



# **Small & Independent Ski Brands: A Few Quick Impressions For 2014-2015**

**NEWSR / EWSRA**

**Stratton Demo Days – February 2014**

**by ExoticSkis.com**

Each February in Vermont (USA), the **New England Winter Sports Representatives (NEWSR)** (<http://www.newsr.org>) and **Eastern Winter Sports Representatives (EWSRA)** (<http://www.ewsra.org/>) sponsors the **Stratton** Dealer On-Snow Demo Days. This is typically the first opportunity for the major ski manufacturers to provide on-snow demos of the upcoming season's new skis to the retailers. Shop owners and hardgoods buyers from around the country descend upon Stratton, Vermont for three days to touch, smell, taste and test new skis in order to decide which brands and models to buy for the next season. NEWSR provides a unique opportunity for sales reps, company executives and support staff to mix, mingle and even try each

other's products (*under-the-radar...of course...*) over several days. The best part is talking about next year's equipment and marketing approaches with sales reps, retailers and manufacturers' VIPs and marketing staff over a few beers each night....Boots, softgoods and accessories are also part of the action at the Stratton Demo Days, but ExoticSkis.com will just focus on the smaller brands and innovative ski designs found at the event in February, 2014.

In the past, the ski industry was dominated by essentially 10 or 12 major brands such as Atomic, Rossignol, Dynastar, Elan, Fischer, K2, Elan, Salomon, Volkl, Head, Nordica and others. Annual industry buying cycles involved retailers visiting Las Vegas or ISPO to attend expositions where the manufacturers show off next year's models and pricing/payment term structures to hopeful retailers who begin negotiations about buying products for the next ski season. The first chance for these hopeful retailers to actually get on snow to test these skis in the U.S.A. is typically the NEWSR Stratton Demo Days in February.



*Helpful, happy event registration staff!*

The first production runs of new skis are boxed up from the factories and shipped to the distributors and reps who mount and tune the skis (sometimes late at night before the event...the timing can be that critically close...FedEx and UPS trucks are full of skis heading for Vermont a day or two before the event) for Stratton, where they typically touch snow for the first time. Even for those who have been in the business for decades, the chance to get the first on-snow rides on these crisp, brand-new, fresh-out-of-the-wrapper skis for next year is like a trip to Disneyland, with old timers and newbies alike showing a near-giddy anticipation at getting their hands on the new models. The event is

for industry-members only, so the public is not allowed to participate, although the civilians looking-on at the circus-like atmosphere gawk in awe at the sheer number of tents and demo setups occupying the entire acreage of the base area of the resort. Hundreds of manufacturer's reps and hundreds of brands fill the resort for the event.



## SMALLER BRANDS:

2014 saw several smaller companies appearing at the NEWSR Demo Days along with the big-10 brands like Rossignol, Volkl, Dynastar, Atomic, Head, Elan, Fischer, K2, Blizzard, Nordica..etc.

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|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Goode</li><li>• Sporten</li><li>• Lib-Tech</li><li>• Liberty</li><li>• SkiLogik</li><li>• Scott</li><li>• Armada (a big brand now)</li><li>• 4FRNT (a big brand now)</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DPS</li><li>• White Doctor</li><li>• RAMP</li><li>• Icelantic</li><li>• Black Diamond</li><li>• APO</li><li>• G3</li><li>• Line (a big brand now)</li><li>• Faction (a big brand now)</li></ul> |
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We took some quick test runs on a few models of several of the smaller brands we found interesting or significantly updated and report our observations here. We did not get out on everything we wanted...which is always sad.. The event goes on for three days. We only got time for two days, but they were perfect.

## CONDITIONS:



*Tuesday morning*

the collection of the best new powder skis on the planet for next year from their demo fleets and were all lined up, chomping at the bit to get first powder tracks on these new skis. As one Rep was overheard saying..."...If you're not out here right now, you should be fired..."...

Retailers had to wait for some of the powder models to come back after a few runs first thing in the morning....such is the privilege of being a demo staffer on a powder day.

Tuesday was a cold, sunny, bluebird day with perfectly firm, hard-packed groomers (Eastern style...leaving hardly a trace of edge track visible on the surface). It was a flawless day to evaluate hardsnow performance of skis.

Wednesday was an epic fresh-snow all-day storm event, with about 12 inches of dry, fluffy cold snow coming down hard. At 8:15 AM, there was a line waiting for the lifts to open. The sales reps had taken



*Wednesday morning before lifts opened*

## SKIS TESTED:

- White Doctor FT8 Pro 179cm no plate
- White Doctor FT8 Pro 170cm w/plate
- White Doctor FT10 183cm
- DPS Cassiar 95 178cm Pure 3 129-95-116
- DPS Wailer 105 185cm T2 136-105-119
- Sporten SL4 165cm 121-67.5-104 r=12.4 (no metal)
- Sporten SL6 165cm 121-67.5-104 r=12.4 (2 metal sheets)
- Sporten Weed 192cm 140-104-125
- RAMP Kapow 189cm (redesign)
- RAMP Peacepipe 189cm (redesign)
- RAMP Bamboo 179cm (100mm waist) (new model)
- The Ski 185cm 93mm waist 16M @ 175 (flatline underfoot)
- Scott Punisher 183cm 108mm waist (flatline underfoot)
- Scott Black Magic 177cm 79mm waist

## White Doctor (France)



*Eric "Bob" Bobrowicz – White Doctor Skis*

Eric Bobrowicz ("Bob" to everyone) worked as a ski shaping guru at Rossignol in France for 25 years, creating successful models such as the Rossi Scratch and Rossi Bandit. He started his own ski company (originally named "Ride Doctor", now called White Doctor Skis [<http://www.white-doctor.com>] but changed the name to prevent potential hairy-eyeball legal comments from Ride). He believes in simplicity and purity in his designs and wants his line to be approachable and widely appealing to a large audience.

His construction uses traditional materials (multi-wood cores, fiberglass, titanal and no "nano bullshit" as he calls it). His designs are classic geometries,

without gimmicks or oddities, and the couple models tested at Stratton had a classic feel. He claims about 5,000 pairs of White Doctor skis produced this year, and about 5,000 pairs of APO skis (which he also shapes). Bob chose the Slovenian Elan factory to manufacture his designs and waxes poetic about their superb finishing line and high-quality processes and skilled workforce to make his creations come to life.



## 2014-15 White Doctor FT8 Pro



The FT8 Pro is the narrow-waisted racecarver from White Doctor with two metal sheets. I tried a 179cm version without carving plate, and a 171cm version with a Tyrolia raceplate.

The FT8 is a classic European frontside racecarving ski with two titanal sheets, one below and one above the wood core sandwiched with triax fiberglass. "Bob" does not believe in materials other than the tried-and-true classic sandwich constructions consisting of wood, metal and fiberglass. The combination works, and continues to be a favorite recipe for modern race skis from nearly every ski designer. The FT8 immediately sets into its turn with a simple tip of the ski, which pulls the forebody around, further flexing the ski, setting waist deeper into the turn, which tightens the radius, which causes the ski to flex deeper... (you get the picture) until you release the pressure and tip into a different turn. Racer-types will immediately feel at home on this ski after two turns, increasing speed and cross-slope pressure angles as they go. I tested the FT8 with "Bob" and two other men, one of which was an ex racer. The ex-racer and I immediately started shadowing each other

on the flawless carving conditions, going faster and faster, increasing edge angles and body angulations to see how these skis gripped and responded under pressure.. The result was two high-speed freight trains trenching the hardpack next to each other, cutting turns into higher and higher pressure situations without a skip, fault skid or wobble. The White Doctor FT8 could be considered a perfect example of a racecarver honed after years of refinement to produce a really, really fun trench-digging experience for those who crave hip-dragging, high-G turn shapes on hardpack. The narrow waist caused the ski to sink into the softer surfaces and lose momentum (like any racecarver), but that is to be expected. Vibrations on boilerplate and hardpack were non-existent, and the FT8 retains its composure perfectly in nearly any situation we encountered.

The only thing lacking in the design was a definitive "snap" out of the turns when the ski was loaded and released. Some people want a ski to explode under them, while others want a quite, composed, security blanket at speed. The White Doctor FT8 is the quiet, silent type, never exploding, but forcefully accelerating on command into the next turn. I personally love this type of ski, but found it a little less "snappy" than I like when looking for a carving workout session. Bob's racecarver is a great example of a classic frontside carving tool to make instructors, ex racers and trench-digging enthusiasts happy. Fit and finish on the skis were superb. The version fitted with the Tyrolia carving plate had the advantage of increased leverage and pressure isolation underfoot, while giving up some feedback underfoot as well as limiting the variety of radius variation. Choosing between the two versions might be the hardest decision for someone looking for a high-quality racecarver. Big grins were generated from everyone on the White Doctor FT8 that day. Great ski.

**Conclusion:**

Classic Euro carving frontside racecarver ski with great control, superb grip and perhaps just a wee bit too tame in the rebound to get richocet-rabbit enthusiasts really excited. Solid, high quality, elegant handling ski.

**Pros:**

Refined ride, high edge-angle carving, quiet, secure.

**Cons:**

Lacks a high-energy rebound snap, prefers to accelerate smoothly and powerfully (depends on what you want in a ski like this).







## 2014-15 White Doctor FT10

The FT10 is the all-mountain mid-size ski from White Doctor. I was expecting the typical “all-mountain-ski-mediocrity” where many skis in this category are perfectly pleasant and capable, but really never excel at any particular surface skiing style. I was stunned at how effective and remarkable the FT10 really was in multi-condition terrain. I stopped after 10 or 15 turns to take the skis off and inspect them more closely and hand flex them because I suspected something unusual was underfoot.

While the design and componentry of the ski appears to be a classic sandwich in all-mountain geometry, the sum of the parts really comes together in a remarkably excellent ski. I was shocked at how well I could surf through the foot of fresh snow with little effort, transition to trails with cut-up, skied-out piles of powder and boilerplate underneath, bouncing with agility and zero abuse and complaint underfoot, then arc super-secure hardpack carves on the scraped-off

sections with zero slip, slide or waffling. Vibrations underfoot on the hardpack were non-existent, while the FT10 behaved smoothly, predictably and with zero deflection in the bumped-out, skied-out surfaces.

We ski a ton of different skis here at ExoticSkis.com, and I have to say the White Doctor FT10 is one of the best all-mountain designs I have encountered. It's always a pleasure to discover your preconceived notions about a particular design or class of ski can be completely turned around by a great ski designer and the right materials put together properly. Nice work.

### **Conclusion:**

One of the standouts in all-mountain ski designs we have seen in a long time. Seemingly unremarkable geometry, camber and components brought together into a great recipe of balanced flex, camber, shaping and response. A real crowd pleaser.

**Pros:**

Refined ride with responsive and secure handling with very little input effort required by the pilot. A great all-terrain, do-it-all ski for skiers who are not looking for a hot-rod or specialty ski.. Agile, smooth, grippy, unfaltering and never demanding, yet capable of high-performance in nearly all situations.

**Cons:**

Lacks an "excitement" factor such as high-energey rebound, super-surfing or trench-digging edge power. Some want a ski to thrill them, while others want a ski to be a compliant, reliable partner no matter what they encounter.



*White Doctor FT10 Base showing core laminations*



## DPS (USA)

Drake Powderworks (now referred to as simply "DPS" <http://www.dpsskis.com>) has been at the forefront of extreme powder ski designs and high-tech materials engineering since 2003 (when Stephan Drake and Cyrille Boinay founded Drake-Boinay Skis), then formally incorporated later in 2005 when Stephan Drake and engineer Peter Turner joined forces. Pricy, high-tech, and high-performance are the hallmarks of these skis which enjoy a fever-riddled cult following. Recently, DPS has brought production of their Pure 3 carbon skis entirely into the new Utah production facility, while the hybrid skis are still produced by a high-tech OEM facility in China. DPS has regularly pioneered many shaping and materials advancements in this industry, and continues to produce skis with a distinct and highly unique feel and personality many skiers find irresistibly addicting. 2014-2015 continues this tradition with several new models and material recipes to keep their followers scrambling to refinance their skiing habit centered around DPS's inventions.

### 2014-2015 DPS Cassiar 95 (Pure3 Construction) 129-95-116 178cm



DPS has taken their new frontside "Cassiar" series into three distinct zones of width and behaviors (78mm SL, 85mm and 95mm) We have been riding the Cassiar 85 since last Spring and found it to be a stunning all-mountain, high-performance hot rod with a unique personality and feel

which should be considered a shot across the bow of every ski company out there. (see ExoticSkis.com website for the formal review) We have also been able to test the Cassiar SL (78mm waist) and found it to have a high-octane slalom turn acceleration which will surprise people with its energy and quickness when ridden it its sweet spot – all while having an ethereal weightlessness about it.

This wider, 95mm waist model takes the Cassiar 85 and scales it up for more surface area in a wider platform and offers a more GS-like feel and increased floating capabilities.

First off, the DPS Cassiar 95 can rip trenches into packed powder surfaces like a GS racecarver when rolled over and pressured. The distinctive DPS shaping really generates an addictive turn shape and turn initiation experience you won't find elsewhere (exactly like the little brother Cassiar 85).

There are plenty of effective skis capable of carving arcs around 95mm waist widths, but the new DPS Cassiar 95 has a unique flavor and personality which seems to pull you into the turn and



finishes it for you, delivering the level of intensity you select from a very wide performance envelope. Addicting is the best way to describe it. The new generation construction produces a lightweight chassis with superb torsional strength and power without the traditional feel of race-like ski with similar hold and arcing characteristics. The DPS formula delivers a ski with unusual grip and security along the entire engaged edge, with fun acceleration power when loaded and released...all while feeling almost unnaturally lightweight. Vibrations are damped really well until you get to the out-of-bounds speed limit of the ski (which is fairly high), and then only produces a slight fluttery feel in the very tip, but never along the midbody or tail section. Your first few turns on the DPS Cassiar 95 might undue years of conventional expectations about how a ski with these dimensions and lightweight feel can perform on snow.

Where the Cassiar 95 really shines is in mixed conditions, where you can slice or surf your way through variable snowpack densities and depths at will, picking your style. Slice under a hard-pressured turn? No problem. Surf the top, pivoting in a slippery pattern back and forth? No problem. Take on cut-up, skied-out surfaces head-on? No problem.

Powder surfaces are easy and fun with the Cassiar 95, with it delivering a more directional, cutting-like behavior than its more rockered siblings in the Wailer family (Wailer 99 and 112 – an exception being the new Wailer 105 reviewed elsewhere in this report). The long, progressive forebody of the Cassiar 95 lets it cut through crud with authority, only seeing a bit of deflection or hyper-turny episodes at the highest speeds due to its lightweight nature (some people crave a heavier, more mass-obvious ski in crud...and for good reason). The “deflection” felt at higher



speeds in crud is really more of a turny response than being thrown off-line since the Cassiar has a tight radius by nature, and plenty of surface area up front. This is a very responsive ski, so pay attention as your speed increases. This behavior also makes it exciting and fun to ride.

I was really impressed with how DPS has taken the remarkable Cassiar 85 and scaled its personality up to 95mm width while retaining the frontside carving prowess and multi-surface capabilities in the larger chassis. The beauty of the Cassiar 95 is its ability to deliver a huge bandwidth of performance at very high levels – not just a couple of things really well. We will be asking for more testing time on this exciting ski this season.

### **Conclusion:**

A new all-mountain, frontside-oriented ski with an addictive personality and very high performance which will appeal to a huge audience like free beer at a rock and roll concert. Tied as one of the best multi-condition all-mountain skis I tested at the event, along with the Scott Punisher.

### **Pros:**

Wide range of very high performance across many surface types, providing carving, “stivoting” and even a floating behavior with an addicting turn initiation and completion. Personality unlike other skis in this category.

### **Cons:**

Pricey, likely to sell out early in the season. Somewhat bland topsheet color and design.



## 204-2015 DPS Wailer 105 (T2 Construction) 136-105-119 185cm

DPS is offering an all-new construction option in some models called the "Hybrid T2". This is a response to people who want a ski with a more pronounced mass underfoot, and the feel of metal in the chassis. This is nothing like the original Wailer 105 (now discontinued and reborn in this version). The new T2 construction blends Titanal, fiberglass and carbon into a strong, damp and serious platform.

The Wailer 105 T2 is a heavy-metal freight train compared to most models in the DPS lineup. Just picking up a pair of these skis tells you they are heavier, damper and stronger than other skis DPS produces with similar dimensions. The hand flex is stout and strong and you get the immediate impression they want speed and athletic input to show off their best traits. The sidecut geometry is subtle and early rise tip minimal, with camber underfoot and a flat tail.



The first couple turns confirmed what the hand inspection indicated: power these skis and pay attention to where you are pointing them. I got runs in about 10 inches of fresh snow, where they actually surfed on top very nicely and produced a surfy, but not turny feel once you got them up to planing speed. Below planing speed, they felt true-to-length and somewhat planky, then came alive above certain speeds (depending on the surface conditions) and rose up to the top surface layers. The faster you go, the more lively and responsive they get. When the fresh snow had gotten cut up, skied out and varied, the Wailer 105 showed it is a crud-cutting tool for charging-type skiers who want a damp, strong ski to hold a specified line throughout an arc at speed. Edge power was 100% reliable and strong as you wanted, with no reall breaking point. Pressure and hold it....making as intense a turn as you want..it sets into the surface and stays put. The more you do this, the faster you want to go until you realize you are moving faster than you expect and feel completely secure underfoot. No deflection. No wobble, No deviations....just holding the line. If you load up the Wailer 105 (this can take some effort unless you use momentum and centrifugal force to generate the pressure you want...use your weight and movement...not muscle power) and release it, you get a very powerful, direct and impressive acceleration into your next turn. Just make sure you



don't get in the back seat, and definitely pay attention to your ski placement for the next turn, because you can get this ski to project you across the terrain with plenty of force. Hardpack hold was superb, with very strong torsional integrity under pressure. It prefers a more GS-like line hold on hardpack, rather than a more turny radius behavior like the Cassiar 95. You can essentially ignore changes in surface conditions along your trajectory with the Wailer 105. Point it and go. As long as you have the piloting skills and physical conditioning to hold it into its sweet spot (slightly flexed and under power), you will feel a thoroughbred underfoot. Faster is better.

The more athletic the pilot, the more performance you get out of this new Wailer 105. While the Wailer 99 or 112 can be found to be surfy, fun, spunky and lively with great edging ability when engaged, the Wailer 105 is the serious, businesslike, more directional, charging-type of ski you might want in a freeride competition, depending on the terrain.

Definitely get a demo ride on a pair to find out if the Wailer 105 has the personality you are looking for. It is a welcome addition to the DPS line

for people who want a powerful, damp feel in a more directional ski with all the traditional response and high performance DPS is known for. Skiers who thought the traditional DPS "feel" was too light, loose or active for their taste should get a ride on the new Wailer 105 in T2 construction. It will change their minds about how a DPS can feel underfoot...just like the Wailer 112 RPC did.

### **Conclusion:**

The Wailer 105 is the metal-flavored freighttrain holding the widest waist in the T2 lineup for next year, and gives strong, directional-oriented skiers a solid platform to pound through nearly any condition with unwavering integrity and power.

### **Pros:**

Superbly solid, reliable, damp and powerful. Surface conditions don't matter. Loves speed.

### **Cons:**

Pricey. Eat your Wheaties. May sell out quickly. Rewards a pilot who has a strong hand at the helm.

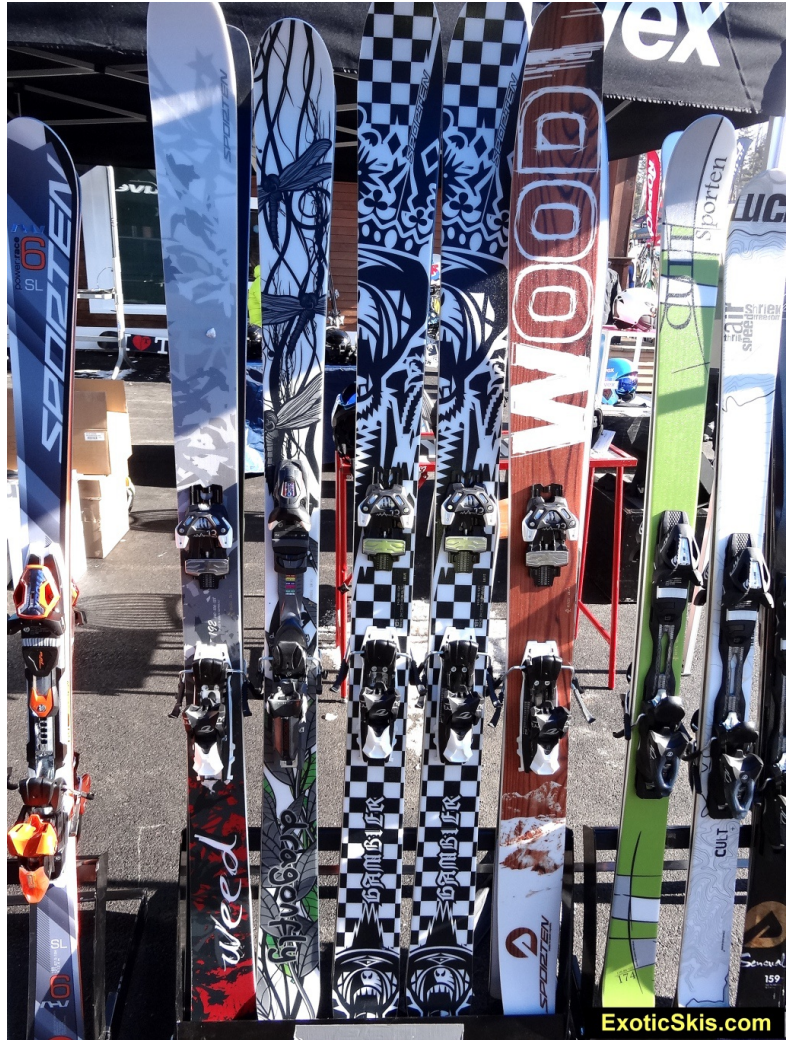


## Sporten (Czech Republic)

Sporten (<http://www.sporten.cz>) is a brand name most people in North America have never heard of, but you can be sure many people have skied their products under different brand names since they are one of the oldest OEM manufacturers on the planet.

Sporten claims to have been in business for over 100 years in the Czech Republic, and has experience making every kind of alpine and nordic ski design, including mogul and jumping skis. They maintain a robust business producing custom designs and standard designs with custom graphics for many brand names around the World, and have a highly experienced and well-outfitted manufacturing workforce and facility.

Their model lineup is huge, with something for every niche from beginner skis to fat freeride skis, as well as a dizzying array of custom and specialty skis. Pricing is very aggressive, especially with binding-included packages.



### Sporten AHV SL4 and AHV SL6 165cm

121-67.5-104 r=12.4

(SL4=no metal)

(SL6=2 sheets of metal)

The carving surfaces on day 1 were superb, so I did an A-B comparison of one of their slalom racecarver models in two configurations (SL4 and SL6). Both are traditional beech-poplar woodcore-biaxial fiberglass laminate sandwich skis, with the SL4 being more compliant with no titanal sheets, while the SL6 has two metal sheets (one above and one below the wood core). They also make (you guessed it...) an SL5 with only one sheet of metal).

The geometry is contemporary SL racecarver, with fairly pronounced tip width and narrow underfoot with squared-off tails. Flex is moderate, with moderate torsional rigidity and moderate dampening using a hand-flex test.





*Sporten SL 4, 5 and 6 series*

athletic skiers should look up the line to the SL5 (not skied) or SL6 (description below).

The first turn on the SL4 instantly grabbed me as it sunk into the hardpack and responded by changing direction immediately with a perfectly shaped SL carve and poppy zing gripping the surface like a laser and finishing with a clean zip which, when rolled over into the next turn, produced the same addicting grip and tracking behavior with essentially zero effort. I immediately wanted to get an intermediate onto this ski to teach them what carving really feels like. No fight, no effort, just clean, crisp carving slices left and right on demand with only a tip of the foot inside the boot. Really, really fun. As I picked up speed with the same radius turns, my friend commented how far over I was angled, hip-dragging along these tight radius turns with the ski bent intensely, gripping perfectly the whole way.

Having no metal, and being only wood and fiberglass, the SL4 soon found its speed limit and became a little less secure under pressure and high speeds, indicating it had left its comfort zone and wanted to back off. Bottom line – the SL4 is an ideal, light-handling carving tool for intermediates and moderate experts looking for a precision carving tool with friendly personality and fun behavior. Ex-racers and more intense or



While the SL4 without metal sheets was quick, edgy, easy-to-engage and fun-oriented, the SL6 with two metal sheets was more business-like, requiring more input and pressure from the pilot to click into its sweet spot and maintain the carve, but delivering a much higher top speed capability and unwavering grip on hardpack under high pressure situations. The tune of the SL6 was not as good as the SL4, so it did not have the razor-like grip of its more compliant sibling when going from running flat to being rolled on-edge, but a quick check showed the SL6 had seen much more demo usage and was less sharp and had a bit more base-high wear pattern to it. As soon as you pressed

the SL6 into the surface, its strength and curvature hooked up together to provide a stout SL platform.



I did not get a chance to ride the SL5 with only one sheet of metal, but I would expect it to have a very wide performance range between the SL4 and SL6...which could be a really appealing ski for many skiers. The fit and finish were quite good, and the Sporten brand is usually available at bargain wholesale and retail prices here in the U.S.

A quick internet search showed you could get the AHV 6 with Tyrolia FreeFlex 11 bidding for € 525 Euros from some internet ski shops. Great bargain.

### **Conclusion:**

Great classic carving geometry with grippy and responsive behavior in a relatively bargain-priced package with bindings.

### **Pros:**

Good value for the fun level of performance. Great selection of models ranging from zero metal, to 1 sheet to 2 sheets of metal. Discounts can often be found on last year's models via the Internet.

### **Cons:**

Relatively unknown. Unknown durability track record. Retail dealers may be hard to find.



## Sporten Weed 192cm 140-104-128 r=24

Sporten describes this ski as "...*Skis with perfect performance, especially on soft surfaces*". While the dimensions and geometry looked great, I immediately had a dislike for this ski in the ideal, fresh foot of snow on day 2 of the Stratton event.

No matter what I did or where I skied it, the Weed simply felt primitive and unrefined, like a concept ski which was not completed, or a prototype that was forgotten in the R&D stages. I had been skiing several other brands of skis in the same conditions just a few runs before I got on the Sporten Weeds, and this ski felt balky, dull, straightline and not particularly floaty at all...even in perfect powder snow. It's edge grip was mediocre at best and it was actually tiring to ride this ski.

I think this model has somehow gotten lost in the Sporten "fat ski" collection, and has not had refinement or testing to reveal it is not in the same league as the contemporary competition brands. It felt similar to the first 100+ mm waisted skis of 5 or six years ago. Surface area does not automatically translate into "excellent soft snow ski." That can be the curse of having so many models in your lineup...one model can get neglected and not represent your ski making experience as much as others. I loved the SL carvers, but this model really fell flat. I did not get a chance to try some of the many other wide models in their collection.



### Conclusion:

Primitive and unfinished design compared to nearly every other ski in the same width category out there.

### Pros:

None.

### Cons:

Unresponsive, balky, tiring and not any fun.



## RAMP Sports (USA)



*Edie and Kristen Kilchenstein of RAMP Sports*

Mike and Edie Kilchenstein and their crew at RAMP Sports (<http://www.rampsports.com>) have taken what started as an idea with outsourced production to a serious made-in-the-USA player in the U.S. ski market. Bamboo cores, composites, hardwood sidewalls and high-tech shaping tools and vacuum pressing technology have allowed RAMP to create some highly rated and affordably priced skis with a serious commitment to ecologically-sound practices. We got on two updated models and one brand new design for 2014-2015.

### RAMP Kapow 189cm 157-125-145 r=17.22

This is RAMP's biggest ski, refined a bit for 2014-2015, and we had superb conditions to test it during the second day at Stratton. New cartoon-like graphics for 14-15 are fun and original. The Kapow falls in to the category of fun, surfy, easy-going powder skis with the added bonus of having really good grip on groomers heading back to the lift.

You can noodle along the edges of trails, poaching the pockets of powder still untracked by others, zipping in and out of the trail at will due to the pivoty and surfy nature of this ski. If you roll it up on edge and pressure it, it will carve a nice slice, taking you into the direction you selected without any hitch or complaints. Fun and poppy were the two words that kept cropping up in my mind as I tested the Kapow in the foot of fresh snow. Remarkably quick and agile for its size, the Kapow is a front-floater, preferring to sink its tail into the soft snow slightly. Lots of zip and zing when you



load its chassis and release, letting you bob and weave through the tight stuff with ease. The light weight is a huge plus, and never fails to let you know you have a fun tool underneath you.

The only drawback to the RAMP Kapow is because it is soft and surfy, it has a speed limit. This is a crowdpleasing powder ski, not a hard-charging competition ski. Ski it too fast, and it can become somewhat darty and even a bit flappy at high speeds, but it's real forte is surfing buttery smooth and agile turns in soft snow. Windpacked crud can deflect this ski a bit since it is a light construction and does not have the heavy-metal mass of some crud cutters out there. The good news is this ski is compliant and fun in bumpy terrain. The Kapow just absorbs the bumps and keeps on truckin' down the hill, bouncing along fun as can be.

The Kapow is a lively, surfy, lightweight fun-filled ski for those nice fresh powder days when you want to float and frolic. If you want a high-speed, crud-cutting charger...look elsewhere. The description might say it's a high-speed twin good for carving turns in windblown snow, but it's most at home navigating through powder at moderate speeds compared to the hard-chargers offered by some other companies. This is a fun ski that would make any powderhound happy nearly all the time. We would love to have a pair in our quiver for those epic fluffy days. Plus, they really put a ton of effort into making the production materials and processes as "Green" as possible...which always feels good.



### **Conclusion:**

Really fun, surfy, easy, energetic powder ski with above-average edgehold on groomers.

### **Pros:**

Fun, easy, agile with good security underfoot.

### **Cons:**

Not for hard-charging skiers or big-drop terrain due to its soft flex. Can deflect a bit in windpacked chop and display some tip flap at high speeds.



## RAMP PeacePipe 189cm 152-115-142 r=17m



This model is refined a bit for 2014-2015, and of-course, features new graphics. The Peacepipe is claimed by RAMP to be "...A *hard charging powder ski*" and "...*The most versatile wide ski out there—strong and solid on windblown hard sections and fast and furious on groomers.*" I have skied the last two incarnations of the Peacepipe and would have to say it is one of the most responsive, fun, turny, lightweight-handling skis in the 110+mm waist category out there, but not a "hard charger" when compared to some stiff, burly skis out there. It is definitely one of the most versatile wide skis we have had under our feet.

This is a ski perfectly suited to East or West coast conditions where you want something around 115mm underfoot, and you want it quick, nimble, poppy and really fun while allowing surfy, pivoty turns on demand, with remarkable edgeholding power on groomers. Thanks to the full-width core supporting the edges, the Peacepipe can impress you with its ability to set an edge into hardpack and grip without faltering when you pressure it and want to carve across the fall line. The

other behavior that immediately impresses the pilot is the ability of the Peacepipe to turn very quickly, either in a speed-scutting pivot sideways entering a tight-zone of trees from the open slopes, or cutting some quick, zippy turns to grab a quick bit of powder off the side of the trail, or to avoid skiers or obstacles on the packed surfaces. "Bright" is the word to describe their bamboo-core Peacepipe. It feels lively and eager underfoot, with a distinctively light handling personality, yet torsionally strong enough to support a pressured edging maneuver underfoot without washing away.

Skiers looking for a stiff, crud-cutting icebreaker-like ride for high-speed, high-pressure situations will find the Peacepipe a bit too eager to turn...perhaps "darty" at high speeds due to its narrow turn radius, as well as feeling somewhat knocked-about in iced-up or windpacked crud since it is relatively flexible in the forebody. At very high speeds, the Peacepipe will feel a bit loose and overly energetic rather than damped, planted and unwaivering like some heavier, more mass-oriented skis out there. It depends on what you want. The Peacepipe is a ski you can ski all day in a bunch of conditions you are most likely to encounter in most places, yielding to other, more specialized skis only in extreme conditions where a hard-core skier would want a heavy-duty, somewhat more demanding and directional ski with higher speed potential and more intense dampening.



I found this latest incarnation of one of RAMP's most popular skis to be really fun, energetic and displaying a very wide range of high performance across the spectrum from groomer to fresh powder in all terrain types, including bumpy terrain. If someone was looking to get their first "powder" ski, or was a seasoned expert looking for a nimble, turny, energetic floater with impressive groomer-gripping behavior, I would tell them to demo a pair of RAMP Peacepipes hands-down.

Some people find this ski too energetic or turny for their tastes, or too compliant and flexible for heavyweight hard-charging. I find the ski a great crowdpleaser for a huge population of skiers. I would personally want a pair of these in my quiver as the go-to ski for fresh snow morning conditions which would turn into skied-out terrain in the afternoon. This is a fun ski with a great personality and a wide bandwidth of performance for lots of surfaces and terrain and continues to be one of my personal favorites from the collection of skis we test each year at ExoticSkis.com.



### **Conclusion:**

Another fun, energetic ski from RAMP with a very wide range of terrain capabilities given its dimensions.

### **Pros:**

Easy and fun, agile and eager with plenty of zing and response underfoot. Remarkably good edgegrip on groomers. Appealing to a huge audience.

### **Cons:**

Some might find it overly eager to turn in soft snow at speed due to its narrow radius. Not for hard-charging, big-drop skiing by heavyweights due to its soft flex.



## RAMP Big Bambooski 179cm 133-105-133 r=17.2m

This is a new 105mm-waisted model for RAMP intended to fill the niche between the frontside-oriented Groundhog/Beaver models and the soft snow-oriented Peacepipe at 115mm underfoot. Slated as a late-season release in March of 2014, the "Big Bambooski" will be a popular choice with plenty of skiers. I skied this new model in some pristine, 12-inch fresh snow during the second day at Stratton and found it to be a good addition to the RAMP lineup.

Compared to the Groundhog (105 mm underfoot) which can be fairly directional and more serious for energetic or athletic skiers, the Bambooski is much more loose, surfy and pivoty due to its rockered design and more compliant flex profile. The Bambooski is totally at home in fresh snow, yet provides a fun, responsive platform when the snow is cut up and skied out. This new ski is more slice-and-dice oriented than the 115mm Peacepipe, and allows a more GS-like on-edge experience when you roll it up and pressure it

through a turn, although much more easy-going than the Groundhogs. The level of effort required to get the Bambooski to change and hold direction is less than the Groundhog, but it lacks the strong carving feel and holding power. It's a perfect fit between the 100mm Groundhog and 115mm Peacepipe. Demo these two skis, then imagine something in-between. The real appeal of the Big Bambooski is its lightweight and easy-handling chassis with 105mm waist, which fits a huge range of surface conditions and terrain...tending toward the softer side of the snow spectrum than the 100mm Groundhog/Beaver skis which grip hardpack with a much more authoritative personality, yet require more calories-per-turn from the pilot.

The Big Bambooski really likes a mix of surface conditions, and resists deflection better than the Peacepipe, allowing a higher rate of speed with less deviation underfoot, all while retaining a fun and agile feeling. The smaller and stiffer Groundhog/Beaver models will cut crud at speed with



authority and power, providing a strong feedback to the skier (which some people like or dislike), but require some more effort to get such results, while the Bambooski provides a more compliant, but somewhat looser ride with less effort. Carving prowess on hardpack is good, again more secure and lengthy than the Peacepipe, yet not at the fast-and-furious level capability of the Groundhog/Beaver skis and their more narrow, cambered profiles.

RAMP's new Big Bambooski is likely to be another crowd-pleasing model...perhaps their best fit for a Western "Daily Driver" or Eastern "Fresh Snow Ski". Compared to the Peacepipe, the Big Bambooski has a definitely less surfy feel, being more planted and connected to the surface, and it feels more true-to-length than the Peacepipe (which can feel shorter than its length due to its rocker profile). The Bambooski provides a more stable-feeling platform when rolled-up on edge through various snow conditions, being less darty or eager to change directions than the Peacepipe, but is not as easy to throw sideways or slarve to scrub speed en-route as the Peacepipe which skims the surface rather than cutting through it. Overall, this new model is going to occupy a sweet spot in the RAMP lineup, and the panda bear is awesome.

### **Conclusion:**

Perfect fit in the RAMP lineup between the frontside-oriented 100mm Groundhog/Beaver models and the soft snow-oriented 115mm PeacePipe model. Fun and predictable, wide-bandwidth of performance across various terrain types.

### **Pros:**

Good all-terrain ski for western "daily driver" situations. Light and energetic feel underfoot. Awesome panda bear.

### **Cons:**

Lacks a really bright and exciting aspect.



## Scott (Austria)

Scott Sports ([www.scott-sports.com](http://www.scott-sports.com)) has been a staple in winter sports equipment for decades, and has recently jumped into the ski design and marketing business over the last several years with highly acclaimed freeride skis produced at the Fischer factory in Austria. Their lineup is focused and refined and has developed a cult-like following over the last several seasons, especially in Europe where Scott skis can be sold out very quickly from retailers. Last year, they acquired rights to produce a ski branded as "The Ski", which was a bump-oriented cult ski developed during the hot-dogging freestyle years in the 1970s by Bobby Burns in Sun Valley Colorado. This reborn "The Ski" quickly gained praise in the press and Internet forums as an excellent all-mountain ski with great performance, pushing Scott's ski lineup down from pure freeride down to all-mountain, frontside-oriented models...culminating in the Black Magic carver we got a chance to ride at Stratton.

### The Ski

**185cm 93mm waist  $r=18m/23m/15m$  (radius varies)**

Scott has been producing some very highly acclaimed freeride skis over the last several years of partnership with the Fischer factory in Austria, and their adoption of "The Ski" brand name for a new frontside-oriented, all-mountain ski has brought a ton of attention to this company. There are a couple of interesting design and cosmetic aspects to "The Ski", one being a rounded, dome-like core construction, and the peek-a-boo topsheet with "windows" showing off the woodcore laminations.

This is a very handsome, clean design, with a superb fit and finish. The handflex is moderate, yet torsionally strong with a moderate rebound and somewhat damp feel to it. There is nothing radical about this ski, other than the straight-underfoot geometry (the section under the binding mount area is essentially straight, with no sidecut curvature).





Looks can be deceiving, and “The Ski” is a great example. I managed to get this ski into some fresh and cut-up powder and packed powder conditions, as well as some good Eastern hardpack in spots. The first few turns indicated this was a smooth, elegant turning ski geared toward technical skiers or advancing skiers looking for a platform to get their technique up several notches. If I had to make a category for this ski, it would be “Luxury Technical”. This is not a fluffy luxury ski with a pretty topsheet, but a highly efficient and precise all-mountain high-functioning tool with a huge performance envelope and impeccable manners.

Cutting through the skied-out and bumped-up terrain, The Ski sliced a smooth and powerful arc through the surfaces, holding its line with zero deflection or deviations, taking as much or as little pressure as delivered by the pilot with composure and integrity. The immediate feeling is one of damp precision, yet the forebody design will rise up through soft surfaces, bringing the ski to the surface gradually and controllably, allowing you to pivot and change directions with very little effort. The sensation is more like a

floatable carving ski than a carving soft-snow ski.

The remarkable thing about The Ski is its ability to adjust to subtle changes in turn shapes and pressures cleanly and predictably. It has a composed, but playful personality, capable of producing a really fun level of acceleration out of a turn if you load it up and release it, yet never pops or zings your feet out from under you.

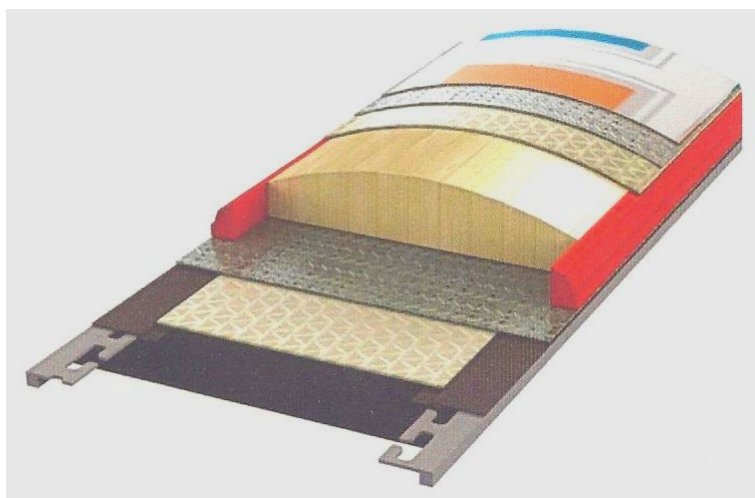
Bumps are absorbed consistently and gradually, never beating on the skier, yet you can bounce your way through in a lively manner, never deflecting off-line. Again, “Composed” is a good word to describe this ski. Powder was handled smoothly and cleanly, yet because of its dimensions, The Ski is not a floaty, surfy powder tool for porpoising through three dimensional snow, but it carries you through powder with a smooth and controlled ride, letting you adjust your depth as you go. More directional than darty, The Ski delivers an easy-handling powder experience like a good all-mountain ski...being totally capable, yet not specialized. Transitions to the hardpack show the great manners of this ski. As the ski goes from soft to hard snow surfaces, you feel a transition from float-to-grip along the body of the ski, and excellent feedback underfoot telling you exactly when you need to move the ski's body from banking to carving mode. What this allows you to do is go





from cut up, skied-out surfaces to the scraped-off hardpack in between without missing a beat, appearing to ski the same line and same surface as you traverse the different snow types as if they did not exist. This is a huge plus for people looking for an all-mountain ski.

I immediately thought the ideal customers for this ski would be instructors, experts looking to ride, rather than drive their skis, intermediates who are ready to step up from mid-range skis to real performance skis, and resort skiers who would want a high-performance, one-ski solution for some frontside-oriented fresh snow in the morning, then a day-long outing on the lift-serviced trails until it's time for refreshments on the deck in the afternoon.



*Construction details of "The Ski"*

The Ski can lay down some impressively silky and intense carving turns when pressured, with a very nice engagement and finish. Experts will love the carving behavior of The Ski on hardpack and packed powder. Damp and quiet arcs are always available, and a great variety of short to long radius turns are supported without changing technique. "Expert Recreational" is another category I would use to describe The Ski. This is a great ski for resort frontside usage, and delivers a huge width of performance at very high levels with very little effort. There is a lot of chatter about this ski in various ski magazines and Internet forums, and for good reason. Scott has delivered a frontside-oriented, all-mountain design with really nice, expert-pleasing behaviors in a wide variety of surface types.

### **Conclusion:**

"The Ski" is a great example of a refined, elegant, technical ski for all-mountain, all-terrain usage. It offers a huge envelope of high-performance capabilities with a relatively easy-to-ski personality, yet will make experts happy with its agility, carving prowess and composed, controlled feel under pressure and in variable conditions.

### **Pros:**

High performance with easy-handling and wide bandwidth of competence. Responsive and smooth.

### **Cons:**

Sells out quickly. Prefers frontside resort usage rather than off-piste freeride terrain.

## Scott Punisher

142-108-130 3D radkuss @ 183cm



First off, the graphics for the 2014-2015 Scott Punisher are produced in Vermont, USA, and they are very cool. We like that (since we are based in Vermont!) Now that we got that off our chest...

The Scott Punisher was probably one of the most impressive, if not the most impressive skis for all-terrain, mixed surface conditions I tested at the Stratton show. (The other ski neck-and-neck in this category was probably the DPS Cassiar 95).

Simply put, the Scott Punisher allowed me to rip through fresh powder, cut up crud, skied-out powder, groomers, hardpack, bumps and everything in-between with accuracy, agility, power, control, grip and impressive acceleration without requiring intense concentration or muscle effort. Experts will love this ski in mixed conditions. The more you drive it forward and ask for control, it delivers. Pivoting agility is always on-tap, along with impressive edge grip and carving power. Bumps are absorbed without abusing the pilot, yet the ski does not deflect, even when windpacked bump faces break through to harder material

underneath.

The more you ski the Punisher, the more confidence you get to point it at anything at any speed. Tight eastern trees are navigated with ease and agility. Open high-speed cruising, cutting across the skied-out powder and bumps is flawless, unwaivering and secure. No deflection, just line-holding prowess with the ability to change turn shape and direction instantly without any complaint or excessive input requirement. This formula is right on the money for someone who wants a multi-condition, one-quiver ski for the 100-115mm waist category. The carving ability of the Punisher is quite remarkable, easily equaling or beating many skis in the 90-100mm width categories. Dampening of unwanted vibrations is perfect, filtering out high-frequency chatter underfoot while never diminishing the full-flex response and rebound.



While experts will love this ski, intermediates advancing their skills could ski the Punisher and quickly learn to up their game without suffering or feeling like they have entered a league beyond their abilities. Despite its name, the handling of the Punisher is not demanding, but the more you press it, the better it responds. That's a great mix and will appeal to a large audience of enthusiasts. The Punisher has no real flap at speed, keeping its running surface well connected to the snow at all times, always sending feedback about its reliable platform along its entire length. You always feel like you can get response from the front, middle and tail at any time, and change direction at will without any loss of stability or reliability. Plenty of zing is on tap if you load the ski up and let it fly across the fall line.

Powder snow is handled pretty well by the Punisher, although it would not be described as a "surfy" ski, but more directional, with vertical floatability rather than smeary, horizontal floatability. I had a blast in the foot of fresh snow with the Punishers, and would probably only want a wider ski or more rockered ski in legitimate deep powder over 18 inches or if I knew I would not encounter cut up conditions later in the day.

Overall, the Scott Punisher would be one of the "go-to" one-quiver skis I would grab if I had the choice. There were other skis in this category at the show which were really good, but the Scott Punisher really rose to the top of the heap, along with the DPS Cassiar 95. This is a great ski. It has a reputation for a reason. Plus, the graphics are from Vermont!



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### Conclusion:

Superb multi-surface, all-terrain, high performance ski for experts looking for power, response and agility in one predictable, fun and confidence-inspiring package. Simply great at nearly everything a 108mm waisted ski would be expected to encounter.

### Pros:

Agility, power, grip, stability, energy, confidence.

### Cons:

Might be hard to find...can sell out quickly.

## Scott Black Magic

177cm 78mm waist – 3D radius



The Scott Black Magic is their new frontside carver, and it has a personality and feel unlike “traditional” carving skis. While most carving skis are either detuned slalom designs, or GS designs made more curvy and turny with narrower waists, the Scott Black Magic takes a different approach with its geometry. It is more of a specialty design.

The forebody is long and drawn-out, rather than having a spoon-like shovel quickly tapering to the waist. The tail is squared-off, but the widest contact point is moved up the tail, leaving a narrower endpoint. Underfoot is straight – meaning no curvature under the binding mount area. The top of the ski is rounded off...similar to the dome-like shape of “The Ski”, but looking more like a cap-ski design (see photo).

The flex is somewhat stiff, but relatively rounded without hinge-points, and torsional integrity feels strong and solid. “Damp” is the word to describe the feel of this narrow frontside carver. The topsheet is subdued and without any visible text to speak of...giving it a stealthy look, yet cool and understated.

For skiers with a race background or “traditional” carving skis or racecarve skis, it takes a couple turns and a bit of conversation with the Black Magic to figure out how it likes to initiate, be held and released. Once you figure out the behavior and sweet spot of Scott's design, you have a recreational carver with some excellent trench-digging behavior and an easy personality. The Black Magic is not a “cut-and-thrust” type of SL racecarver, nor is it a roll-and-hold GS carver. This ski likes to have the forebody pressured gradually, with a forward-biased stance, then gradually pressured along the chassis to the tail where you release the load and launch across the fall line, or gently roll it back to the opposite side, pressing forward again to create a seamless linked series of carves.

“Technical carve” is the best phrase to describe this ski rather than “race carve”. Instructors and frontside experts will appreciate the precision and accuracy of the Black Magic, while racers might find they miss the “traditional feel” of their raceboards or





racecarvers. The big bonus of the Scott Black Magic is the relatively low level of effort required to get it to engage and hold its line. You don't muscle the edge into the surface and hold its curvature, you pressure the front of the ski, let it engage, then follow its shape through to the next turn. You can load it up and spring out of your turns if you want, and it has plenty of zip and zing, but it really wants to deliver a dampened, controlled ride rather than a ricochet-rabbit type of experience. More "effective" than "exciting" in its personality, although you can lay down some hip-dragging turns on packed surfaces if you want to. Grip on true eastern boilerplate is a bit less intense and slightly less secure than a traditional racecarver or race design.



This ski fits into the Scott frontside lineup nicely as the ski a person normally addicted to "The Ski" would reach for on the really hardpack days or boilerplate groomers first thing in the morning. Ideally, a diehard Scott enthusiast would have the Black Magic first thing in the morning, then switch to The Ski after their carving workout.

### Conclusion:

Scott has created a low-effort frontside carver with a unique and effective personality for technically-inclined skiers looking for something other than a race-like carving experience on hard surfaces.

### Pros:

Non-demanding, clean, elegant carving ski with a unique personality. Graphics are subdued and understated.

### Cons:

Takes a few turns or runs to learn how it likes to be engaged and pressured to show off its prowess. Graphics might be too subdued for some tastes.





## IMAGES FROM STRATTON:







*Gotta luv the sweater..*









## CONCLUSION:

It's refreshing to see smaller, lesser-known ski brands appearing at industry demo events such as EWSRA/NEWSR in Vermont. The costs to attend the events can be huge for a small company since they need to pay for event registration, transporting people, gear, tents, tables, tools and supporting staff with hotel and food expenses. They hope they can attract the attention of some retailers to place orders for their skis. Now that the smaller brands are making an impact and capturing the attention of skiers everywhere, retailers are starting to add unusual or interesting brands to their racks to offer customers a wider choice and fresh excitement into the hardgoods business.

Smaler brands have definitely caught the attention of the major brands whose staffers can be seen checking out these smaller brands during the event....

Let it snow!

Cheers,



Eric Edelstein

<http://www.ExoticSkis.com>