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FAQS ABOUT THE SKI CANADA TEST

BIG WHITE / TEST 2003

WHY DON'T YOU USE NORMAL PEOPLE TO DO THE TESTING?

Our testers are “normal people”—except they put their pants on both legs at the same time. They come from many backgrounds but all have one common trait: they are avid, accomplished skiers with years of experience in the ski industry. Many are instructors or coaches. They know what each ability level needs and how to test the limits of each category. They know how recreational skis should feel and they know how slalom skis should perform. They also have the experience and background to detect subtle differences in ski behaviour that only comes from years of skiing full time. And then they are able to express these subtleties in specific terms so our readers can draw a meaningful picture of how that ski performed. Good testers are a rare breed. Yes, test impressions from the general public have value—they can often identify skis they liked or disliked—but the feedback gets kinda thin on specifics. Readers who are researching skis to purchase need real information and we haven't yet found a substitute for years of training and experience.

I NOTICE THAT SOME BRANDS WERE NOT TESTED. WHERE'S VOLKL? WHERE'S SALOMON?

All suppliers are invited to participate in our test but each year, some decline. (Along with Volkl and Salomon this test are Scott USA and Nordica.) The problem is we simply can't test a brand without a ski manufacturer's participation because we are testing next year's equipment and only the suppliers have access to next year's gear. The reasons given for not participating vary from costs and variance beyond a ski company's marketing program to disputes over our strict methodology and frank results. (Of course, we think we have a very convincing team at Ski Canada, but if your favourite ski is missing, it wouldn't hurt to tell the company you're disappointed it's not in the Ski Canada Test!)

DESCRIBE THE TEST PROCESS? A delicious buffet breakfast in Big White's Ridge Daylodge starts each day for the testers. Then the group is first up the chair to review the terrain for the day and get a briefing from the technical editor on the testing criteria. Each ski category has a battery of specific tests on speed

and turn shape, and every skier is required to conduct the same test. By the time the team arrives back at the bottom, the suppliers are standing at their stations and the fun begins. Joe Grierson, the whip-cracking pit boss ensures that things run smoothly, no easy task with 25 people rotating through the pit every few minutes. The testers take one run on each ski, assessing the same criteria in the same way every time. When they finish they can take a break; and they need it. Testers will ski more than 40,000 vertical metres during the week.

WHY DO YOU MASK THE SKIS? A heavy blue opaque tape is put on all skis simply so that the brand isn't obvious. This requires quite an effort and wouldn't be a practice the suppliers would miss, but it serves two purposes:

- Graphics are designed to impress and we do not want testers receiving first impressions that may distract them. We want them thinking about how the ski feels, not how it looks.
- Ski Canada has a long tradition of conducting the most professional ski test in the business. Impartiality is at the core of our credibility so it's important that we do everything possible to make the process as unbiased as possible.

WHAT'S WITH THE TESTER "ABILITIES"?

We use words like athletic, technical, finesse, power and so on to describe each tester's style. The words are self-explanatory but it's important to recognize that all testers are not the same and we want our readers to know that we have a variety of expert skiers assessing the skis. It may also give you one more clue as to how much that tester's comments relate to you.

SOME TESTERS ARE SPONSORED BY A CERTAIN BRAND. DOESN'T THAT AFFECT TEST RESULTS?

No, we discard the results of testers when they are skiing on their sponsor brand. But just for fun we have compared final results with all the marks included and found that the difference was negligible. Final standings were the same with or without the sponsor marks but we leave them out on principle. And just so you know, we also discard the high and low marks to eliminate any personal bias that may creep in.



Readying the skis



TESTER
CHRIS SIMM,
Big White



TESTERS LISA SUUTARI,
SUNNY VERREAULT,
Big White

EVERYONE IS DOING SKI TESTS. WHAT MAKES THE SKI CANADA TEST SPECIAL?

You may have seen some ski tests where the skiers take out the brand of their choice (not masked), take a few laps on different and then complete a feedback form. We do that too, but we call it general skier impressions. During the Ski Canada event, testers take one run on every

ski. Skis are masked, the ski run is closed to the public, and the speed and turn shape for the test run itself is strictly monitored. Every run is exactly the same for that day and in the same sequence so that each ski has a turn to go first for the day, middle of the day through to last of the day. When the testers return to the pit, they immediately step into a new pair of skis, Joe cracks his whip and they jump on the lift to repeat the process. Our testers are not there for a few runs on skis of their choice, they are conducting a tightly controlled comparison test. Seventeen fields of numeric data are collected from each run as well as tester written comments. Unlike some publications, Ski Canada prints all results, including those for skis that did not impress the testers. We print all results, not just the ones who did the best. We feel our test is unbiased and fair and the readers, including ski shop employees, deserve to see everything, warts and all.

HOW ACCURATE ARE THE RESULTS? I see a particular brand got rave reviews. Should I go out and buy a pair? Well, now it depends, "rave review" does not necessarily mean you would enjoy it. Is that ski designed for the kind of skiing you like to do? If not it could be a terrible choice. Decide on the category and realistically assess your needs before looking for high marks. Finally, if at all possible, don't buy skis until you've skied on them yourself. The ski test is just one of the tools you have to help you make a good choice. Some shops rent or demo skis they sell and in other cases suppliers have demo days to allow you that all-important "feel good" test. If they don't feel good, don't buy them. Who knows, you might discover that a ski that got tepid reviews in the test is just what you were looking for.

I'M NOT A GOOD SKIER LIKE YOUR TEST TEAM MEMBERS. HOW CAN THE TEST RESULTS HELP ME? We test skis that are designed for skiers of all levels, including yours. Experienced skiers with expert feet

took them on appropriate terrain at the appropriate speed to assess how good they will be at helping aspiring skiers. Tester comments will give helpful hints on stability, ease of steering, preferred snow conditions and recommended skier weight.

HOW MUCH ARE THE TESTERS PAID? You could say a good tester is worth a lot, but believe it or not our testers do not receive one penny for an entire week of their time. They even pay their own way to the test from across Canada. They must truly be one of the most significant volunteer groups in the ski industry. Their contribution to the skiing public is immense.

HOW TO INTERPRET SKI RESULTS

The full results of all tester feedback cards would take a dozen pages to reprint in the magazine.

Sometimes comments are contradictory, reflecting the personal tastes, styles and talents of 25 different people, so what is presented in the magazine is a summary and consensus for each ski tested. For example, one tester may describe a ski as "lively," but if the next tester doesn't like that characteristic, he may call it "nervous." What one tester calls "stable" or "solid" may be reported as "dead" or "heavy" by another tester. Sometimes a light skier complains about a ski being too stiff, but a heavier tester reports that the same ski "has great edge grip at speed." Reading between the lines and finding trends to fairly describe each model is the job of the technical editor. In the end it may look as though all the skis are the same—fantastic. It's true, modern skis are good but there are many differences and you'll enjoy some more than others. Carefully read the tester comments and who made the remarks. And finally, The Bottom Line offers one more interpretation of the results. It should be encouraging to know that in every ski we tested, at least a couple of skiers absolutely loved them, even the ones at the bottom of the ratings. That's why you should regard these results as just one tool to help you narrow your choices, then test them yourself before you make your decision. Use your Ski Canada Gear Guide and Ski Test at the ski shop—and don't be surprised to see the guys behind the counter referring to their copy!