



Although there is no question that the gearhead gene runs deep in my blood, I am not one to embrace everything for the sake of being new and techie. In fact, I am downright stubborn when it comes to the bigger better newer philosophy in most aspects of my life. The exception to this is skis. Ski technology has come a long way in ten years. Unlike computer technology where efficiency and accessibility all seem to come at a price - frustration and time wasted dealing with problems - modern skis only make skiing easier. And aside from the actual price tag, there are no real downsides to upgrading your skis. Sure, we could get into the whole consume for the sake of consumption question but then I would sound like the curmudgeon I really am and my wife says that is bad form.

Modern skis truly make skiing easier and more accessible not to mention they dramatically extend the range of what can be called good snow conditions. I can recall heading out for a ski about eight years ago. I had a very respectable pair of new telemark skis at the time and we had some classic Mt. Hood conditions, 30 plus inches of new snow and 32 degrees Fahrenheit. Attempting to make turns in such spongy glonch was enough to send even the most diehard of skiers (me) back to the car wishing I still lived in the Rockies. Not that I necessarily prefer such conditions but given a modern ski the likes of which you can choose from any company's line-up today, such snow conditions are actually skiable if not down right fun. Given a modern ski's width and sidecut, they make short work of what were once unskiable snow conditions. So just think how much fun the new skis are given the kind of snow we all prefer to ski.

Now, that said, not every ski out there is appropriate for every skier. Skis, like people, have distinct personalities and biases. Some favor short radius turns, some favor big radius turns, some favor big aggressive skiers and some will put a smile on anyone's face. Some are obvious quiver skiers while others fill the utilitarian nitch. The trick is to pick a ski that meets your own personal needs. And it is with our ski reviews that we try to help define a ski's personality so that you can be in the know when choosing a new board.

We do not review every ski on the market. Other magazines do that. We review skis that we believe are suited to skiers with an off-piste snow bias and the skis on which we have spent enough time on to give an honest rounded opinion. Skis are broken down into three categories, Mid fat - up to 84mm under foot, Fat - 85-95mm under foot, and Extra Fat - 95mm+ under foot.

MID FAT (75-84mm under foot)



**Atomic Tacora** 119-80-103 Length:163/172/181/190cm; 7.7lbs (181cm) \$490 A new ski from Atomic this year, the Tacora fits between the Kongur and Janak in size. Testers noted that this ski rewards aggressive input (we skied it tele) and found it more responsive than the Kongur. Like the Kongur, the ski responds very well to parallel turns. Testers also decided that it was a good ski to step down in size from what you might think you would ski. Dimensionally, it should cover all snow conditions with ease but we found it had a soft spot for groomers and carvable snow.



**Atomic Kongur** 117-84-109 Length:168/177/184/191cm; 7.6lbs (184cm) \$580 The Kongur shares its profile with the venerable TMX from last season. The addition of a magnesium top sheet and new graphics are about all that separate the two skis. Popular among accomplished AT skiers looking for a do it all ski. The Kongur is also a respectable tele ski though it is hard to deny that it has a parallel turn bias. One tester swears it improved his parallel technique by leaps and bounds. With slightly less side cut and a stiffer profile than other mid fat boards, the Kongur prefers medium to larger radius turns and handles speed well. Equally at home on the hill or on a tour, testers found it happiest in any variety of soft snow.



**Black Dlamond Crossbow** 116-83-106 Length:163/171/179/187cm; 7.2lbs (179cm) \$569 A stiff mid fat ski, the Crossbow is not for the faint of heart.

This ski likes centered aggressive input and rewards with incredible carving ability in the firmest of snows. It even inspires confidence when the going gets icy. It is full of snap around the resort and stable at speed. Although we skied it with freeheels, it is an obvious choice for a locked heel and its relatively light weight will keep ski mountaineers happy. BD touts it as a ski for all conditions but we found it happiest where it could hold an edge.



**G3 Baron** 116-81-104 Length:163/170/177/184cm; 7.8lbs (184cm) \$599 A mid fat utilitarian ski, the Baron is damp and predictable. It is fat enough to ski the pow and agile enough to ski groomers. Its moderate side cut favors medium radius turns and although we tested it with tele bindings, testers agreed that it is well suited to parallel turns (read AT gear). The Baron does not have a single personality rather it responds well to a diverse range of skiing styles. It is best skied with medium to big boots and is equally at home at the hill or the backcountry. Looking for a jack of all trades tele or AT, the Baron should make the list.



**Karhu Kodlak** 117-80-105 Length:166/176/186cm: 6.9lbs (176cm) \$479 The Kodiak stepped into a very competitive market of mid fats last year and turned more than a few heads. This ski loves to roll from one turn to the next and testers made comparisons to the World Piste. It is a freeheel skiers ski, taking a variety of snow conditions in stride and letting you move from turn to turn with ease. A bit stiffer than the World it carves a very nice arc in firm snows but requires a little more energy to get a full return. This is a versatile ski for skiers from coast to coast looking for the elusive one ski quiver.



**K2 Shuksan** 117-78-105 Length:167/174/181cm, 6.9lbs (174cm) \$469 With mid fat dimensions, the Shuksan is a versatile AT ski. K2 believes AT skis deserve different construction from their tele line and the Shuksan shines as a fixed heel tool in all conditions. Two of our testers ski on this ski more often than not when they go for a tour. These are guys who could ski on just about any ski they choose and they choose the Shuksan (granted the Mt. Baker and Anti-Piste were not available when they got Shuksans). As one tester put it, this is the World Piste of the AT line. The ski likes to turn and has a medium to short radius bias. This is not a new school big line ripper, it is a backcountry and mountaineering ski that is equally at home in blower pow, sierra cement, or tight technical lines. Mount these with Dynafit bindings and you will have a touring machine.



**K2 World Piste** 119-78-105 Length:167/174/181/188cm; 6.8lbs (174cm); \$489 We resisted the urge to cut and paste last year's rave review for the World. Again, the ski receives high marks for its versatility. This ski makes short work of all but the hardest snow and is downright fun in manky snow. It initiates turns easily, floats in all soft snows and makes you look and feel good in crud. Its weakness, high speed firm snow ripping but that is small price to pay for its versatility elsewhere. It responds well to a variety of skier levels and can be driven by a variety of boots. It truly is a quiver of one. You can go fatter for sure but you will not find a more versatile ski for all mountain use. Our only beef with the World is that K2 claims a 60/40 bias toward firm snow. We believe it has a 60/40 bias toward soft snow.



**Rossignol Powder Bird** 120/83/110 Length:160/168/176/184cm; 7.6lbs (176cm) \$510 Aptly named, the Powder Bird fits the do it all with a soft snow bias profile. The characteristic damp Rossi ride gives a solid feel underfoot on carvable snow but keeps you working to drive it. The damp ride is also great for crud and skied out pow. Given its weight, big boots help keep the Powder Bird centered and made it more popular with faster bigger skiers.



**FAT** (85-94mm under foot)



**Black Diamond Havoc** 120-88-113 Length:163/173/183cm; 8.1lbs (183cm) \$549 The Havoc, Black Diamond's most versatile ski, offers relatively stiff flex with stable performance. This ski is a big boot big radius board for tele. AT users found it more versatile in the boot size and turn radius. The Havoc got high marks from big skiers and aggressive tele'ers. No one complained about high speed performance with this ski. It is well suited to AT gear, strong legs, and big turns. Now, if BD would just cut the twin tip off the tail we would be happy.



Karhu Jak 124-90-113 Length:165/172/179/186cm; 8.5lbs (179cm) \$519 The Jak broke new ground several seasons back and quickly gained a strong reputation among aggressive freeheel skiers. Well, this season the Jak is back with new dimensions and it continues to impress. Although the ski lost some width, it loses no performance. In fact, it is surprisingly quick for its size, responds adeptly to freeheel input, and is arguably one of the most versatile fat skis on the market. Don't be fooled by the dimensions, it is an all mountain ski with soft snow dimensions. It takes a confident driver to enjoy these in all conditions but if you are ready to give it some input, the Jak will perform. This ski holds an edge with the best of 'em and is loads of fun on any carvable snow not too mention powder. It carves an arc and pops out of a turn loaded with energy for the next turn. The Jak is a stable all mountain resort ski for strong freeheel skiers with a medium to big radius tele turn bias. Big boots are a must.



**Karhu Jak BC** 124-90-113 Length: 165/172/179/186cm; 7.3lbs (179cm) \$539 The Jak BC is the lighter backcountry friendly version of the Jak. This ski is dreamy in soft snow and remarkably capable in all other snow. Given its weight, the Jak BC can actually be skied with a lighter boot but handles the power of the big boys without complaint. Aggressive freeheelers looking for a backcountry ski or lighter skiers looking for an all a rounder will not be disappointed. Karhu's new construction technology makes for a solid, even flexing, and lively ski. Trying to decide between the Jak and the Jak BC? High speed resort rippers and bigger skiers (175lb+) will prefer the Jak while soft snow hounds and lighter skiers should have no complaints with the Jak BC.



**K2 Work Stinx** 124-88-111, Length: 167/174/181/188cm; 8.7lbs (174cm) \$500 The Work Stinx has been part of the K2 line for many seasons but the new Work sets a new standard. We have raved about the World in past seasons and although we liked the Work too it lacked a degree of energy that the World offers. Well, no more. The Work Stinx is a fun responsive ski. Given its size there is an obvious soft snow bias but the Work handles a firm pack pretty well. This ski likes to turn, short, medium, or big radius, it will make it happen. It responds equally well to tele and parallel input. Are you a western states tele skier, ski with a big boot (T1 or equal), like to split your time between the resort and the backcountry, enjoy a wide variety of snow conditions? Have a freeheel? This could be your ski.



**G3 Reverend** 126-93-114 Length:170/177/184cm; 8.8lbs (185cm) \$675 The Reverend picks up where the Baron stops. Take the same damp predictable ride of the Baron and turn up the volume several notches. This is the type of ski that could lead to trouble at the resort for going too fast and too far. Little can stand in the way of this board, especially if you have the power to make it perform. It takes an aggressive big booted tele skier to fully appreciate it. It shines as an AT ski. Grab your helmet, tighten your boots, and enjoy.



**K2 Mt Baker** 122-89-108 Length:167/174/181/188cm; 7.6lbs (174 cm) \$499 With a soft snow bias, the Baker has a distinctive K2 feel with easy turn initiation and strong variable snow condition performance. It is noticebly light for it size and the light swingweight makes for quick turn transitions. The Baker is not so much a hard charging resort board as it is a do anything deep snow tool for touring. If the Shuksan leaves you looking for a little more real estate under foot, the Baker will leave you smiling.



**ScottyBob Head Rush** 127-90-(tail dimension not applicable) Length: 167/175/184cm; 6.7lbs (175cm) \$550 Well, you can read all the propaganda and argue over the freeheel specific design behind the ski shape all you want but when you put the skis on snow you will notice a difference. The bottom line is that these skis initiate turns very easily. The unique tail



Larry Deaver goes under cover while ski testing in the Monashees, www.solmountain.com



design suits the tele turn (although they parallel without much complaint too) and encourages turn after turn. It takes a few runs to dial it in but the skis are very responsive. The responsiveness does not equate to a loss of control but if you drive 'em like traditional boards you risk over turning them. Thus it takes a certain touch to ski them and that is why it may take a run or two to feel centered. The downside? Well, it's not a new school point 'em and rip ski but it is fun board and although we did not have a chance to get any aspiring freeheelers on them, they should well appeal to folks looking to master the art of the freeheel. Another characteristic worth noting is the incredibly light swing weight of these skis. They hop and rise out of the snow with ease and we found them darn fun in powder. As one tester put it, "it is hard to say that I would forsake my other boards for this ski but it makes a nice addition to the quiver". Finally, it's worth noting that these skis are downright beautiful. The wood veneer top sheet and lack of overbearing graphics on our test pair looks even better in person than in the catalog.

**EXTRA FAT** (95+mm under foot)



**Atomic Janak** 125-99-117 Length:153/163/173/183cm; 8.6lbs (183cm) \$628 The Janak takes the place of the Tele Daddy in the Atomic line. Atomic updated their entire line with magnesium caps. The ski is remarkably light for its size and remarkably stiff torsionally for its weight. This ski has a bias for big turns and open slopes in soft snow. It is stable and holds speed without complaint. It will also hold an edge without complaint but not without aggressive input. One tester sums it up well with, "it is a demanding but rewarding ski". This ski will make a true big mountain powder whore happy. Big skis require big boots and this is no exception. Don't be afraid to lock your heel on this board but be prepared to ski a smaller size than you might think you should. Good choice for pure deep powder skiing.



**Black Diamond Verdict** 128-98-116 Length:170/180/190cm; 8.4lbs (180cm) \$599 The obvious powder stick from BD, the Verdict's even flex makes it freeheel friendly (we skied it tele). Although nearly 100mm under foot, the ski has 30mm of side cut and remains responsive. The ski snakes powder lines through the trees with remarkable ease and given its surface area offers little reason to hold back in big terrain. The big surprise here is simply how maneuverable the ski remains despite its girth. Less impressive is its hard snow performance but who really wants a ski like this for hard snow? It was one of the more freeheel friendly skis in its size class but responds very nicely to parallel input. Of course big boots are key.



**K2 Anti Piste** 131-98-116 Length:167/174/181/188cm; 9.4lbs (174cm) \$549 The Anti Piste redefines fast on freeheel skis. With the Anti Piste faster is better and what defines good snow becomes blurred. Big skis require a confident driver to enjoy all conditions and the Anti Piste is no exception. This ski made testers want to ski fast (which they did with big smiles) and long for big open terrain. It is surprisingly easy to turn given its behemoth dimensions. Round flex and healthy side cut add up to make a responsive (relatively speaking) big board. Not for the faint of heart or light booted folks. This is a full on big mountain big boot ski and we thank K2 for the lack of a twin tip!



**Rossignol Sick Bird** 128-98-121 Length: 171/178/185cm; 9.7lbs (173cm) \$539 Classic Rossi (including the graphics), the Sick Bird is a damp and powerful ski. Big boots are a must as this ski is not light or docile. Aggressive style is key to making the Sick Bird perform and perform it will. Although big lines are the ski's obvious preference, if you have the energy, it will accommodate shorter swings too. The Sick Bird responds well to both tele and parallel turns. It makes short work of skied out pow and floats like the big board it is in the fresh. As one tester put it, "it's not my choice for a tour but it is a fun big resort ripper". see page 18





## **WOMEN'S SPECIFIC SKIS**



**Atomic Pumori** 112-80-103 Length: 163/172cm; 7lbs (172cm) \$493 Atomics mid fat ski for women, the Pumori is a relatively quick turning and easily initiates turns. The healthy waist still requires some energy to get on edge but testers found the Pumori more lively than the men's boards. Testers described it as snappy and capable. Like the Atomics in general, this ski responds well to parallel turns and would be an obvious choice for a woman's AT ski.



**Atomic Salpal** 106-72-97 Length: 140/150/160/170/180cm; 6.6lbs (170cm) \$410 The Saipal received high marks as a women's tele ski. Bright and snappy are adjectives used to describe its personality. Its modest dimensions may not make for the best powder ski around but it will serve well at the ski hill and would be especially fun on a spring tour.



**K2 Schi Devil** 119-78-105 Length: 153/160/167/174cm; 6.6lbs (174cm) \$489 The Schi Devil replaces the Instinx from last year's women's line up. Obvious comparisons were made to the World Piste (as it shares the same dimensions). This is a lively ski that responds easily to a variety of skiers and put smiles on every tester's face. Testers described the handling as effortless and capable of every turn radius. Should have T2's or bigger for boots but testers found it very forgiving and fun.



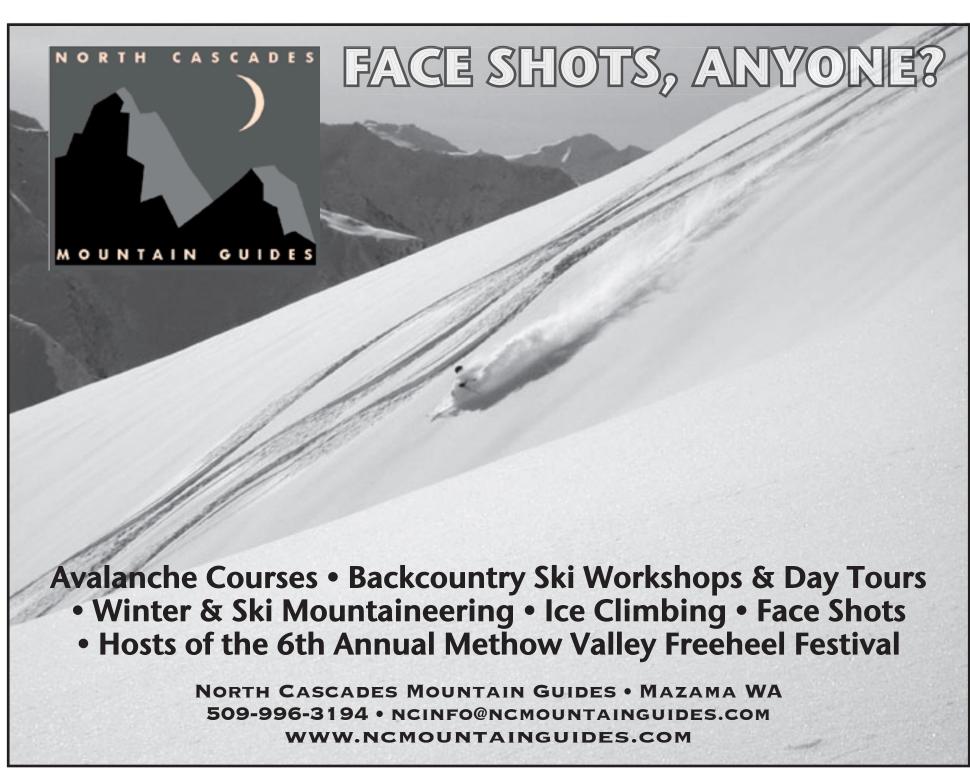
**K2 Dawn Patrol** 125-89-112 Length: 153/160/167/174cm; 7.4lbs (174) \$519 The Dawn Patrol received high marks from men and women alike. It is an obvious choice for a woman's powder and touring ski. If hut skiing in Canada and double digit days at the hill are your style, the Dawn Patrol will not disappoint. Like most K2's it appeals to folks looking for a turny but versatile ski and it is more forgiving than most big boards.



**Karhu Jili** 124-90-113 Length: 158/165/172cm; 6.8lbs (165cm) \$519 The Jill is a responsive ski for freeheelin women who enjoy ripping around the hill. It is no secret that this ski is designed for aggressive skiers and it is best appreciated by women who enjoy the benefits of a big ski; speed, power, and floatation. Relatively light, it is equally happy touring for turns.



**Rossignol Rip Chick** 120-83-11 Length: 150/160/168/176cm; 7lbs (168cm) \$510 With mirror dimensions to the men's Powder Bird, the Rip Chick is an all mountain ski with a soft snow bias. The Rip Chick maintains the damp Rossi ride and was popular with aggressive women skiers. It works through soft snow with ease, is stable on firm snows, and favors big to medium radius arcs. Not for the timid but will keep a demanding skier smiling.





The bulk of our ski testing was conducted at the Stevens Pass Ski Resort in the Washington Cascades. Resort skiing allows us to run skis through a consistent loop of terrain and snow to help provide consistent feedback on the skis. Generous support from Stevens Pass made this possible. www.stevenspass.com

A bonus to this year's test was the ability to take a select group of skis on an hut trip to British Columbia's Monashee Range. A big thanks is due to Sol Mountain Touring for their generous support of the test. Sol Mountain Touring offers a wide range of classic hut skiing terrain, comfortable accomodation, and classic BC hospitality. www.solmountain.com

Also a big thanks to the Mountain Shop of Portland, OR for their continued support of our various ski needs. www.mountainshop.net

Finally, a big thanks to everyone who helped test skis with special thanks to Jeremy Rooper, Larry Goldie, Steve Hindman and Larry Deaver.

Atomic Skis - www.atomikski.com
Black Diamond Skis - www.bdel.com
C3 Skis - www.genuineguidegear.com
Karhu Skis - www.karhu.com
K2 Skis - www.k2skis.com
Rossignol skis - www.rossignol.com
ScottyBob Skis - www.scottybob.com

Sol Mountain Touring - www.solmountain.com Stevens Pass - www.stevenspass.com





