

TESTED: 26 EASY CRUISERS & 17 POWDER SKIS

SPECIAL
ANNIVERSARY
ISSUE

ski canada

40
YEARS



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SKI DYNASTIES: PASSING ON THE GENES

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POWDER SKI TEST 2012

Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing provided the perfect snow, terrain and guides to evaluate this season's crop of wide boys.

BY RON BETTS, TEST EDITOR
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN SCHWIRTLICH

The sport of skiing has undergone some remarkable changes in the last few decades. New technology in clothing, electronics, boots, bindings and skis has allowed skiers to enjoy the sport more comfortably, more safely and with a more direct route from the bunny hill to the thrill of black-diamond runs.

One thing that hasn't changed is the excitement of looking down the mountain and seeing an untouched carpet of new snow. Look at images of powder skiing from the 1930s and, apart from a few changes in technique, you'll see more in common with modern skiing than differences.

What is it about skiing fresh snow that inspires, excites and leaves skiers feeling euphoric? Maybe it's because we're the closest we'll come to flying without leaving the ground. Or maybe it's because there's nothing like looking back up the mountain at a fresh set of tracks and thinking "I did that." A powder day can make a good holiday great, etch a single run into a memory that will last a lifetime, and bring people together yet simultaneously make us seek the solitude of an unspoiled line.

I'd like to dedicate this year's Ski Canada Powder Test to Eric Rousseau. A longtime Whistler local and legend, Eric tragically passed away

in a tree-cutting accident this fall. He will be remembered by all those who knew him as one of the most inspirational and naturally talented skiers in our tribe. There will be many runs done in his memory this winter. Not many powder days went by without Eric charging hard and living up to one of his favourite sayings: "The faster you ski, the less time you're in danger."

This winter, don't let the great days get away—and enjoy them more by being on the right equipment. The guides at Mike Wiegele Heliskiing will help you narrow down your choices, so when there's new snow on the mountain you can, in the words of my friend Eric, "make it the best day ever."



ATOMIC

ATLAS

\$899

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

182, 192

140 115 122

22 @ 182

BSI

ULLR 190

\$549

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

190

134 112 129

14.6 @ 190

BSI

ULLR 170

\$549

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

170

134 112 129

14.2 @ 170

DYNASTAR

LEGEND BIG DUMP

\$950

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

192

142 120 132

38 @ 192

ELAN

BOOMERANG

\$925

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

168, 181, 190

140 120 130

27.7 @ 190

The Atlas combines the latest in rocker technology with traditional construction methods. The rocker provides great flotation and turn initiation, while the conventional sidecut gives a carving feeling similar to what you'd expect from a ski on a groomed slope. **Ron Betts** summed it up best: "Put this ski on edge and you'll be rewarded with a responsive arc. It's nimble in the trees and super-fun when you light it up in the open. The ski is a bit stiff; lighter skiers will need some speed to help bend it, but when you do, jeehaw!"

The Nelson, B.C. manufacturer boasts a powder ski that has handmade quality and is virtually indestructible. The test team found that the ski was great in soft-snow conditions, but lacked some versatility for more challenging conditions such as wind-pressed snow. Many testers thought the Ullr would make an exceptional touring ski because of its light weight, including **Crosby Johnson**: "A fun, playful ski that's easy to turn and stable at speed. It's light for its size so would be a good touring ski."

The Ullr handled everything that was thrown at it, though it wasn't as comfortable on wind-pressed or harder packed snow; deep in the powder was where it was happiest. The women commented on its light weight and also thought it would be a great touring ski. **Heidi Stammberger** gives her impression—and a lesson in Norse mythology: "It's easy to turn, with an even flex and quick recovery at the end of the turn. A nice soft, forgiving ski. (Skada, Ullr's woman, would be a good name for a female version of this ski.)"

We get lots of powder in the west and have wide-open spaces to enjoy it—exactly where this ski shines. If you like speed and big turns, then the Legend won't disappoint. For lighter skiers or those who prefer short turns, it may be too aggressive. **Jordan Steifvater** put on his big-boy pants for the test: "This is a strong ski ready for turns at any radius at speed. It's stiff, powerful and stable in big terrain. A real tough-guy ski." **Bill Mark** said, "If you like to ski fast and make long turns, this ski will work."

This ski had our testers excited and led to some of the most complimentary comments of the test. Three testers commented on its balance and felt that skiers might have to play with the midpoint of the ski, depending on style and personal preference. Overall, this was a fun ski that seemed to do it all well. Here's what **Ron Betts** had to say after a day on the Boomerang: "This is an extremely lively ski, with great initiation, and stable and trustworthy at speed. It feels as if the binding could be mounted farther forward."

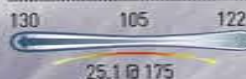


ELAN

BLISS

\$725

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
155, 165, 175



Our testers (all Wiegele mountain guides) liked this ski, but found it a bit narrow for the rigours of a full day of heli-ski guiding in deep snow. The Bliss would be great for someone looking for a mix of a resort/backcountry ski. It handles the pow, but would be at home in the resort as well. **Heidi Stamberger** spends more time in a helicopter than a chairlift and had this to say: "A great all-round ski. It's quick to initiate, stable through the middle and has a sassy snap at the end. It would work most days at the hill and rip in the powder as well."

FISCHER

WATEA 120

\$999

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
179, 189



Not all skiers are looking to straightline big chutes or charge the mountain. For the majority, a ski with a soft, even flex will work best. Our testers felt that this ski hit the mark in that way. **Francois Hebert** commented: "A nice ski. The rockered tips are particularly soft and will go over cut-up snow and crud with ease. A heavier skier could overpower it." **Mike Hainault** agreed, "It's playful and agile, and prefers moderate speeds and short turns. The tip never sinks or dives, but does fold under pressure."

K2

obSETHed

\$1,050*

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
169, 179, 189



"Versatility" was used often to describe this ski. A good powder ski needs to perform in much more than just deep snow. Our test team found the obSETHed a little soft for the heaviest skiers, but really liked its float and rebound. **Mike Shynkaryk** pulled out the sports car references: "This ski's personality is like a Corvette. It's stable in long turns and performs short turns surprisingly well." **Elias Ortner** also raved about it: "A nice powder cruiser for the ambitious powder skier. Awesome float, faceshots guaranteed."

K2

MISSDIRECTED

\$700

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
159, 169



Big sidecuts have allowed for shorter skis, especially on-piste skis. In powder, a bit of length is still a good thing. Our testers raved about this ski for its responsiveness and versatility, and thought it would suit a wide range of abilities. They also would have liked to try a longer length. **Polly Simpson** summed it up by saying, "A great all-round ski. It's stiff yet responsive. It likes to turn, is easy to manoeuvre and powers through snow like a machine. For expert skiers, I recommend a longer length."

KÄSTLE

BMX 128

\$1,179

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
188



Our testers found the BMX performed best in long turns and with some speed. It was not as popular in wind-pressed snow or more challenging conditions. **Andy Aufschneider** found his weight and skiing style made this ski work: "Be aggressive and it will reward you in deep powder and big turns. Speed or strength is needed to get the ski working." For a lighter skier like **Barry Widas**, the ski was a bit overpowering: "Fun to ski in powder but lacked stability in wind-pressed snow. The 188 length was too long for me."



LIBERTY

MUTANT

\$849

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

192

160 149 145

35 @ 192

PRIOR

OVERLORD

\$899

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

163, 169, 175, 183, 188, 193

136 114 122

25 @ 183

ROSSIGNOL

SUPER 7

\$899

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

188, 195

146 117 127

22.5 @ 195

ROSSIGNOL

S7 W

\$799

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

168, 178

140 110 118

14.8 @ 178

SALOMON

ROCKER 2

\$899*

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:

170, 180, 184, 192

142 122 132

26 @ 184

The width of this ski makes it an exceptionally solid platform. Testers felt it had a big sweet spot, and worked well for balanced skiers and those who are balance-challenged. This is not a ski that would transition particularly well to hardpack; it needs a solid dose of deep to come alive. It handled speed well and initiated easily. **Bill Mark** had this to say: "A big powder ski for soft snow. Despite its size, it turns quickly. It's fun in deep powder and even works in more dense snow, but forget using it on groomed."

The Overlord shone in a variety of conditions and appealed to a wide range of skiers. Our entire test team enjoyed their time on this ski, and liked its lively, playful nature. **Francois Hebert** thought it would be a great ski for adventurous resort skiers: "It's versatile yet stable, and handles any type of snow with ease." **Polly Simpich** knows how to lay down big lines and appreciated a ski that let her do that: "It likes big, high-speed, aggressive turns. Good flotation given the narrow girth, yet still manoeuvres in the trees."

For a powder ski to really excel, it needs to take the playful, carving feel that skiers get on the groomed and transfer that to soft snow. Rossignol has been doing that for years and continues with the Super 7. Testers described it as a responsive, playful ski that was comfortable in many different conditions. **Francois Hebert** had a great time on this ski: "It will handle all types of snow with ease and is surprisingly forgiving for a large ski. Skiers who have some finesse will like this ski. Heavier skiers could overpower it."

A powder ski that helps the skier gain confidence is a real winner. Part of conquering deep, untracked snow is having faith in your gear. This ski from Rossignol will help skiers gain that confidence, and those who already have it will appreciate the quick initiation, great flotation and excellent performance in this ski. **Heidi Stammberger** liked the soft flex, which made for a fun ride: "It's easy-turning and super-soft. This would be a great first powder ski—the tips are impossible to sink. Excellent flotation."

This ski was a crowd-pleaser across the board. From our lightest tester at 145 lbs to our heavyweight at nearly 200, everyone found it worked exceptionally well in different conditions and at different speeds. **Mike Hainault** had this to say: "Salomon hit the nail on the head with this one. It's well balanced, easy to steer and totally predictable. It loves all kinds of soft snow, and is stable enough for moderate drops and big jumps. It's silky smooth, with a nice radius and turn shape." According to our testers, this ski does it all.

POWDER TEST TEAM

All testers are guides at Mike Wiegele Helicopter Skiing (www.wiegele.com) and ski well over two-million vertical feet of powder per year:

Andy Aufschneider
Mike Basham
Ron Betts
Mike Hainault
Francois Hebert

Crosby Johnson
Bill Mark
Elias Ortner
Michael Shynkaryk
Polly Simpich

Heidi Stammberger
Jordan Steifvater
Scott Streadwick
Barry Widas



STÖCKLI

STORMRIDER 110

\$1,125

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
174, 183, 192



VÖLKL

KIKU

\$800

LENGTHS AVAILABLE:
154, 162, 170, 178



The Stormrider is not for the timid. It's a ski that likes to go fast; it performs best when some speed is added to the mix. Less experienced skiers might find it a bit overpowering, but those with some skills will be rewarded with a solid ride and a platform for ripping the biggest lines and sticking the biggest landings. If big turns in open terrain is your thing, look no further. Mike Hainault enjoyed his ride: "A solid, stable ski that prefers longer radius. It needs a competent driver with a strong technical background."

Völkl always seems to come to the test table with a great ski. Wiegele's female guides are experts at skiing powder and know what they like, and they liked this ski. Heidi Stammberger loved the versatility and feel of the Kiku: "This was my favourite ski of the test. It's great at speed and has amazing agility. It has a real snap when you push it and is extremely versatile." Polly Simpich added: "This ski initiates turns easily and is very stable. It makes short or long turns with ease, and is lighter than most skis."