

Ski Test 2006 - Tribal Rights

Contributed by John Dostal
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With the ski test, it's the same crisis each year: how to make it better, more inclusive, more answerable to all the variables of snow and terrain that comprise the backcountry. That and get every damn new and second-year ski in every size. And get them mounted on time, with proper adjustments for twin-tips and fatties.

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So we trusted what we knew, relying, one could say, on our tribal instincts. We rounded up a bunch of skiers, some we'd skied with, some we knew by reputation. And no mush-mouths invited, or one-ski, one-brand zealots. We ran the age spread to five decades. Invited idiosyncrasy. (So what if a Colorado-based tester friend initially evaluated skis on how big they made her butt look? She knew her way around the hill, and was a shrewd judge of ski design.)

We put the tribe up for a few days at Jay Peak, Vermont's northernmost ski area, known for its powder and for the accessibility of rugged terrain. At the end of March, most companies could supply samples in two sizes at best. We mounted (or remounted) them with Rottefella's 6 and 8 so testers could swap their heelpieces from ski to ski. We had each pair drilled *randonné*, too, holed out for Fritschi Freerides. We included new and second-year skis. (For older skis—still in-line—refer to our archival tests on-line.) What showed up? Fatter skis and more of them. Women-dedicated skis. We were shocked! And stoked!

Inevitably, amidst the tech talk, chatter turned to mountains, lines and stashes. As it should. Because when the ski test hits the pages, and the pages hit your hands, it should be an occasion to think about—dream about—what these tools are for, and where to use them. So now, over to you.

ATOMIC www.atomicski.com

The ageless TM22 (see online archives) still anchors a line with several new skis—including one for women—and a construction change that slightly softens existing models.

ATOMIC TeleDaddy

sizes [cm]: 153, 163, 173, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 116/99/126 weight/pair [g]: 3940 (183 cm) \$608

It's no longer the biggest of the big, but the ski that Atomic recruited from their alpine line a year ago and treated to a tele-genic makeover with a softer flex and reinforced binding area still has a patriarchal presence. In addition to new cosmetics, this year's ski shows the effects of a new fiberglass weave over the core that makes it slightly softer longitudinally. And it now comes in a 153 cm length. We tested a 173, which a couple of male hard chargers thought was too short, and lighter women thought too long. The measured response of one tester: "Very broad performance range—short superb drifting turns and clean medium and long radius carves in hardpack. Light and easy to initiate. Excellent float. Consistent and stable in mixed-condition turns." And the shorter version: "This ski rocks. Will do anything—rail groomers, ski powder, snowy bumps, slush." Another view: "This ski is a crud shovel. It has the ability to throw any amount of wet corn out of its path."

ATOMIC Beta TM:X

sizes [cm]: 168, 177, 184, 191, 198 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 117/84/109 weight/pair [g]: 3540 (184 cm) \$574

Successor to the TM:EX, this is no longer among the widest. And with Atomic's new fiberglass weave around the core, it's softer longitudinally. But it remains among the most versatile skis we tested, damp and lively and maybe a little quicker into the turn than its predecessor. A go-to ski that performed equally well in hard, soft and hammered snow. "A nice ski that inspires confidence. It's quick yet has power," said one tester. "Nice combination—lively but stayed damp at high speeds. Easy initiation into a stable turn," said another. And further: "Perfect combination of torsional rigidity and flex throughout—a great all-mountain ski. If you're only going to own one pair of skis, this would be a good choice."

ATOMIC MX:8

sizes [cm]: 150, 160, 170, 180 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 106/72/98 weight/pair [g]: 2330 (160 cm) \$449

The MX:8 is basically a softer version of Atomic's long-lived TM:22. According to Atomic, the aim was to retain the footprint—narrow enough for prolonged skinning—and the proprietary, torsionally rigid Beta construction, but make a more powder-friendly ski. Testers still found it best in harder snow and crud, with a lively feel that came through in medium-radius turns. A few views: "Good torsional stability. Nice and easy turn initiation with good edge hold in a carve." "Lively and responsive ski." "Quick, smooth, medium turns."

ATOMIC MX:7

sizes [cm]: 153, 161, 169, 177 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 103/70/95 weight/pair [g]: 2670 (161 cm) \$321

The MX:7 is Atomic's least expensive ski and lacks the edge-empowering Beta construction of other Atomic's a ski better suited to groomers than to demanding backcountry usage. Still, on the former, it's no slouch: "I was impressed by the stability and liveliness of this ski," said one tester. "Very quick edge-to-edge. Held on hard snow very well." But for several testers, the downside was its tendency to get thrown around in heavy and funky snow.

ATOMIC MX:11

sizes [cm]: 160, 167, 175 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 96/67/86 weight/pair [g]: 1930 (160 cm) \$373

"Old school" is not necessarily a disparaging term. That's how a few testers admirably characterized the MX:11, one of the few skis we tried that had a tip measuring in double digits. That screams "randonnéé," and indeed it has the same dimensions as Atomic's well-known Tour Guide, its predecessors and spin-offs. "Nice sidecut—old school. More versatile than the MX:8. Makes for good jump turns and medium radius turns," said one tester. "Superlight and easy to turn," said another. A third opinion: "Old school straight, light, good edge grip, and nice powder shovel. Good for picking apart tight fall line terrain." Adding: "Don't exceed this ski's speed limit."

BLACK DIAMOND www.blackdiamondequipment.com

Overhauls line with a works-anywhere ski and debuts first-ever women's model.

BLACK DIAMOND Havoc

sizes [cm]: 163, 173, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 120/88/113 weight/pair [g]: 3400 (173cm) \$569

The hellhound that BD let slip last year with the Havoc is bigger than any other in the line. But the only dog-like trait this twin-tip ski is its propensity, when taken up to speed, to take a bite out of difficult terrain, thanks in no small part to its wishbone-like reinforced Dual Torsion Bow construction. Testers were pleased with its performance. But many shared the opinion that you get out what you put in. Or, as one tester put it: "Not for the weak and weary." For those willing (and able) to work these "freight trains," as one tester termed them, at some velocity and ignore a slightly heavy feel that some thought could take a toll on long tours, the Havoc rewards, no matter what the turn radius. "Very predictable, stable and good at high speeds [with] good edge hold," said one tester. "Edge holding, crud-busting monsters," in the view of another. And finally: "My personal dream machine. Even, stout, and liked speed. Wide enough for the pow, and stiff enough for the hardpack."

BLACK DIAMOND Ethic

sizes [cm]: 158, 167, 176, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/79/102 weight/pair [g]: 3120 (176cm) \$559

Think of this as a value judgment by BD: overhauling the best-selling Mira by adding a Dual Torsion Bow construction to a shorter size—while retaining the mid-fat profile. Testers picked up on its liveliness and positive edge hold—"Quick, easy turner that holds a good line," said one—finding it slightly better in long and medium turns on harder snow. Some of those familiar with the Mira found the Ethic somewhat stiffer, sacrificing some wide-range prowess for carving ability. "It has great edge hold, lively sidecut and rebound, but was too much ski in tight trees and bumps, tending to lock onto a turn and rocket out at more speed than I wanted"; but a good ski for someone who likes to carve clean arcs in open terrain," said another. "Carves well," said a third, "stiff enough for good groomers, but too stiff for bumps and soft snow."

BLACK DIAMOND Nunyo

sizes [cm]: 159, 167, 175, 183, 191 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 107/73/97 weight/pair [g]: 2990 (175cm) \$499

The Nunyo is the narrowest and least expensive ski in the BD line. It shares the tuning-fork-configured Dual Torsion structure with the Havoc, but not that ski's power. Best in short and medium radius turns, this soft-flexing ski is "light and easy to turn," as one tester opined. User-friendly to those who don't want—or need—to punch it, the Nunyo requires a lighter touch than the hard-corps of skiers may want to provide.

DYNAFIT www.life-link.com

The randonnée resource went wider—and turned up—last year and now holds the line.

DYNAFIT 812

sizes [cm]: 160, 170, 180 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 111/72/101 weight/pair [g]: 2919 (170cm) \$490

Long known for its relatively slim, lightweight skis designed for mountain touring, Dynafit began to go wider two years ago with the Tourlite Tracer. It morphed—becoming a little narrower at waist and (turned up) tail, while retaining its Titanal and fiberglass reinforcement—into the 812 last year. Slightly heavier than its predecessor, it retains an overall light feel. According to our most rabid light-ski partisan: "Pretty light. But I found them easy to control in bumps, crud, powder, steeps and steep bumps."

FISHCER www.fischer-ski.com

One new ski and tweaked construction on a couple of returnees, with low-rider prices for all.

FISHCER Mustang

sizes [cm]: 170, 180, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 120/86/107 weight/pair [g]: 4220 (180 cm) \$549

With a 120 mm tip, this is now the biggest horse in Fischer's line, and slightly lighter and softer than the Big 8.6 that preceded it. Still, testers were nearly unanimous on its being a ski that shouldn't be reined in to be at its best or asked for quarter-horse turning. "This ski will not deflect in crud. It carves well, floats well and has a big sweet spot that needs to run to enter the turn." "This ski busts through just about anything. Not an easy ski to maneuver at slower speeds or in bumps." "A stiff, stable platform."

FISHCER Stingray

sizes [cm]: 165, 175, 185 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 115/76/100 weight/pair [g]: 3000 (175 cm) \$449

The name is new, but this is the successor to last year's 7.6 (cm underfoot), which was the successor to the previous, well-regarded 750; Okay, enough. Just put the emphasis on success. This mid-fat still has Fischer's CFC (Carbon Fiber Chassis) with an Air Channel core and a slight change in the carbon weave that softens it up a bit. It's the lightest ski in Fischer's line, comes in the shortest length and is the most skier-friendly, with tester response split between its facility in shorter and medium turns, in or out of crud. The Stingray's quickness and light feel impressed testers: "Quick yet damp. Good stable carver for how light it is." "Lively initiation into next tele turn." "A very predictable short-medium turning ski."

GOODE www.goode.com

Largest and widest lineup of ultra-light, pricey, carbon-construction skis, with shorter sizes flexed for women.

GOODE Carbon 116

sizes [cm]: 163, 183 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 140/116/122 weight/pair [g]: 2740 (183cm) \$990

Goode has men and women's world records in water skiing—the Carbon 116 is the supersized winter version except for the price, its astonishingly light. Given its girth, it's a test of Goode's claim that, by using carbon fiber, it can make a ski light but strong, soft but torsionally grippy. It comes in only two sizes. Given our experience with the Carbon 95, it's a pity Goode couldn't provide the shorter one. A radical design, the 116 demands more test time, including skinning. To one fat-ski fiend, it was "a great platform. Little-sidecut—love it. Feels solid." To a confirmed randonné wrangler: "Handled mushy corn very well but were a little unpredictable when set hard on edge. Very light, strong feel." Others were surprised with the ease of initiation—a sumo doing a back flip—while some wanted to reserve it for deep powder.

GOODE Carbon 95

sizes [cm]: 162, 172, 182, 192 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 125/95/112 weight/pair [g]: 2435 (172cm) \$990

In the Goode system, the model number is the waist size, and Goode's let out the seams with the Carbon 95. The 162 cm size was the shortest of all the Goode's we had. And this one, like the shortest in Goode's two other models, has been flexed for women or lighter weight skiers—with a corresponding adjustment in mounting location. A point proved by one of our rapier-thin male testers: "I skied these way too long at 182 cm; they rocked at 162. Really stable and responsive; Really got something back to spring into the next turn." One swooning tester wondered: "Oh my; do I have a ski attached to my boot? So damn light but stiff at the same time; and the ski is fat enough to make your butt look extremely small." Among the skiers hammering the longer sample: "Super light, good edge grip, remarkably stable," said one. "Excellent range of performance," said another. "Held on steep ice. Floated easily in crud. Very good grip on mid-radius carvers."

GOODE Carbon 82

sizes [cm]: 156, 166, 176, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 118/82/108 weight/pair [g]: 2370 (176cm) \$890

In its second year, this is the narrowest in Goode's line, but still among the widest in the test. As for light, it's what you'd expect from an all-carbon construction utilizing only alien materials in its base, edges and the open-cell foam filler between its interior vertical carbon ribs—a quality remarked on by all testers. Some found it chattery at high speeds, and getting "tossed around"; described some testers' experience with it in heavier snow. But for most, it worked well all over the mountain and the speedometer. "Held an edge better than expected for a light ski," one tester said. "Nice and light underfoot without feeling insubstantial." "A really smooth ride for such a light ski. This would make a corn snow weapon. It's light enough to hike or tour but able to handle a wide range of snow conditions with enthusiasm," said another.

KARHU www.karhu.com

Karhu lives up to its name ("bear" in Finnish), adding a couple of ursine power skis—and a kids' model—to a line anchored by the ultra-wide pairing of the Jak (see online archives) and Jil. [KARHU \[www.karhu.com\]\(http://www.karhu.com\)](http://www.karhu.com)

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KARHU Jak BC

sizes [cm]: 170, 180, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 127/97/117 weight/pair [g]: 3700 (180 cm) \$539

This is the sophomore year for the lightened version (by some 15% due to a lighter core and the substitution of carbon fiber for Titanal) of the Jak, Karhu's big body that spread its wings two years ago. A number of testers familiar with the Jak prefer the BC, partly because it lacks the Jak's prominently turned-up tail. As one said: "I own a pair of the old Jaks. These are better. They're less ponderous. This is still a big ski but it feels quicker than others in the same size class." Another view: "A big improvement to the Jak line. Stiffer, and [with] less tail, it's more apt to stay on edge." To a point. While the BC got high marks for its floatiness in powder, a number of testers cautioned that high speeds and hard snow could cause hardship: "Hardpack and groomers need not apply."

KARHU Kodiak

sizes [cm]: 166, 176, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 117/80/105 weight/pair [g]: 3160 (176 cm) \$499

The Kodiak is wider overall than its den-mate in the "Bear Series," configured for better performance on softer snow, although testers found it only slightly less potent on the firmer. Hard to find anyone who was bearish on this ski: it was among the best reviewed in the test. And again, men were skiing it in a 176 cm length. Said one tester, who could have been speaking for several: "A great all-around ski. Combines the quickness of the Grizzly with the float of a wider ski." If I had just one to own, this would be the one. "Carve-a-matic," said one senior tester. "Drives through mixed crud without deflection. Very good edge hold and carve modulation. Becomes more stable as it is loaded."

KARHU Grizzly

sizes [cm]: 156, 166, 176, 186 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/75/101 weight/pair [g]: 3150 (176 cm) \$479

A new, mid-fat designed for "all mountain" skiing, the Grizzly gets its bite from a Titanal laminate in the form of "Power Claws"—visible through the top sheet—configured to wrap around the ski's torsion box to improve edge hold without compromising a round flex. Karhu also excised a wedge of Titanal ("V Bands") at tip and tail to lighten the ski while maintaining tip and tail pressure. In general, testers found the Grizzly smooth and consistent, especially in medium-radius turns. "A very nice, all-round tele ski," said one tester. "Consistent performance at all speeds." Cautious about its high-speed applicability, another tester cited the Grizzly's "smooth, even flex"; quick, responsive but well-mannered. Female testers liked the ride as well, but wanted to go shorter than the 176 cm sample we tried.

KARHU Agent

sizes [cm]: 157, 167, 177 tip/waist/tail [mm]:110/83/103 weight/pair [g]:3460 (177cm) \$469

A dedicated park and pipe ski with equally elevated tip and tail, the Agent replaces the Ruckit. The Agent has a wide footprint and beat-on-me skully over a wood core with extra-thick steel edges. Despite its stiffness and beaminess, it came across to many testers as fairly light, turny and lively and could, said one, "go with the flow." Just so long as the flow didn't involve long, sweeping turns. Tester response varied according to bodyweight and aggressiveness: lighter skiers liked its versatility; heavier hammerheads cited its speed limit: "Very overpowerable at speed and with emergency maneuvers," said one.

K2 www.k2skis.com

More for women—and now kids—with new models and overhauls in a growing line.

K2 Hippy Stinx

sizes [cm]: 169, 179, 189 tip/waist/tail [mm]:125/95/118 weight/pair [g]: 4200 (179cm) \$599

K2 launched their graphically explicit "Hate-Ashbury" twin-tip late last winter. Untweaked this year, it's one of the widest—and heaviest—skis we tested. It has a hard-charge torsion box construction with K2's triaxial braiding. This brute invites open bowls, deep snow and the willingness to carry speed and arc big ones. As testers found, getting too laid-back with the crud busting, hyper-floating Hippy invites getting laid out. "A bit belligerent, with a mind of its own," said one tester. Other views: "The burliest ski of the test, sometimes these got carried away." "A great ski for powder and crud. Requires a lot of input." One tester responded, feeling this Hippy's love, "You f#*ing sallies. This is a dance partner for me."

K2 Work Stinx

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 122/89/112 weight/pair [g]: 3400 (174 cm) \$519

A major overhaul last year encouraged even more shiftlessness in the Work Stinx via a wider footprint and pronounced sidecut, and a dual-density wood core with greater torsional stiffness. Mid was the keyword for the ski we tested: mid-length, best at mid-range speeds in medium-radius turns. "The Work Stinx felt lighter than many wide skis—would make a good quiver ski for lighter skiers on soft-snow days," said a tester. "Nice in crud, and forgiving," said another, "Too soft for hard snow, squirrely at speed." "Very good powder and crud ski," added a third, "Reliable mid and short turns—good at a range of speeds." Several male testers wanted to go longer than the tester size. Although female testers would have preferred a shorter ski, the tested Stinx had a lot of femme appeal: "They float and respond exceptionally well," said one. "I had as much fun on these as on the Dawn Patrols, even with the [7cm] difference in length."

K2 Piste Pipe

sizes [cm]: 159, 169, 179 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 112/80/103 weight/pair [g]: 3500 (169 cm) \$449

Black matte finish, diabolical graphics, rivet-reinforced tip, switch-twitch tail, and crush-proof construction—who could mistake this for anything but a dedicated pipe ski? But it has outreach beyond the walls, though the highly elevated tail defies—or at least complicates—skin attachment. Despite the armor, the Pipe came across as reasonably lively. Most testers found it best in shorter and medium radius turns, though some were impressed with its long-turn capability. More common was agreement on its stability and its power—a palpable improvement over the previous version: "The Pipes skied great once they were brought up to speed; they powered through most everything," said one tester. "Really stable at medium speeds"; "They are a burly ski and ski like it," said another. Others called it "a Cadillac ski—smooth riding from front to back," and "stiff enough but not too stiff."

K2 World Piste

sizes [cm]: 167, 174, 181, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 114/78/105 weight/pair [g]: 3100 (174 cm) \$489

New cosmetics, binding mounting inserts and a slight adjustment to its dampness are all it takes to renew the passion for a ski that soon lived up to its name when, two seasons ago, K2 increased the original's dimensions along with its contact length, and stiffened its flex. Once a big, turny ski, in today's company it's a mid-range, turny ski. But mid can be good. The universal tester response, as one tester put it: "Good all-mountain performance—versatile." Generally user-friendly, it was too narrow-waisted for some testers in difficult, cruddy conditions, and was challenged crossing the border to higher speeds.

K2 Shuksan

sizes [cm]: 160, 167, 174, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 114/78/105 weight/pair [g]: 2900 (174cm) \$459

Last year, K2 exploded the dimensions of its versatile, hard-use randonnée ski, along the way lowering the tip profile to increase contact length and retaining the double sheets of Titanal that put punch in its platform. The now-wider Shuksan segues easily into short and medium turns, testers found: "As long as you keep this ski turning and rolling from edge to edge, it'll go anywhere with ease," one observed. "All-around," and "comfortable" were repeated characterizations. But watch the speed. It's not the ski, most testers agreed, for ripping big lines at serious speed.

K2 8611 Summit Superlight

sizes [cm]: 153, 160, 167, 174, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 107/70/97 weight/pair [g]: 2600 (174cm) \$359

K2's got a lock on irony, putting its wieldiest moniker on its lightest ski. The venerable 8611, whose new Superlight footprint makes it markedly wider than its previous incarnations, is lighter. Aimed at randonnée racers and those putting a premium on upward mobility, it utilizes a gram-shaving core of long-grain "plantation species" flacatta wood with carbon strands for stiffening. For testers, the 8611 was at its best in tight conditions where quick turns were vital: "very easy to put on edge and turn," said one. "Quick underfoot, great swing weight for jump turns," said another. "Gentle and forgiving," said a third, "as long as things don't get too rowdy." Meaning long-radius turns and higher speeds.

ROSSIGNOL www.rossignol.com

The tightly focused, four-ski lineup is unchanged in the second year, except for a slight rise in price, but continues to match up well against newcomers.

ROSSIGNOL T1

sizes [cm]: 150, 160, 170, 180 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 109/70/98 weight/pair [g]: 3120 (170 cm) \$375

This comparatively slim ski is Rossignol's least expensive, aimed at relative newbies primarily skiing groomed slopes. It's for skiers who want a soft-flexing ski best at shorter turns, and—no surprise given the short lengths—women. Testers readily found this a middle-of-the-road ski: moderately lively, damp and light underfoot. And best at medium turns. "The softness responded well [in] spring conditions," said one tester. Other views: "Seemed to like most snow and terrain. Real nice on upper intermediate terrain and for beginners." "Going moderately fast, this ski is super responsive and is great at short, quick turns on smooth, firmer snow."

ROSSIGNOL T2

sizes [cm]: 160, 170, 176, 182, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 109/70/99 weight/pair [g]: 3120 (176 cm) \$425

Barely wider than the T1 at waist and tail, the T2 has a more upscale (Free Dualtec/microcell core) construction designed to best serve skiers who want to mix it up on and off groomed slopes. Overall, testers found it a good all-around ski, slightly better in hard snow, but giving up little ground in soft conditions or crud. In one of the most complete tester summaries: "Surprisingly versatile. I expected good hard snow performance and got it, but didn't expect such a smooth ride in soft snow and crud. Not enough float for a steady diet of powder, but [it] would make a great ski for resort use while remaining light enough for tours and spring hikes for corn." Said one female tester: "Stable at high speeds; responsive and flexible"; "Very versatile."

ROSSIGNOL T3

sizes [cm]: 160, 170, 176, 182, 190 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 113/76/103 weight/pair [g]: 3620 (176 cm) \$475

Designed as Rossi's range rider—as in wide range. It has more girth than the T2 and is stiffer, thanks to a Z metal layer. Well-received last year, its rip ratings—long turns or short, soft snow or hard—continue to be high, though there was considerable difference of opinion on its liveliness. One tester's comments summarized several: "Great all-around ski. Quick and fun. Skied everything well." Another cited its "quick/sleazy feel—very good in tight lines and trees." A couple of the hard corps were less impressed with its high-speed, junk snow performance: "Fun and nimble for playing but not for raging. Very quick edge-to-edge. This ski was a bit wimpy at high speeds in cruddier snow."

ROSSIGNOL T4

sizes [cm]: 158, 168, 178, 185, 195 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 122/94/112 weight/pair [g]: 3700 (178cm) \$525

Rossi's big gun returns unchanged. It's loaded with Rossignol technology, most notably Free Dualtec construction that features angled sidewalls (called Shockwalls) with a shock-absorbing layer on top of a more rigid layer for edging power. While some testers were sensitive to the T4's slightly narrower sidecut compared to other fat skis tested, response to this ski was overwhelmingly positive, with even the nastiest, most cynical testers nearly gushing. As in: "The perfect ski." "Super ski." "The favorite ski" of a couple of veteran testers. More technically: "Soft enough to turn soft snow roundly. Torsionally stiff enough to rage hardpack." "These skis are wrecking balls, breaking through all crud and variable mush." "Initiates easily, stays on top of crud." Rossi suggests mounting them 1.5cm ahead of mid chord. Our test technician believed that they could well be mounted another 1-2cms ahead of this point.

SCOTTYBOB www.scottypob.com

Slightly stiffened last year, the asymmetrical BobTail returns as the most radical ski design on the market.

SCOTTYBOB BobTail

sizes [cm]: 168, 178, 181 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 122/77/98 weight/pair [g]: 2920 (181cm) \$390

With the BobTail from ScottyBob, the tail tells the tale. The long and short of the ski's radical design (laid out in detail on a quirky, amusing and thorough website) is that a shorter outside edge allows more pressure to be put on the rear ski in a tele turn for a better carve and greater stability. The springy BobTail is not a ski to jump on and go. As one veteran tester said: "They must be introduced to a new user properly. Once you figure the ski out (on flats first), the ski tracks beautifully. Bend the knee, tilt the skis and hold on." Said another tester, obviously impressed: "Right on, ScottyBob. Good idea—it works. These skis are fun as hell! These skis love to turn; they get in a rhythm and stay there." The turniness of the ski was widely noted. As another tester said: "Very lively ski when brought to speed. The camber moves skis into the next turn with little effort." A third view: "It's a cool feeling. They will surprise you—load into a turn and they shoot you out into the next." Not all testers were so transported, some faulting it for not holding a long-radius turn at speed, and others for its performance in crud.

VOILÉ www.voile-usa.com

Still riding the wave of its new-tech ski introduced last year.

VOILÉ Carbon Surf

sizes [cm]: 158, 168, 178, 188 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 120/87/112 weight/pair [g]: 2950 (178 cm) \$425

The Surf's been up for a year now in Salt Lake, hand-built with the lighter weight afforded by carbon fiber composites added to fiberglass, and a larger footprint—with twin tip design—than the paternal Mountain Surf. Testers took to them like a point break: "Very impressed. These skis are light, a pleasure to tour with," said one tester, who was among those giving them highest marks for soft snow performance. "I would take these into the backcountry any day," said another, "Although they were light, they could be driven with authority." According to another test veteran: "Very smooth, even flex; very easy to carve or slide a turn. Good soft snow ski."

VÖLKL www.volkl.com

With North American tele and backcountry skiers in mind, the line sees radical overhauls with their three widest-ever

VÖLKL T-Rock

sizes [cm]: 164, 172, 180 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 119/87/111 weight/pair [g]: 3300 (172cm) \$650

The "T" presumably stands for telemark. This wood core ski is Völkl's first one aimed at the US market. "Rock" describes its performance, with borderline raving among testers for its skiability in various conditions, through the range of turn shapes, and at multiple speeds. The middle of its three lengths we tested proved to be right for most, with only a couple of hard-charging men and women looking to go, respectively, longer and shorter. "Wide range" and "quiver of one" were typical responses. Longer responses: "A great all-around ski" with super edge hold, but fat enough to float. Lively yet very damp. "Very damp, smooth, predictable. Initiates easy on short turns; good float, stability on longer, crud turns. A true tele ski: supports good, balanced flex from a neutral or "back" position.

VÖLKL Snow Wolf

sizes [cm]: 156, 163, 170, 177, 184 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 113/76/100 weight/pair [g]: 2600 (170cm) \$650

Völkl's had a long commitment to making AT/randonné skis with a silky but secure feel—at relatively light weights—that have been praised in previous reviews. But past testers literally wanted more: wider skis for more float. And with the Snow Wolf, they've got it. It's basically a wider Mountain Norbert Joos, similarly perforated at the tip to accommodate Völkl's skin-clip system with (supplied) custom-fitted, pre-cut nylon/mohair skin, and with a lightweight vertically laminated wood core. To say as several testers did, that it's a "good touring ski," is not to damn with faint praise. More specifically: "Lively ski" with very sweet, round turns, rolls

edge-to-edge beautifully," said one tester. "Responsive, good carving ski," said another. But the light weight imposes a speed limit. The Snow Wolf prowls best a notch under high speed.

VÖLKL 724 EXP

sizes [cm]: 156, 163, 170, 177, 184, 191 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 114/74/92 weight/pair[g]:2600 (170cm)\$650

The long and short of it is that the EXP ("Expert" in Völkl's Euro line) is a wood-core, in-bounder bomber with pronounced sidecut in a wide range of sizes. No surprise that testers found it solid and stiff, best in long and medium turns on harder snow, but without having to cop a plea in softer conditions. "A nice, high-performance trail ski," as one tester put it. "Very stable, solid underfoot, great for fast groomers," said another. Other testers were less laudatory, citing its lack of tight-tree quickness. Overall, this was one of the skis that elicited the widest range of tester response.

VÖLKL Mountain Norbert Joos

sizes [cm]: 153, 163, 170, 177, 184 tip/waist/tail [mm]: 104/70/92 weight/pair [g]: 2360 (170cm) \$575

Völkl collaborated with Norbert Joos, the well-known European ski mountaineer, on an easy-attach skin system cut each size of the latest incarnation of Völkl's well-known Mountain. Introduced last year, it is slightly slimmed down from its predecessors—and, notably, is even lighter—but packs some punch, thanks to a stringer-reinforced foam core with Titanal overlay. Said one tester, an unabashed fan of light skis: "An amazing ski for the weight. Fun in powder, competent in glop, good edge bite on ice. Gave me the control I wanted for short radius turns."

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