 weight/pair [g]: 4235 (172cm)

When it comes to cosmetics, the PFD, painted by a Jackson Hole local, is schizophrenic like a mullet: all skiing’s classic days depicted on the cherry wood top, all surf’s up on the bottom. The name is perfect for the shape. This 172cm-only flotation device has a huge profile (best mounted nearly at center) and what Karhu calls a “snowboard-like flex”—not a stretch for a factory that once produced more snowboards than skis. The thing is, few will ski it. Limited edition? We’re talking some 150 pairs in shops. We’ll get on them when the snow accumulates and report back.

VOILÉ Insane

sizes [cm]: 178 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 140/109/132 weight/pair [g]: 3860 (178cm)

The big, light Carbon Surf is still riding the wave in its third year (we’ve archived our review). But it’s literally dwarfed by the new Insane. If there’s a Dimension Championship, with a 140/109/32mm profile in a single 178cm length, the Insane is a finalist. Graphically explicit—and offensive to some testers—the Insane is light for its size thanks to an aspen core with carbon reinforcement. Among our hardest-charging testers, responses were mixed. While Voilé claims the Insane will serve skiers of all abilities, our testers’ advice was you better be on your game. “Insanely sweet to ski on,” said a tester. “A perfect, dedicated backcountry ski.” Most testers took issue with that assessment. “A very loose, wide ski,” as another put it, with soft tails that release and smear easily. “At speed through irregularities, it’s a wild ride.” “It’s a big, soft pow and crud board that likes to charge hard as long as the snow is forgiving,” added a third. And from another: “It plows through soft snow, but that’s it.”

Buy Now From:

ICELANTIC Scout

sizes [cm]: 143 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 140/105/130 weight/pair [g]: 2540 (143cm)

If the Oompa Loompas skied, they might take to the Icelantic Scout, a contentious twin-tip that rewards—indeed demands—a vigorous skiing style. It's a single-sized (143cm) ski with monstrous dimensions (140/105/130mm) from a Colorado-based company that is, they say, "committed to exploring the structure of wonder." More specifically, they "plan to prove to the market that surface area is king," and that the Scout has that of a 185cm shaped ski. We had too little time and too few testers on the Scout, but a preliminary assessment suggests that, first off, it's no lunch tray. The Scout will carve if, as a tester said, "you're willing to commit to putting the ski way up on edge—it's a long way from one set of edges to the other." Prepare for jackhammer unweighting. Another tester characterized it as "a lap dance ski—good for doing short [skin] laps." We'll wait until we can get the Scout back on snow to report on other capabilities.

KARHU Jak Team

sizes [cm]: 172, 179, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 134/100/125 weight/pair [g]: 4090 (186cm)

A monster twin-tip for big-mountain heroics in response to requests from Karhu's team skiers. Wider even than the old Jak, it has Karhu's tough Macrobloc core with Titanal PowerClaw and V-Band edge-enhancement. None of our testers gave it top marks for hard-snow performance or short-radius turns, though a couple thought it was adequate. But at higher speeds in softer snow and crud, it's a ripper. "This new Jak is an aggressive pow and crud ski that will blast through anything," one tester said. "Nothing gets in the way of these beastly crud-busting machines," said another. It was a top-three ski for our most veteran tester, who cited its range and modulation of arcs: "An excellent all-around ski that will provide good hard snow performance and excellent crud/powder performance."

ATOMIC Janak

sizes [cm]: 153, 163, 173, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 123/99/115 weight/pair [g]: 3910 (183cm)

The successor to the TeleDaddy, the Janak holds on to similar proportions, and maintains its patriarchal presence in the heavily overhauled Atomic line. While the power-to-the-edges Beta design endures, new features include different laminates above and below the core and a magnesium-infused cap—all in the interest of smoother flex and better dampening. The Janak is definitely a softer ski than the TeleDaddy, with nearly unanimous reviews that it was best in softer snow and crud, and specialized in longer and medium-radius turns. Like Atomic's other new skis named after South American and Himalayan mountains, the Janak is named from the latter. Not all testers were pleased with the makeover. "Vague," a TeleDaddy partisan termed the Janak. But most testers liked the ride and the backcountry versatility, with a couple cautioning about limited resort suitability. "An ideal all-snow backcountry ski."

It handled mank, powder, crud and re-freeze with poise," said one. "Caresses the terrain. Really takes crud and variable conditions well," said another. "A good choice for BC powder touring," added a third tester.

Buy Now From:

K2 Anti Piste

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 131/98/116 weight/pair [g]: 4268 (174cm)

This is the biggest freeheel ski K2 has fielded—a flat-out powder ski for the quiver and with a bit of edge, according to them. It's a ski that likes to be revved high, testers found, and demands that you're buckled in the driver's seat. "Don't get caught asleep at the wheel on the Anti Piste," one said. We tested it in 181 and 174cm lengths. Even the shorter one evoked tester cautions: "These are like a race horse let loose in the wild. If you can manage the ride, you'll have a blast. They require 100% commitment on all but the easiest terrain." And, "A hard-charging ski not for the faint of heart or thigh. Not a tight woods noodler." It displays a propensity for longer and medium radius turns, and rips smoothly through powder and crud. "Handled a variety of terrain with prowess," another tester observed.

Buy Now From:

ROSSIGNOL Sick Bird

sizes [cm]: 171, 178, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 128/98/121 weight/pair [g]: 4420 (178cm)

A Big Bird for sick lines. The widest freeheel ski Rossi has offered, it's the first to go beyond Rossi's previous raised-tail designs into a true twin-tip. There's no interior metal, but it does have a tri-density core with different materials delivering liveliness, response and shock absorption. Rossi characterizes it as a float-and-turn ski with size and weight that may not be for everyone (the testers agreed). Those who might experience difficulty include skiers who prefer slower speeds and tighter lines—"The ski preferred longer arcs, but would drift shorter turns without much complaint," said one strong tester. "The Sick Bird is a powerful ski that needs to be driven hard," commented another, because this is an open-throttle machine.

Buy Now From:

BD Verdict

sizes [cm]: 170, 180, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 128/98/116 weight/pair [g]: 3900 (180cm)

"Apocalypse pow?" The graphics on what BD calls its "image" ski seem to be taken out of Revelations—portentous and vaguely menacing. The widest ski that BD has ever fielded, the Verdict has proprietary Dual-Torsion bow construction and a squared-off tip. We had only a 170cm length to test, which, surprisingly, was fine with several bigger testers. Maybe that's because several testers described the Verdict as "a stiff, boardy ride, pivoting and skidding more than it is prone to carve—but doing both with alacrity." Even at a shorter length, it's got punching power. "The wide platform rips through funky snow, pivots effortlessly in tight trees," a tester observed. "If you keep your mass over the top of the skis they react well." Another agreed, "It's deceiving that it can make such quick turns. Surprisingly maneuverable, but not a carver." The verdict on the Verdict: It's a stubby, swervy crudbuster of a ski, not for the passive.

Buy Now From:

FISCHER T-Stix 96

sizes [cm]: 168, 177, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 131/96/119 weight/pair [g]: 4140 (186cm)

In Fischer's yearly overhaul of their line, the one constant has been some form of the name Stix, whether Big Stix or now, T-Stix. This year Fischer has a three-ski line, or one model that comes in three sizes with differing sidecuts to preserve a constant turning radius. They're twin-tipped and they're big: the shortest ski, at 168cm, has a 124mm tip. Fischer considers them "big" skis, but somewhat softer than the skis in the alpine line from which they're plucked. Only the 168cm and 177cm skis were available. Even the shorty stood up to aggro skiing: "It effortlessly does it all, except for the longest radius turns," said one veteran tester. From another: "A nice blend of responsiveness and dampening. Felt stable at speed, yet was quick and responsive." With the 177 there was a hung jury. Some testers applauded the carryover of short-ski suppleness; others were looking for more long-ski hold in variable conditions and faster speeds.

Buy Now From:

GOODE BC95

sizes [cm]: 162, 172, 182, 192 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 126/95/112 weight/pair [g]: 2400 (182cm)

The BC95 seems to strike a happy medium between the whopping 116—we’re talking waist widths here—which is in its third year and appears in our archived reviews. We skied the 172cm and 181cm lengths. Women preferred to go shorter still, and Goode does have a 162cm version. Some testers couldn’t adjust to its extreme lightness. But as one suggested: “A 100% carbon ski [sans P-tex] feels very different from a foam or wood [core] ski, and it takes a while to trust them.” The 95 is moved between long and medium radius turns with aplomb, and was at its best on softer snow and crud. “Stable like an SUV; but they drive like a Porsche,” said one tester. “If you push on these skis they push back—and it feels good. They turn on a dime and they make you forget they’re even on your feet,” said a second. “A fun ski that I would consider setting up as my own AT boards. Wide underfoot, light, yet stable enough to handle some bigger terrain,” said another.

G3 Reverend

sizes [cm]: 170, 177, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 126/93/114 weight/pair [g]: 4000 (185cm)

A big ski that is designed to arc in every way, the Reverend delivered a sound, measured sermon that didn’t try to inspire a congregation, and even made a few bigger, stronger testers beg for forgiveness. Some found it best at medium and higher speeds and long and medium radius turns—“These are not ballet shoes,” as one tester said. Or as another was moved to comment: “The meek may inherit the earth, but they should avoid this ski.” On reprobate terrain, the Reverend put down the hammer: “Bombproof long radius [turns] through the worst of the muck,” said a tester. “Crud busting,” said another. “Plows through everything.”

Buy Now From:

KARHU Jak

sizes [cm]: 165, 172, 179, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 124/90/113 weight/pair [g]: 3840 (179cm)

The name is the same, but the ski is virtually new. Along with re-sizing the lengths, Karhu has kept the Jaks at 90mm underfoot and added a shorter (165cm) option. The twin-tip tail has been cropped to a slightly raised tail, notched for skins (these changes have shaved 200g/pr). But arguably the most important additions are the Titanal Powerclaws and V-Bands, which provide torsional stiffness and more effective edging in the harder conditions that made older Jaks—and the skiers on them—nervous. There were still a couple of holdouts on the Jak’s hard snow capability. But for most testers, the new Jak was an improvement. “Carvolicious, stable and very playful. Loves to ski anywhere there is enough snow to push around or set an edge into,” said one tester. “They’re more versatile than the old Jaks,” another concluded. “Runs terrain very well,” said a third. “A great ski for off-piste.”

KARHU Jak BC

sizes [cm]: 165, 172, 179, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 124/90/113 weight/pair [g]: 3280 (179cm)

As with the Jak, the BC’s width has been narrowed to a still-generous 90mm for all sizes, and the tail trimmed to a slight kick—forget fakies—and notched for skins. Also, the new BC is a whopping 420 grams less than the old BC. But, there’s no new Titanal here: construction is still the wood-and-fiberglass Macrolite core with stiffening carbon stringers. “It’s still not a real hard snow ski—” “Requires concentration,” said one tester, even though more testers than last year thought it could stick fairly well to the slick. For most testers, the Jak BC carved and released well, and performed best in longer and medium-radius turns. But, overall tester opinion was that it lived up to its BC appellation. “I think I just found my touring ski,” said one senior tester. “It’s light enough to skin easily or carry on a bootpack, and is still wide enough to make big buttery turns in a variety of snow conditions.” “A very flexible, predictable and playful ski. Solid under foot. I’d love to use it in variable snow and powder,” said another. “Easy to turn, light, soft—nice for a person my size and ability,” said a female tester skiing the 179cm, mounted AT.

K2 Mt. Baker

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 122/89/108 weight/pair [g]: 3460 (174cm)

K2’s widest randonneé ski brought to mind the celebrated line from a Ring Lardner short story—“Let’s you and him fight.”—since it provoked some tester tussling. Designed on the old Work Stinx chassis, primarily for soft snow, but with cross-braided buttressing from the alpine line, the Mt. Baker felt DOA (or departure) for one veteran tester—“a completely different ski from the Shuksan”—but for others it was smooth, obedient and easily set into turns. “Great powder skis,” said a tester. “Not as wide as some, but with a good combination of shape, sidecut, stiffness and length.” But he also noted that the 181cm tested demanded energetic input in “clutch situations in tight trees.”

Buy Now From:

K2 Work Stinx

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 124/88/111 weight/pair [g]: 3600 (174cm)

To encourage taking more sick days, K2 has again overhauled the Work Stinx. The old woody now has two layers of metal in its layup to improve hard-snow hold, along with K2's new progressive sidecut for better crud capability. Employers beware: the new Work rocks—it was a hit with most testers, who liked its damp, flowing feel and its ability to handle a variety of turn shapes and snow conditions. A few thought it needed to be stepped on, massaged or goosed for turn initiation, but that wasn't enough to diminish enthusiasm for what proved to be one of the better skis in the test. "The ski gives confidence in all terrain," one tester said. "Great transitions, loves it all, very damp but active," said another. "Unlike many of the stiffer fat skis, the Work Stinx allows the ski to flex evenly throughout its length. This lets the skier dictate the performance. You need a bit of effort, but it pays back with sweet, go-anywhere performance," said a third. "A great trail and light-off-piste rager, very playful and responsive," another added.

Buy Now From:

DYNAFIT Freeride Carbon 10.0

sizes [cm]: 178, 187 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 118/88/110 weight/pair [g]: 2780 (178cm)

When the European outdoor-gear giant Salewa bought Dynafit last year, they realized—with considerable input from American distributor Life-Link—that if they wanted to get more U.S. market penetration for Dynafit skis, it wasn't going to be on the back of the relatively light, uphill-oriented skis that the brand was noted for. Hence the Freeride Carbon 10.0. It's wider but not bloated, and is lightened by a carbon, micro-cell construction, courtesy of Blizzard in Austria. As long as the testers didn't drop radically into the slow zone, the palpably stiff Freeride could handle a variety of turn shapes and snow conditions. Testers were impressed. One, who doubted whether they were for him with an "American charge first and ask questions later" attitude, concluded: "They performed well in all conditions, even icy hardpack. Really good balance between a light touring ski and one that can handle being skied aggressively." In another view: "Initiates and finishes powerful carves with ease, and makes smooth, fluid transitions with very little energy. Responsive on short turns, reliable on long."

VÖLKL T-Rock

sizes [cm]: 164, 172, 180 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 119/87/111 weight/pair [g]: 3300 (172cm)

What would a ski test be without controversy? This year, Völkl provided it. Last year's T-Rock was among the tested. But this year's ski didn't flex the same in hand or on snow. A couple of testers complained: "Lost its backbone." "Unstable compared to last year. T-Not!" Völkl admitted to having pre-production inconsistencies in their skis (including the ones we had last year) and had slightly softened the lay up by changing the thickness of fiberglass and its weave in the ones they shipped last year. But for most testers, that ski—and this year's test skis—still rocked. Lively, but fairly damp, better at medium and longer radius turns, they still got high marks for hardpack. Said two women skiing the shortest, 164cm length: "Responds when you want it to, loves to mix it up—effortlessly." "Good overall ski. All snow, all conditions and speeds." Every male skier wanted to go longer than the 172cm ski we had, but most found it praiseworthy. "If you pay attention, they ski the groomed well, and in the fun stuff—just point and shoot." "Top 3 pick," said another. "Mixed off-piste, good on firm snow and in trees; a fun ski."

ATOMIC Kongur

sizes [cm]: 168, 177, 184, 191 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 116/84/108 weight/pair [g]: 3510 (184cm)

Two words describe the new, magnesium-infused version of the Atomic Beta TM-X: go figure. One skier couldn't

find the Kongur's sweet spot; another claimed he could—under his buns, once the skis had been rendered into a bench. But then, consider this: "Very neutral ski, very versatile. A very forgiving ski that responds to the skier. Smooth-flowing over most terrain. Lightweight, all-around ski." And these: "A good ski for someone who tours and skis in soft snow." "Solid-feeling ski with good edge hold."

Buy Now From:

ROSSIGNOL Powder Bird

sizes [cm]: 160, 168, 176, 184 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 120/83/110 weight/pair [g]: 3160 (168cm)

The original Powder Bird appeared in the Rossi line 25 years ago. Now, it's been the inspiration for Rossi to the antiseptic letter/number designations and "bring back the rooster," in both names and graphics. Based on the new Bandit 3, the new Powder Bird has dual-density sidewalls called Shockwalls, complete with a shock-softening layer underfoot and a more rigid lower layer for edge grip. This Bird flew through turns at all speeds and radii, and was slightly better, testers thought, on soft snow and crud than hardpack. "Powder Bird? I say Power Bird!" one tester exclaimed, noting, as did others that it's a versatile ski—"Obedient," as another said—if you can drive it.

Buy Now From:

BLACK DIAMOND Crossbow

sizes [cm]: 163, 171, 179, 187 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 116/83/106 weight/pair [g]: 3240 (179cm)

It still looks more longbow than crossbow to us, but BD is, you might say, re-stringing its original ski with an asymmetrical torsional rib that stiffens under pressure to improve edge hold on harder snow. According to BD, the new Crossbow has a more balanced geometry with a softer tail for a smoother feel. But the re-design is still a stiffer ski that prefers harder snow and crud, testers found, and medium to long radius turns. And it was found to penalize laziness, while rewarding a more aggro style. "It's a powerful mid-fat that will turn well even on harder snow," one tester said, adding, "But due to its stiffness, it's hard to slide and cheat on variable steep crud." "Does a good job of skiing just about everything lift-served, but its too stiff and skinny for an all-around backcountry ski," said another. A third view: "Very reactive and stable, this ski will drive through anything that is in front of it and carves amazingly—a lot of snap."

Buy Now From:

G3 Ticket

sizes [cm]: 174, 182 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 120/81/109 weight/pair [g]: 3400 (182cm)

Of the four skis G3 introduced in very limited distribution last winter, the Ticket is the most radical. Its funhouse mirror shape is visibly deeper on the skis' outer edges than on the inner ones. What inspired the asymmetry: an attempt to get the uphill ski into a tighter turn radius and out of the way of the downhill ski, preventing ruinous tip crossings. Though not all testers would punch this Ticket, most thought the skis behaved as intended, especially in medium and short radius turns, where they showed a pleasingly supple side. But when pressure was applied, a couple of hard chargers thought the Ticket could be overpowered. "Skis well on groomed—like a cruiser. You feel comfortable and predictable. Cuts and busts up crud well," said a tester. "Awesome edge pressure and balance. The concept works," said another. "It's a fun, mid-speed carving ski that likes to dodge, dart and play," added a third.

Buy Now From:

G3 Baron

sizes [cm]: 163, 170, 177, 184 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 116/81/104 weight/pair [g]: 3500 (184cm)

When it comes to skis, the Baron is the “guide” in Genuine Guide Gear—a utility randonneé ski with reasonable width and a light feel. Overall, the Baron had a fairly royal presence, which was best at medium and long radius turns and dealt equally well with hardpack, powder and crud. It was palpably—but not overly—stiff for several testers, who thought it needed to be commanded. “Skied vigorously, and performed well,” a tester said. “Solid, stable ski that holds well on the groomed and can handle variable snow,” added another. “Fun all around,” said a third. “Lightweight, but not wimpy. Would be good going up or coming down steeps.”

Buy Now From:

KARHU Kodiak

sizes [cm]: 166, 176, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 117/80/105 weight/pair [g]: 3610 (186cm)

One of the best-received skis in last year's test, the Kodiak returns unchanged—as does tester enthusiasm. Slightly better at higher speeds and medium-to-long radius turns, the Kodiak moves easily into a turn and releases from a carve on demand, testers thought. In a word: versatile. "Great all-around ski. Nice lively feel without losing predictability. If I could own only one pair of skis for all conditions, these would be my choice," said one veteran. Added another: "Permitted me to play with a mixed bag of turns and responded beautifully no matter what. The highest performing ski in varied conditions that I've ever skied." "Good everywhere," said third, "but especially in the East Coast, a one-ski quiver for sure."

ATOMIC Tacora

sizes [cm]: 163, 172, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 117/80/104 weight/pair [g]: 3500 (181cm)

The Tacora is a totally new ski from Atomic. With their magnesium Beta construction, it fits at the lower end of the m range, based upon its proportions. According to Atomic, this is where skiers, who are looking for an all-mountain ski, are heading. Most testers cited its lightness and the palpable contrast between a somewhat soft tip and stiffer tail—flow in front, kick in back. "A good crud buster. Likes to take you straight down the mountain," said one tester. "I could carve across the fall line, but it preferred a straighter line," said another, adding, "Not that it isn't fun, but I wouldn't want to get into technical terrain with it. However, it's a good ski for someone looking to get into a versatile, lightweight backcountry ski." Said a third: "It certainly is light and might be a good choice on a long skin and low-angle downhill."

Buy Now From:

BD Ethic

sizes [cm]: 158, 167, 176, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/79/102 weight/pair [g]: 3280 (185cm)

The Ethics Committee (i.e., our testers) found this successor to BD's best-selling Mira in violation of soft snow standards. However, it worked well for most testers at medium speeds and through medium-radius turns on harder snow. "In hard conditions, it's great and smooth flowing—it moves well with the terrain," said one. "It's a nice, firm-snow ski. Older-style sidecut leads to quick edge sets," said another. "But it wouldn't be my choice in powder."

Buy Now From:

K2 World Piste

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 119/78/105 weight/pair [g]: 3100 (174cm)

This long-lived K2 ski has had its passport renewed—again. It's a bit wider, stiffened in its forebody with a "Mini-mod" wrap and a couple of sheets of titalanal for a ride that K2 says should be smoother on harder snow. Tester response was almost in lockstep, with "good-all-around" the watchword. They responded to its ability to engage a carve, but unlock when smearing was necessary. Its new, turn-inducing wider tip was also noted. "Performs like a wider ski in powder," one tester said. But also noted was its tendency to "lose a little acuteness," as one tester put it, at very high speeds on hardpack.

Buy Now From:

K2 Shuksan

sizes [cm]: 153, 160, 167, 174, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 117/78/105 weight/pair [g]: 3150 (174cm)

As K2 doubles the size of its randonnée line, the Shuksan is the only one of the old guards left. But it, too, has been tweaked for the second straight year, and for the better. To say that it's an "all-around" ski is not damning with faint praise. Testers found it capable of cutting turns—without balking—in all shapes and in a wide range of snow conditions. "Easy turning cruiser. Good carver, and easy to transition from one turn to another," said one tester. "Swings easily into the fall line, so you get it on edge pretty well," said another. "A fun, solid-feeling ski that, with time, I'd be comfortable skiing anywhere. A bit soft, but it had a big sweet spot." "For their thinner width, they floated well in powder and crud—very responsive," added a third.

Buy Now From:

ROSSIGNOL Dirty Bird

sizes [cm]: 158, 166, 174, 182 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 116/78/105 weight/pair [g]: 4280 (178cm)

The dirt on the Dirty Bird, now Rossi's narrowest ski? Well, there's not much. It's not too narrow, beamier than the old T3, and skis clean in a wide range of conditions, speeds and turn shapes, and it received the best overall rating of the new Rossignols. "This rooster will wake you up in the morning," said one tester, citing its willingness to take "aggressive input," as well as cruise on autopilot. "Metal makes the difference," said another, referring to the core, and adding: "Nice and variable turns, smooth clutch and hard bite." "Very quick and energetic feel—dances from turn to turn," said a third. According to another tester, long familiar with Rossignols: "The Dirty Bird shares Rossignol's signature dampness with the rest of the line. A big improvement over the T3. It handles soft snow better without giving up hard snow

performance.”;

Buy Now From:

SKI TRAB FreeRando

sizes [cm]: 157, 164, 171, 178, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 108/78/93 weight/pair [g]: 2580 (171cm)

The Freerando is Ski Trab’s widest ski. Although there’s no signature dual tip, the tip is oversized and softened, which Ski Trab claims makes the ski ride like it is 10m wider. The FreeRando also features chatter-inhibiting rubber shock absorbers in a carbon-reinforced cap construction. Testers found it had to be stepped on a bit in turns, and that it was better in long and medium radius arcs. “Stable, stiff, lightweight. This ski would be great for a long tour—Euro style—where the terrain is variable,” said one. “It flows well with a bit of manipulation,” noted another. “This was the best guide/light tour oriented ski I have found. Fun in the bumps, stable in the crud, stable at moderate speeds.”

VÖLKL Snow Wolf

sizes [cm]: 156, 163, 170, 177, 184 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 111/76/98 weight/pair [g]: 2700 (170cm)

With last year’s Snow Wolf, Völkl responded to the demand for a wider, lightweight randonnée ski that would maintain the damp, silky feel and tenacious hold that previous Völkl skis were known for. One BC editor found, as previous testers had, that the Snow Wolf can stay on the prowl, just as long as it’s kept under its speed limit. “I took it to heavy powder and light, steeps, ice and everything in between and found it to be a stable and reliable performer. On steep corn, the snappy Wolf rebounded enthusiastically through every turn.”

DYNAFIT Freeride Carbon 8.0

sizes [cm]: 155, 165, 175 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 113/75/100 weight/pair [g]: 2780 (175cm)

A skinnier version of the 10.0, the 8.0 retains the carbon/micro-cell, lightweight lay-up in a size range that should appeal to lighter skiers. We only had the 175cm, and agro-male skiers were looking for more length. Still, as one tester put it: "Terrific for a lighter person or whomever wants to gain ground in a hurry. It's surprisingly stout, despite its length. Its stiffness didn't get in the way of maneuverability." Another view: "At medium speeds this ski performs all turns well. A good all-day touring ski. Lightweight and quick. Pretty responsive on varied terrain."

KARHU Grizzly

sizes [cm]: 166, 176, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/75/101 weight/pair [g]: 3140 (176cm)

This bear doesn't bulk up for winter. The Grizzly is designed primarily for on-piste and harder snow, with its Titanal Powerclaws wrapping the claw and the Titanal bands at the tip and tail for edging. It is Karhu's next-to-narrowest ski and enters its second year unchanged, except for a lower price. Last year testers liked its mid-range performance—at medium speed and medium-radius turns—along with its supple feel and ability to carve and release on demand. They still do. "Very quiet, and moves from turn to turn very easily," said one. Adds another: "Very supple and quiet. Easy turning. Caresses the terrain and snow so you can feel it."

BD Frantic

sizes [cm]: 159, 167, 175, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 107/73/97 weight/pair [g]: 3140 (183cm)

What's in a name? Perhaps the answer is taking this Euro-style (fairly narrow) ski into crud and powder. The Frantic is the successor to the Nunyo. According to BD, the Frantic is designed for steep slopes and hard snow—the latter validated by tester response. "Keep this ski in the fall line," said one. "Great at high speeds." "Stay out of the woods and pow with these," cautioned another. "Very responsive to subtle input," said a hard-charging third. "But its narrowness makes crud and soft snow a bit of a chore."

SKI TRAB Duo Sint Aero

sizes [cm]: 157, 164, 171, 178 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 105-102/73/89 weight/pair [g]: 2100 (171cm)

Ski Trab is a small, 50-year old Italian factory specializing in ski mountaineering/touring skis. Now available in North America, the Ski Trab dominates randonnée racing with a ridiculously light ski, featuring a distinctive twin-tip/twin-tail design. This design also appears on the Sint Aero, which has mid-fat width, but shares a honeycomb core and carbon construction. The twin-tip increases surface area for flotation; the twin differentiated tail compensates for a very torsionally stiff midsection by flexing to make for a quicker turn. (The similar Duo Sintesi, which we didn't test, has a slightly heavier wood channel core at a considerable savings in price.) Once they got used to the look of the tip—"Gonna be too many questions in the lift line!"—testers found it best at medium speeds, with good performance through a full range of turns. "Needs very little input to turn smoothly. A very turny ski with good edge. Holds on harder snow," said one tester. Another found it better at higher revs: "The tip is odd, but it didn't negatively affect performance. Assuming this ski was made to excel going up, I expected it to be a rodeo ride on the return trip. I was wrong. It held on blue ice, it knifed through soft snow in the trees and, with its narrow profile, is a sufficient bump ski. Despite its light weight, it holds at speed."

ATOMIC Diran

sizes [cm]: 150, 160, 170, 180, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 106/72/97 weight/pair [g]: 3000 (180cm)

The Diran is a reincarnation of Atomic's long-lived TM-22 and the softer MX:8 that succeeded it. According to Atomic, there is no change from the venerable dimensions that comprise a popular profile for AT in Europe. Testers claim that it skis soft snow and crud fairly well, with a slight leg up on harder conditions—at its best in medium-radius turns. Tester response was all over the map, though nearly all cited its light feel underfoot. "This ski is a touring tool, not for fast downhill skiing," said one. "Great upper-intermediate ski for resorts and backcountry," said another. "A nice groomer and light off-piste board with the classic Atomic snappiness, but not as stiff," added a third.

K2 Super Stinx

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/70/97 weight/pair [g]: 2860 (174cm)

This hard snow specialist has been overhauled this year with a new tip shape, stiffened forebody and the insert pattern K2 has used on several of its stable mates. Testers found that it lived up to its billing: a snappy, reactive, tenacious hard

snow ski best kept within the Groomerville city limits. "Big fun," said one tester. "Once in a turn it held like a champ." "Has the responsiveness to make quick turns, and travels well in long turns. Holds on firm snow," said another.

Buy Now From:

K2 Chogori

sizes [cm]: 146, 153, 160, 167, 174, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/70/97 weight/pair [g]: 2600 (174cm)

A new ski in K2's ever-expanding randonnée line, the Chogori is basically a significantly lightened up Work Stinx—right down to its price—for quad-trashing vertical. This ski was not available for testing.

Buy Now From:

K2 Sahale

sizes [cm]: 153, 160, 167, 174, tip/waist/tail [mm]: 102/70/89 weight/pair [g]: 2200 (160cm)

A specialty superlight ski developed in collaboration with ski mountaineer Andrew McLean, the Sahale has a torsion construction that's stiffened by a wide carbon stringer. With a tip that barely clears 100cm, it is designed for tight terrain and harder snow. When we can take it to the chuting range, we'll report back.

Buy Now From:

Without Whom...

The Testers:

- Hardy Avery
- Lindsay Bilodeau
- Oliver Blackman
- Ben Bridgewater
- Wendy Bridgewater
- Erin Bushey
- Stephanie Campbell
- Mike Cannon
- Maria Daley
- Stephen Gorman
- Jason Haddick
- Emily Johnson
- Matt Mancini

- Ryland Mauck-Duff
- Andrew Minier
- Alan Moats
- Brian Mohr
- Eli Moore
- Sam Petri
- Adina Roskies
- Mickey Stone
- Lauren Traister
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