



# ALL-MOUNTAIN FREERIDE

**THE SKI INDUSTRY HAS MANY WAYS OF DESCRIBING ITS CATEGORIES, AND WHAT ONE COMPANY CALLS ALL-MOUNTAIN MAY DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM ANOTHER.** We decided to go with the numbers, so officially this category is defined as those skis with waists in the pudgy 70- to 75-mm range. But of course waist size does not tell the whole story. This year's crop of All-Mountain boards also averaged a fairly serious 17.1-metre sidecut. Some of the narrow carving models tested later in the week had the same profile, which is telling. Compare that to the Mid-Fat skis, also in this issue, with an average sidecut of almost 20 metres for more sedate carving and friendlier behaviour in the chop. So All-Mountain skis combine the best of both worlds: they have enough flotation to handle soft groomed and light powder, but also have the physique to slice powerful arcs in the corduroy. If you are torn between the two sirens of hardpack and pow, there is an All-Mountain ski out there that will make your day—any day. Naturally, some of the test skis were happiest in the softer snow, while others preferred to spend their day closer to the groomed. All of them were surprisingly versatile and competent.

**THE RUN** Our test pit was halfway up the mountain in full view of Fernie's impressive Lizard Bowl and the huge undulating slopes leading back to the pit. A short ride on the Great Bear Express Quad whisked testers up 457 vertical metres to begin their run above the 1,830-metre level on the mountain. All testers used the Bear, a wide, groomed slope beginning with a deceptively moderate grade that becomes increasingly steep. Bumps along the sides led the bravest testers into gladed pitches and challenging conditions. Huge rolls and interesting terrain changes made an ideal venue to test these do-it-all skis.

**THE CONDITIONS** A week that started out foggy and soggy ended in classic Fernie heli-ski-like powder. But it was an unseasonably warm 8C and Scottish mist that formed our welcoming committee on the way up the mountain the first day. Wet snow turned wetter on the way down the test slope, which ironically provided excellent test conditions as it changed from dense groomed to soft and slushy. It didn't feel like winter but the actual skiing was slippery and great for testing.