



Time to take the plunge



Photo: RICHARD SAVAGE

The greatest schism between eastern and western Canadians isn't about politics or power—it's about powder. Shocking to most skiers in the west is the fact that many easterners are so intimidated by the rare and elusive "deep" they actually find it objectionable. They'll even avoid it.

To be fair, easterners are often excellent at skiing gates or carving on ice; they're at home on the hardpack—powder practice days are rare opportunities indeed. That said, every season our ski club is blessed with one or two perfect powder Saturdays. Shin-deep (once in a while even knee-deep) dry-and-light awaits us after a white-knuckled drive to my family's diminutive chalet Friday night, but waking up

to an untracked dump makes me feel like I'm at a little Fernie, Red or Smithers. It's the only time I've been known to abandon my family for a lift-opening run or two.

The thing I find so peculiar, given these hard-to-come-by but oh-so-delicious occasions, is how many otherwise confident skiers will happily stick to the packed-powder of groomed runs. And when the few runs left ungroomed get tracked up, only a handful of us (most half or a quarter my age) end up in the trees—where we can ski powder the entire day. No-powder people simply don't know what they're missing.

A heli-guide once told me the difference between American skiers and Canadian was *they* overestimate their abilities and *we* underestimate ours. Sounds about right. I have so many perfectly qualified friends in Ontario who would have the best ski holiday ever if they only got up the courage to book a few days or a week with a heli or cat operation. I've heard the scenario many times: they've skied big powder in some snow that was very heavy on some skis that were very narrow, which resulted in a painful sitting-back style that required thighs bigger than Jeremy Wotherspoon's. Technical Editor Martin offers a few tips to bring out der *Pulvern Schwein* in you this issue starting on page 70. (If you can only remember three things, start with: 1. stay centred, 2. keep your feet evenly weighted and closer together 3. get into a rhythm.)

And 4. book some powder time this winter.

The sport of heli-skiing may have been invented in B.C., but a week at Wiegale World

has been unaffordable for most Canadians. That changed when packages as short as three days were offered. We're finally seeing some boys from Bay Street and the oil patch hook up with the Euros and Americans who traditionally fill most of the chopper. B.C.'s plethora of cat-ski operations keeps expanding with more and more seats filled by Canadian skiers who've finally realized what our sport is all about. Stories on several, as well as listings of all cat and heli ops, start on page 32.

My first powder day last winter was with a brand-new operation, Big Red Cats out of Rossland's Red Mountain Resort—and it was a perfect example of how the uninitiated have nothing to get their knickers in a knot about. Given Red's tough reputation, I was surprised how gentle the terrain was on our cat-ski day and how well it fit most skiers in the group, who weren't meat-hucking, ski-video stars but simply strong intermediates on rented fat skis. There were a few big shooters from the States, a small boys-club posse from Alberta, a couple of couples from the east and a few dirt-bag latch-ons like me who were skiing standby. All were day-skiers (well, one was on a snowboard) who were simply taking a special day or two away from skiing Red Mountain.

Run by former Aussie national team racer Kieren Gaul and his Canadian wife, Paula, Big Red Cats had such a successful winter last season they were onto their second cat within months of opening. Teaming up with Red, Big Red Cats has inexpensive day-skiing rates from \$239 a day—pretty cheap considering the day left me with several nights of sweet dreams.

Big Red isn't the only operation that capitalizes on day-skiers. RK Heli-Ski where we test powder skis (see page 56) has been lifting first-time and veteran heli-skiers into spectacular terrain for 36 years. Whistler now has five heli- and three cat-ski ops near enough to the lifts to combine a few days of warm-up resort runs first. Fernie, Revelstoke, Golden, Nelson...the list is as endless as the untracked powder of the B.C. Interior. The only thing missing is you. ❄️