



Small & Independent Ski Brands:

Quick Impressions Of Selected Models

Killington, Vermont
December, 2013

ExoticSkis.com



The Beast Returns

**155 trails stretching over 73 miles (135km).
3050 vertical feet. 22 lifts enabling 38,315
riders per hour. Very often one of the first
areas to open and the last to close.¹**

Killington has had a long and storied history over the decades, including hosting some very large on-snow demo day events. The last decade or so saw these consumer demo days fade away, and the annual Killington ski and snowboard demo events became fewer and fewer. Whether this was due to some general downturn in economic vitality in the industry, or devotion of promotional energy to other pursuits (*or combination of both and other factors*) we don't know, but December 2013 saw the Marketing and Events Departments at “The Beast of the East” get fired up and put on their most vigorous attempt at a serious on-snow demo day “Test Fest” in many years.

According to many folks who follow Killington's activities rather closely, 2012-2013 saw a definite upswing in the promotional and marketing efforts of the resort to become more relevant, more modern and embrace digital technology for communicating the Resort's features, events and new corporate attitude to the hundreds of thousands of skiers within an easy drive to Vermont. “Test Fest” 2013 was Killington's shot across the bow of the other ski areas in the region, and according to skiers and some smaller ski companies we talked to over the two days, they were happy it was fired. The PSIA (Professional Ski Instructors of America) was conducting their “Masters Academy / Pro Jam” during that same week at Killington, providing a steady supply of instructors from East of the Mississippi who would have a chance to try the skis and snowboards from the vendors.

Partners:



AMERICA'S ACTIVE LIFESTYLE LEADER



Killington partnered with Outside Television and Monster energy drinks to add some draw to the event. National outdoor brand placement can be a big help to add legitimacy and impact to an event such as a two-day, on-snow demo fest.

¹ Killington web site: http://www.killington.com/winter/mountain/mountain_info/resort_info/index.html

Support For Small, Innovative Ski Companies

Killington started assembling their list of vendors for the Test Fest by combing through the usual list of major brands such as Fischer, Head, Elan, Rossignol, Blizzard...etc. ExoticSkis.com got wind of the Test Fest event and quickly approached the Marketing Department and suggested they add some spice to the mix by inviting some smaller, perhaps lesser-known brands to set up shop along the demo alley, and the Marketing Department took to the idea right away. In a matter of two weeks before the event, the vendor list grew to include brands such as:



The presence of these exciting, smaller brands at a multi-day, consumer demo event at a large resort is very promising and shows the crop of ever-growing smaller ski and snowboard brands is going mainstream... not only in the eyes of consumers, but the resort industry itself.

Killington gets our congratulations for inviting these companies to participate and show their products to the skiers hungry for new and exciting equipment. It shows that a relatively large, corporate-governed ski resort can indeed reach out and support small companies contributing to the health and well-being of the industry, and that makes things better for skiers and the industry as a whole.

Insurance: A Big Obstacle & Opportunity

While many small companies could not attend due to scheduling conflicts...some emerging companies were stymied by the modern-day requirement to maintain liability insurance for the public trying their products at events such as the Test Fest. Killington, like any responsible sponsor of events, requires the vendors to provide proof of liability insurance before they can participate in the event. This insurance typically takes the form of \$2 million aggregate / \$1 million per occurrence policy, and requires the host corporation (Killington in this case) to be named as an insured party.

This insurance requirement stopped several small companies from attending since such coverage can be a large expense for a startup, and as one company explained...”*Adding another named insured to our current event policy added an additional 15% to our total policy cost.*” Savvy entrepreneurs should see an opportunity to provide liability coverage for small companies looking to participate in ski and snowboard product testing events at affordable prices and flexible scheduling. With more than 300 U.S. and international companies listed at ExoticSkis.com, the market potential should be self-evident.

Attendees & Setup:



- Elan
- Faction
- Fisher
- K2
- Line Skis
- Nordica
- Rossignol
- RAMP
- Icelantic
- Head
- Blizzard
- Scott
- Ski Logic
- DPS
- Worth Skis
- Never Summer Snowboards
- Burton
- GoPro

For Killington's first reboot of their demo day event operations, they did an admirable job of attracting ski, snowboard, helmet and pole manufacturers to their site in mid-December for a two-day “Test Fest”. Everyone was invited to set up along the access road, just below the Superstar lift. While this meant skiers and riders had to hike a bit back and forth between the lift and the demo tents, it was probably the best they could do to get trucks and tents close to the skiers without a large logistical effort. Numerous attendees wished their



tents could have been ski-in-ski-out, but since it was nearly -12 degrees F. (yes, below zero) on opening day morning, the Reps appreciated being able to fire up their trucks and warm up on a regular basis in between visitors without having to hike.

Quick Impressions...or “Speed Dating” Some Skis

We couldn't get out on all the skis from the smaller companies, but we tried to pick a few examples of some skis of particular interest to us. Normally, we here at ExoticSkis.com dislike reviews based on a few runs or a single day of testing since such short testing times really don't let people know what it's like to live with a ski in real-world conditions. We didn't really “test” these skis, but essentially speed-dated them, and we'll let you know what we thought.

Conditions:

(“Hey...it doesn't feel all that cold, does it?”)

Morning temperatures in the valleys below Killington hovered around -18F (plus or minus a few degrees) around 7:30 AM on Tuesday, while the base lodge enjoyed a relatively balmy -12F or so by 9:00 AM...warming up during the day. Several inches of new snow had blown into the area, with the surface being dry, cold, fine-grained packed powder and windpack over a durable eastern carving surface. You could get a pole into the base material with no problem. Hunting around the edges of trails and lee-side of the more forested slopes revealed some very nice, shin-deep to boot-deep windpacked snow, both bumpy and smooth. There was ample opportunity to find Eastern hardpack for edgehold evaluation. Visibility was pretty good, allowing high-speed runs where traffic was minimal. Overall, a great day to test the windpacked, “dry-crud cutting” and hardpack carving abilities of the skis.



Killington The Terrain:

Killington's terrain is great for testing since you can find wide-open, high-speed runs, tight trees, shrubs, flats, steeps, hardpack groomers, ungroomed wild-snow, small bumps, bigger bumps, cut-up snow, manicured snow...you name it...so it was a good venue to test skis, and the SuperStar lift next to the demo alley is high-speed and allows access to many kinds of terrain quickly and repeatedly. We could find slopes facing nearly any direction you could think of, both sheltered in the trees and windblown to pieces. Their man-made snow base from weeks of snowmaking efforts provided a consistent and durable underlayment for the natural

snow and newly blown surfaces we found for Test Fest.

The Skis:

Rather than try to get 1 or 2 runs on as many models as possible and end up with 1-2 run impressions, we concentrated on getting a bunch of runs on a smaller selection of skis to get a better opinion of them on different areas of Killington's terrain.

- RAMP Peacepipe 179cm (146-112-134 r=17.5m)
- RAMP Groundhog 179cm (136-100-121 r=19.4m)
- Worth Magic 185cm (135-109-120mm. r=26m) with carbon power-core
- DPS Cassiar SL 160cm (127/78/113 r=11.5m)
- DPS Cassiar 85 178cm (122-85-109 r=15-18m)



Mike Kilchenstein's [RAMP Sports](#) has transformed itself from a small, U.S.A. startup outsourcing the production of its ski and snowboard designs from Asia, to an increasingly prominent and successful U.S. company now making most of its products in a brand-new factory in Park City, Utah. U.S.-made Kelvar and fiberglass composites, innovative, rapid-change mold production technology mated with high-sustainability, eco-sensitive materials such as bamboo cores and pine-based, no-petroleum resins have essentially resulted in a completely new line

of skis for the company since the startup skis we tested several seasons ago at [ExoticSkis.com](#). Earlier outsourced models had some reported delamination in the tails and some topsheet chipping issues, which have since been eliminated with the new U.S. production controls. RAMP's aggressive direct-sales pricing and pro-discount programs make the skis affordable, and their corporate responsibility programs make the



corporation very interesting.

RAMP Peacepipe 179cm (146-112-134 r=17.5m) \$719 usd (website)



The Peacepipe is RAMP's second-widest ski at 112mm at the waist, with rockered forebody, camber underfoot and relatively flat tail with a radius of 17.5 meters. They call it a “Hard Charging Powder Ski.” I think it falls into a more versatile category and is not really a “Charger.” The flex is relatively moderate, tending to soft in the forebody. The initial impression is “quickness and agility” for a ski with this much surface area. The second impression is “surprisingly intense edgehold” when pressed into soft or hard snow surfaces. The third impression is “snappy, light-handling and energetic.”

Skiers who crave hard-charging, damp and directional wide-open throttle skis in big terrain might find the Peacepipe too eager to turn and too flexible for their tastes. For the majority of the skiing population, however, the Peacepipe represents a super-friendly, super-agile powder ski with a floaty, surfy personality

and unusually good edgegrip on groomers. RAMP's Peacepipe is probably one of the best examples of a crowdpleasing modern powder ski for experts looking for an easy-handling, no-effort surfer with unusually good edgehold and attention-getting response underfoot, or for intermediates taking their first forays into the addiction known as powder skiing.

The lightweight chassis and very responsive personality can lead to some very quick behavior at higher speeds (which can be good and bad...depending on your situation and preferences), and some tip deflection can occur in some choppy crud conditions at speed, but the grip underfoot and in the super-secure tail can moderate any forebody

deflection pretty well. The Peacepipe can probably be skied all day in all kinds of conditions



without making the skier feel like they have been wrestling a truck. The Peacepipe could be a daily driver for softer conditions in the West or a powder ski for the East...depending on your preferences.

The agility of the Peacepipe is really fun in the tight shrubs and trees, and bump behavior is super civilized for a ski of these dimensions. You can squeak along the edges of trails, poking in and out of the powder stashes, then pop back out onto the main trail with nearly zero effort. Take the ski up to ticket-pulling speeds, however, and you need to pay attention because it's eager to pivot and change directions with minimal input. It's not unstable, just "eager" due to its relatively turny radius and snappy nature. The relatively flat and stable tail keeps things more civilized than a fully rockered tail in high-speed conditions.

The Peacepipe is not a hard-charger built to support professional-level freeride competition (despite what the website description might say), but it seems to hit the mark as an agile, easy-handling powder and 3-D snow ski with perhaps one of the best edgehold behaviors for its width in the business...giving it a very wide appeal to a huge audience. If you ski at a DIN level of 10 or more in big terrain at high speeds, the Peacepipe might not be the ski you're looking for. If you're anyone else, you should definitely get some demo time on a pair of Peacepipes. The new production materials and technologies have generated a winning combination in the Peacepipe design, and it's one of RAMP's most popular models for a reason. Our limited few runs on the ski were fun and impressive, and that says a lot.

Other Reviews:

SnowBrains:

<http://snowbrains.com/ramp-peacepipe-ski-review/>

TetonGravity:

<http://www.tetongravity.com/reviews/teton-tested/2014/ski/2014-Peace-Pipe-Review-398/>

SkiBumPoet:

<http://www.skibumpoet.com/reviews/peacepipes-ski-review/>

GearInstitute:

<http://www.gearinstitute.com/skiing/item/ramp-peacepipe-20132014>

TrainingWithTrevor:

<http://trainingwithtrevor.blogspot.com/2013/03/the-goods-ramp-peacepipe.html>

RAMP Groundhog 179cm (136-100-121 r=19.4m) \$619 usd (website)



The 100mm underfoot Groundhog is the favorite ski of RAMP's Eastern Sales Rep. The forebody is slightly rockered ("early rise" in RAMP's vocabulary), with camber underfoot and a relatively flat tail. Handflex could best be described as somewhat soft up front, then relatively stiff throughout the entire body. The first impression was "strong underfoot, with great grip and power all the way from the forebody through the tail." The second impression was "somewhat stiff-feeling and almost GS-like."

The more runs I made with the Groundhogs ("Hogs" for short), the more I realized this ski wants to be driven, not ridden. It also handles somewhat narrower than its 100mm waist would lead you to believe. While it has an early-rise forebody, the stiff nature of the midbody of the ski transmits bump pressure to the skier, keeping the pilot on notice there is a strong ski underfoot. The best word to describe the tight-bump behavior

is "abrupt" if you were not ready for the ski's midbody contact with the bump face. This strong feel was really useful when cutting across windpack and cut up windpack, resulting in nearly zero deflection and very secure tracking under low to high pressure situations. The Hogs are stable, strong and never seem to lack the ability to hold your chosen line. They cater to the purposeful, athletic pilot rather than the touch-and-go finesse styles of traversing terrain.

The Hogs inspire confidence underfoot in all kinds of surfaces we tried (but we did not get any real deep powder conditions to test them in), with lots of power, grip and stability. Their grip on Eastern hardpack was impressive and reliable, perhaps one of the strongest grips in a 100mm ski we have seen, owing to stout torsional rigidity which gives this ski its firm handling traits. The Groundhog is indeed versatile at 100mm underfoot, and is probably best suited to skiers who lean toward the athletic side of the spectrum rather than the passive skiers.



The Hogs are not difficult to handle, but can give a firm, strong ride not all skiers are looking for. There is plenty of power on hand, and if you get them loaded into a full GS turn with a deeply-flexed carve, they can rebound with a remarkable level of acceleration. Vibration dampening was moderate, and while the skis never showed any nervous behavior, they can communicate the surface conditions directly to the skier, which some people like, while others prefer some isolation from these sensations underfoot and along the ski's length.



The RAMP Groundhogs handled our test surfaces (Eastern hardpack to packed powder to windpack, cut-up windpack and windbuff) with authority and confidence, showing a directional, firm personality rather than a surfy, pivoty feel. People should demo the Groundhog in several lengths to determine their best fit since the 179 we tried definitely felt “true-to-length” and not shorter like so many other skis do.

The Groundhog feels like a stable, durable, workhorse of a ski for a wide variety of conditions. It may not have the most cushy ride, but for lots of people who spend lots of time on snow (patrollers come to mind), the Groundhog might be just the ticket since it will deliver confident, powerful and responsive control in lots of situations.

Other Reviews:

BlisterGearReview:

<http://blistergearreview.com/gear-reviews/2012-2013-ramp-groundhog>

GearInstitute:

<http://www.gearinstitute.com/skiing/item/ramp-groundhog-20142014>

Freeskier:

<http://freeskier.com/gear/products/ramp-groundhog-ski-2014>



Jason Duquette-Hoffman, Dalton Harben and Adrian Kostrubiak formed [Worth Skis](#) in Middlebury, Vermont in September, 2011 with the goal of Eastern skiers designing skis for Eastern conditions. The company quickly developed a cult-like following for its designs, and there is a serious contingent of

backcountry skiers who absolutely love Worth skis and anxiously await every new model and tweak of the existing designs.

Currently, Worth's designs are manufactured by Keith O'Meara's legendary Praxis ski factory on the North shore of Lake Tahoe, and plans are already underway to bring production of some models and perhaps a new line of skis back to the Northeast...closer to home.

One of the best ways for an emerging ski company to get its designs on-snow with superb durability and quality to prove the validity of its ideas is to have the designs built with the materials and workmanship available at a renowned ski building facility such as Praxis.



Jason Duquette-Hoffman and his Worth Skis

It's a smart business move to prove the designs and initial business model first, then pursue production facility capitalization as a secondary or tertiary phase. Extreme durability and high-quality materials highlight the Worth skis, and their geometry is different than most other skis in the marketplace, giving them a unique feel and personality...all from a Vermont-based company!

Worth Magic 185cm (135-109-120mm. $r=26m$) (\$825 usd with carbon power-core)



Let's say this right up front. Worth is a Vermont company, and ExoticSkis.com is based in Vermont, so we are naturally biased to like these guys, but we are professionally skeptical and probably give their skis a slightly more critical eye to make sure they represent our little Green Mountain State in the way we think it deserves..."Ski The East" and all that jazz.... That being said.....

The Worth Magic is a relatively wide-bodied ski

with a distinctively low, long-tapered, early-rise forebody, early-rise tail and relatively big-mountain radius of 26 meters at 185cm. The construction, fit and finish are superb and convey a sense of durable quality. Graphics are vivid and decidedly "non-corporate" (see photo below for other models side-by-side).

The Magic is described as an ideal ski for "...*When rocks and roots are opportunities, trees are features, not problems, and downed logs are your friends, you know you have the Magic.*" The goal was to make a ski that was playful, competent in wildly diverse off-piste conditions and strong enough to ride hard and stand up to abuse. Based on a bunch of runs with this carbon-enhanced energy core version, Worth has produced a very interesting, brush-stomping ski with some handling traits many skiers will find really fun.

The initial impression I got riding the Magics was "long-nosed and smooth." The long-nose impression is due to the



low tip profile and very long, gradual taper meant to slice through crud instead of being knocked around by it. The second impression was “front-biased handling”. This essentially means the ski seems to crave being driven along the entire length of its forebody into a turn, while the tail seems to be going along for the ride. This is not really an imbalance as much as it is a bias. The rounded tails make navigation in the brush, bumps and trees fluid and free from hang-ups (a good thing), but laying pressure along the waist back to the tails on firm surfaces can lead to some softer-than-expected lock-in than some skis. This means maximum maneuverability, but forfeits a bit of carving prowess and high-pressure stability in the rear, which some people may or may not care about in a ski of this category. If you want a GS-carving big-body ski, look elsewhere. If you want a crud-cutting back-country ski with penchant for staying forward (some AT and tele-skiers come to mind), the Magic fits the bill by allowing you to slash your way through brush and trees with easy-handling behavior, but authoritative strength when needed. Vibration dampening is right-on, even on Eastern hardpack.

Edge grip is very sound when the entire edge is engaged at the right angle, but if you try to punch your way to edge grip underfoot with a quick maneuver on hardpack at the wrong edging angle, you might find the tip and tail falling away because the ski is a large-radius design with pressure distribution spreading out along a wide area. If you roll the ski up on edge and try to ride it like a GS ski tighter than its 26 meter radius, it will tend to run straight until you reach the designed radius sweet spot and it engages happily. As soon as the ski gets “into” snow at least sidewall

depth, the shaping takes over more prominently and the skis can be bent into all kinds of turns at various speeds with very little effort. The Magic is designed to ride predominantly “in snow” instead of “on snow.”

The unique nose design really showed its benefits when I poked into a bumpy side trail where the rope was recently dropped (*officially or otherwise, I don't*



know). The bumps and brush had filled-in with dense, windpacked, dry buff and the Worth Magics really allowed me to dive right into them nose-first or off-axis and the skis never deflected or protested once. They just drove on, staying on the chosen line, rising up and down gently without abrupt behavior, flowing in and out of the terrain irregularities predictably, no matter if I was passively riding or aggressively driving. This behavior alone might be a reason to have a pair of Magics in your quiver. Some skis with wide shovels can often pop-up or surface abruptly in soft snow or bumps instead of gradually rising, while the Magics and their tapered shark-nose design are predictable and controlled and never knocked around up front.

Jason and the crew at Worth Skis have proven they can create skis with great appeal to skiers looking for a craft-built, unique design. We can't wait to see the new skis they have cooking up in the workshop.

Other Reviews:

TetonGravity:

<http://www.tetongravity.com/forums/showthread.php/259148-Review-Worth-Skis-The-Magic-185>

EpicSki:

<http://www.epicski.com/t/119176/worth-magic-one-ski-to-rule-them-all>





Stephan Drake's [DPS Skis](#) (originally known as Drake Powerworks) holds a lofty position in the World as one of the leading pioneers in innovative ski design and materials science. DPS is arguably known as the pinnacle of powder ski designers with their radically effective shaping, camber/rocker profiles, geometry balancing and

avant-garde use of carbon nano technology composites and construction techniques. While they have an unquestioned

leadership position in powder-specific designs, including their relatively radical “Spoon” technology, the designers at DPS have been exercising their imagination to create a series of frontside skis utilizing the same high-performance carbon composite componentry and shaping science expertise used in their powder skis.

We managed to get on a couple examples of their new frontside skis at Killington and found the DPS designers have been very busy indeed, crafting some skis to show off their prowess at getting skis to behave in great ways on the frontside of a resort.

The Cassiar line currently hosts the Cassiar 85 and Cassiar SL models, both incorporating the DPS “Pure3” technology of materials and construction techniques.



DPS Cassiar 85 178cm (122-85-109 r=15-18m)

(\$1,249 usd – Pure3 carbon construction)



We got a brief half-day on this ski late last season, and again at Killington in December. We will be conducting a full-review on this model later this season, so stay tuned, but we wanted to let people know about this model early in the season since we think the DPS Cassiar 85 is a significant industry advancement in all-mountain ski design. The pictures we took last Spring are better quality, so we will use some here to help people see what the ski really looks like in person.

The Cassiar 85 is a brand-new design for DPS, essentially leading the frontside lineup, which includes the Cassiar 85 and Cassiar SL. The ladies's version of the Cassiar 85 is called the “Uschi 85”, and is essentially the same ski in a different color available in 158cm and 168cm lengths instead of the Cassiar 85's 168cm and 178cm options.

While the Cassiar 85 is somewhat expensive at \$1,249 usd, it showcases their “Pure3” componentry, which DPS claims is “3 percent lighter, 30% torsionally stiffer with increased power and strength over conventional construction. The Pure3 construction contains an aspen wood core infused with vertically-oriented titanal metal ribs (“SS technology”), carbon nanotech prepeg laminates, carbon binding plates, urethane dampening,

Rockwell 48 edges, Austrian Worldcup carbon racing bases and UHMW sidewalls.

We can attest to the powerful nature of the Pure3 construction since we have skied several of the same models of some of the other DPS skis in both “Hybrid” (non-Pure3) and “Pure3” versions in the same lengths back-to-back, and the difference is astounding. We can also attest to the long lifespan of the DPS skis, having skied some models for several years since they were new, and they retain nearly every bit of their performance characteristics, even after several seasons of hard use.

The best way to convey the ride of the Cassiar 85 is to quote some notes we took both last Spring and this year:

- Stunningly lightweight (really really)
- Innovative shaping
- "Carbon ringing" on hard surfaces...they "resonate"
- Easy-easy-easy to ski
- Somewhat "detached" feel on the hardest, bulletproof surfaces, although they will bite when asked, just not in the way a nice SL or GS ski will navigate and ride the intensely hard surfaces
- Superb turn response and shapes as soon as the snow is sidewall-depth...the ski comes alive when it can engage it's shape along its entire length "in" the snow.
- Multiple turn shapes without much effort.
- Fun ability to fly along with the edge locked-in, then hockey-scrub/pivot sideways to cut speed without fear of high-siding or low-siding ("stivot"...or something like that is the current fad...)



DPS Cassiar 85 side view showing low-profile tips

- Quiet at high speeds, although the lack of mass underfoot makes the ski feel less "locked-down" like a race or racecarver ski. This ski is simply very lightweight, so people familiar with a heavy-damp ski will find it unusual. This is not a race ski, it is very high-

performance recreational ski.

- Very fast bases.
- Excellent edging behavior along its length.
- No "explosive" power, just smooth and zingy in both short and long radius arcs.
- Balanced.
- Wide range of performance...can be skied slow-and-easy for gramps, yet rowdy enthusiasts can crank it up and lay down serious turns at speed with great confidence, having more response than most other all-mountain skis.



- The Pure-3 carbon construction with the metal inserts has torsional integrity, pop, zing, dampening and very low mass ("unsprung weight" is minimal...probably one of the lightest all mountain designs I have been on). Swing-weight is minimal, yet not "missing" (if that makes sense)...feather-weight does not mean "feather-like".
- Really addicting turning behavior (can't quite put my finger on it...I will need time in some 3D snow surface types to get more descriptions...)
- No tip flap at high speeds
- Quick edge-to-edge, easy to roll 'em back and forth quickly at speed without quirky behavior.
- Excellent feedback underfoot.
- Boring color (Hey DPS...have you heard this before?)
- Sparkle topsheet (reminds me of a My Little Pony accessory of some kind)
- Topsheet does not chip...it merely shows slices if they get hit with an edge.
- Full-wrap 360 degree edges (fairly beefy)

- Springy and fun if you want, carvy and turny without ever putting you in the back-seat.

We will have more details about this ski's behavior in different conditions and terrain (such as powder and heavy crud) later in 2014, but based on our two days on this ski in different conditions and terrain, as well as comments from others who have tried it, we think the DPS Cassiar 85 has the potential to redefine the meaning of “very wide, very high performance envelope” for frontside-biased, all mountain skis. Most skis in this category are either “fairly adequate” or “pretty good most of the time”, or “really good at X, but so-so in other situations”, but rarely are they exciting at nearly every task and condition like the Cassiar 85. Every once in a while, a ski comes along to reset the standard for performance in its category, and the DPS Cassiar 85 might be such a ski in 2014.

Other Reviews:

Joseph Olshan, Barnard, Vermont (ExoticSkis.com Tester)

I am old enough to remember the advent of fiberglass skis and the exhilaration everybody felt when their new skis, made of stiff construction, could suddenly edge into hard pack. You held your line; you didn't slip down. In those days gear that gripped the snow was prized; next in importance was stability. All the racers I knew locked in on long skis – 190s, 200's, even 210's – and screamed down the mountain, turning on the top of moguls rather than in between them. They were remarkably stable at high speeds. This was well before skis became shorter and easier to maneuver and bouncing around a field of moguls became much more of a sport.

A few weeks ago, when I strapped on a pair of DPS Cassiar 85's and took my first traverse at the top of Killington Mountain, I heard them before I felt them. It was a crisp, resonant, musical sound, the sound of the skis “pure prepreg carbon fiber laminates”, a formula that the company developed; and they are quick to tell you that other skis on the market that claim to be made of carbon fiber are in fact a blend of carbon and fiberglass. I'd just come off my Atomic Theories, quick-turning, forgiving all mountain skis that in terms of grip, I immediately realized were no competition for the Cassiars. Soon I was at the side of the trail turning on a thin powder cover and nailing the snow. And wondering “how do they do it?”

I ran the Cassiars quite a bit before I took them into the bumps, pleasantly surprised at how responsive they were. I thought of the old days when you couldn't get such responsiveness coupled with such extraordinary stability. Skis were spoken of as “soft” or having soft tips and while you knew they'd be good for turning, you knew they'd be less stable at velocity.

I trotted the skis out a few days later when the snow was more malleable, hardpack and ice

nowhere to be found. The Cassiars did well enough, but I found myself thinking they are perhaps best suited for the hard, eastern terrain that we face regularly in Vermont and that this might have been a prime day for my more forgiving Theories.

Off the hill, I went to the Internet and read about the partnership between two industry veterans: Stephan Drake and Peter Turner. I read a lot of technical specs that didn't completely land. But I could sense immediately that these skis were consummately designed, built for speed and while they are superb carvers, they secretly want you to kick them loose into fast GS. And so I carved and cruised with impunity.

Brian Finch, ExoticSkis.com tester:

<http://www.epicski.com/t/119641/2014-dps-cassiar-85>

"The ski is quite phenomenal in that when you are just puttering around it feels like you have nothing on your feet. However, once you start turning the sidecut readily & engages. The rider is able to make turns with great ease. Now every ski at this point in time should be able to rail without any difficulty ; put the ski on edge and hold it there and it should carve. What was rather interesting about this game was the ability to initiate the turn and actually feel like you're performing a tip stand at the same time. The skis actually let you get up on the shovels and hold onto the turn from the tip of the ski. This ski is hands down the easiest ski to initiate that I've ever experienced. The sensation was completely effortless. Simply load the tip initiate your turn, feather and adjust it will and repeat. Turn after turn after turn the same easy, smooth, effortless initiation occurred even it slower speeds in lower angles." ...

"Unless you have a helicopter or a snowmobile in your future ski plans, this is really the ski should be looking at. I don't think it's an understatement to say that this is probably **the ski** that majority the big name manufacturers are to be chasing for a while. Where DPS is really hit this out of the park is they produced a ski that can be a 99% winner for every condition you're going to see and is completely easy to turn. The ski is so easy to turn, while I had my brother who had not skied in 18 years up, I threw him on the ski and just let them go. There's some video out there from him just ripping around and it's quite amazing to see how easy it is to manipulate the ski. For the advanced skier this is really your quiver of one type ski."

EpicSki:

<http://www.epicski.com/t/119641/2014-dps-cassiar-85>

"DPS always manages to surprise me, one way or another. I expected the ski to be tossed around in the heavy crud and generally kick my behind, but it didn't. I had my 187 Bonafides in the car and never went back to change, although the day was clearly better suited to that kind of ski. Few things stood out: I am surprised by the torsion stiffness of the Cassier and the way it manages to

blend good grip and energy out of the turn with very neutral turn initiation. It feels like a very good carver. The tip was not hooky, even though it looked like it should be.

The ski definitely has a tail that is powerful, but still releases when you want it to release (the upturned tail is the likely reason for that behavior). It's definitely a slicer, not a floater, the stiff metal- reinforced low-slung tip goes through the crud in a remarkably effective way. The price you pay is dampness: everything under the boot is transmitted back to you. Even if you feel like you are getting intimate with every clump of snow under your feet, the ski never gets tossed around, and just keeps slicing through the chunks (the caveat is that if you ski it from the center you start getting tossed, but as soon as get back on the tips, everything quiets down the ski start to slice- so stay on the tips). It's a lot like driving a sports car- point it and it goes where its told, but it's anything but a plush ride.

Per DPS, the production skis will have increased dampness, which is a good thing in my book. I like the snow feel a lot, but its more than I need and I'd gladly sacrifice some of that for a bit more tranquility. Light weight also helps when you have to pivot it quickly, so the bumps were quite OK.“

DPS Cassiar SL 160cm (127/78/113 r=11.5m)

(\$1,249 usd – Pure3 carbon construction)



A year or two ago, if you told fans of DPS skis they would have a Pure3-carbon construction slalom ski in the lineup, they would have checked you into a rehab facility within minutes. Times change, and voilla, DPS has a ricochet-rabbit slalom turner built with their Pure3 carbon+nano technology.

According DPS's description of this ski...

"The Cassiar 80SL is a true race carver with a 11.5m radius sidecut, and the only prepreg carbon fiber shape of its kind on earth. If you enjoy training early season with deep g-loaded carves, or appreciate elite race skis, get ready for carving geometry mated with the lightest, most powerful ski construction ever made.

The Cassiar 80SL exhibits new levels of quickness and power as it moves under your body in lightning fast transitions and unmatched rebound

and edge grip. If we weren't as obsessed with deep snow, we would push the SL onto the World Cup –it's a high tech Ferrariesque tool."

First impression: "The Ferrari-red color with yellow lettering is very cool and distinctive.". Second impression: "Holy smokes, these things just jetted out from under me across the hill like someone threw a switch when I punched them." Third impression: "...Don't punch them if you know what's good for you. Carve 'em.....uhmmm..what else do they do?"

DPS's description is right on the money when they say "...new levels of quickness and power as it moves under your body in lightning fast transitions and unmatched rebound and edge grip."

After a bunch of runs with these little rocketships underfoot on some classic New England hardpack surfaces and some packed-powder surfaces, I quickly understood several things about the DPS Cassiar SL:

- These skis feel like a demonstration-of-concept, proving DPS can make a ski with intense g-force frontside carving rebound energy when skied aggressively, while remaining perfectly civilized, lightweight and easy-handling when skied passively.
- When flexed into their designed radius and loaded for rebound in the right way, and you pull the trigger, they can jettison you laterally across the fall line quick as lightning, and sometimes surprisingly.
- High-speed runs should be taken cautiously with this 160cm ski with 11m radius since they will want to engage their turn-with-pop behavior very, very quickly and it can unsettle even an expert skier if they are not paying attention.
- Vibration dampening and security is excellent, even on hardpack, which means you can ski it without feeling like it is detaching from the surface when the surface is less-than-smooth.
- The very lightweight chassis can feel somewhat feathery to someone accustomed to heavier, damper slalom skis, but you quickly learn to finesse your feel for it.
- This is not a race ski, but an intense recreational race carver.
- It has a relatively narrow performance envelope...essentially a one-trick-pony in its current geometry.
- This ski will chatter if your technique is not precise and accurate on the boilerplate surfaces.
- Bumps can be fun and lively, but the ski is very, very responsive and won't tolerate a lazy, back-seat pilot technique. Stay on your toes.
- If you want a workout, take the Cassiar SL and bang out a couple hundred yards of lateral-projection, loaded-for-bear SL turns back and forth and see if you can maintain them in their designed sweetspot radius as your speed increases. I bet they will win the contest.
- The Cassiar SL can be skied at slow speeds without intense input and attention, which is a remarkable achievement for a ski capable of producing ricochet-like, darting response when punched into a loaded arc. An intermediate looking to feel a carving ski's slot-car-like lock into a turn could ski the Cassiar SL without any problems and would find the light weight and easy-handling behavior when skied passively very fun and easy.

I got the distinct desire to have this ski design stretched out into a longer, perhaps slightly larger-radius version (13 meters @ 168cm?) to make it more versatile...something more turny than the

Cassiar 85, but less radical and narrowly-focused than the SL....or....stretching the SL into a 165 or 168 length proportionally. The current 160cm length feels like it would be ideal for a smaller person than my 5' 11" frame at 185 pounds. We will have to get this ski under some smaller people and see what they say. DPS has demonstrated they can make a dead-serious hard-snow carving tool, and that should delight DPS fans and spook the competition a bit.

Other Reviews:

SkiCandada:

<http://skicanadamag.com/2012/09/18/gear/slalom-test-2013#DPS>

“If you like short turns in a variety of snow conditions and have no intention of ever ripping up a slalom course, then the DPS Cassiar is worth a look. Not all skiers are looking for the Mach-3, hair-on-fire experience, but this ski has the heart of a slalom without excluding the more recreational skiers out there. It works at slower speeds and for less aggressive riders. Paul Ouelette summed it up best: “A quick, light ski that’s playful. It’s easy to pivot and fun in a variety of terrain.”

Ski Magazine:

<http://www.skinet.com/ski/gear/dps-cassiar-80-cassiar-80sl-2013>

“A relentless carver, the Cassiar is loaded with springy power and hungry to arc up the pistes. Testers called it "darty," "spunky," and "race-bred without a spandex look." Its proprietary carbon construction is remarkably light and sturdy. Testers felt it deflected a bit in crunchy, crusty conditions due to its lightness. But on groomers, it tracked precisely with a snappy, playful, and laserlike intent.”

About ExoticSkis.com:



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ExoticSkis.com is regarded by the ski industry as the World's leading resource for lists, information and news about more than 300 small, independent, innovative ski designers and manufacturers around the globe.

ExoticSkis.com also hosts some of the only on-snow tests of some of the World's most interesting and impressive skis from this list of rare, unusual and creative ski builders. Since starting in 2005, our goal is to give ski enthusiasts a place to learn about alternative ski makers and their interesting products, and to give ski designers and manufacturers a place to notify the public about their efforts.

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What We Do:

ExoticSkis.com maintains the definitive listing and information about these unique and unusual ski companies, sortable by country and type of ski. We produce some of the only on-snow tests in the World of these distinctive skis. We promote awareness of these ski designers and their products to allow ski enthusiasts to choose skis from alternative sources rather than the industrial-scale manufacturers. While the major ski manufacturers such as Atomic, Blizzard, Dynastar, Elan, Fischer, Head, K2, Kastle, Rossignol, Salomon, and Volkl all mass-produce many fine skis, there are hundreds of alternative ski builders making exceptional skis of countless varieties for enthusiasts around the globe. ExoticSkis.com brings knowledge of these small manufacturers to the public.

Cheers.

Eric Edelstein - Founder
<http://www.ExoticSkis.com>