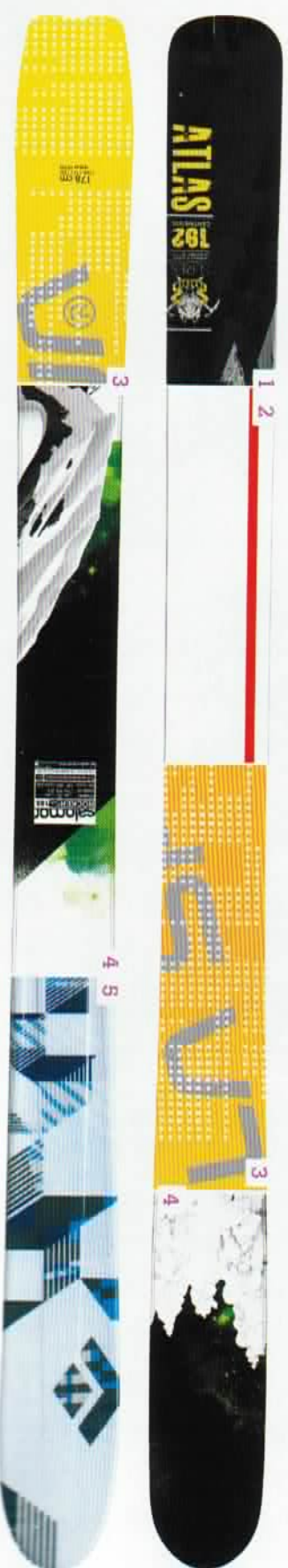


Ski manufacturers build for versatility, soft snow



THE VERY MENTION of a second straight La Niña winter helped fuel early season ski sales to start 2011/12, driving a 5 percent increase in equipment sales at specialty retail through October, according to the Leisure Trends Group. Combined with a fresh track frenzy that has more skiers looking beyond the resorts for virgin snow, the steady pace of turnover on the retail floor means there should be plenty of room to accommodate all the new technology being introduced here at the show.

Rocker technology, proving its popularity with consumers for powder days at the resorts, continues to expand into backcountry skis as well. It's something **Black Diamond Equipment** (#5027) picks up on with some of its nine new skis in two new series, the Free Tour and Tour, all designed for skiers who like to ski off piste.

The 2012/13 line brings "new shapes that make skiing easier and more fun in varied conditions in the Classic Touring segment, while also adding more rocker to our fatter Free Tour skis," Black Diamond Ski Category Director Thomas Laakso said. The five new skis in the Free Tour line have rocker for soft snow performance, lighter weights for climbing (thanks in part to the paulownia wood cores), as well as 95 to 125 mm waist widths for stability and float. The big mountain Megawatt

(MSRP \$929) is the top model in the new Black Diamond line with a 125 mm waist, plus fully rocker tip and semi-rocker tail.

K2 (#36113) expands its Backside Adventure Series of skis with the Sideseth (MSRP \$1,000), named for pro skier Seth Morrison. Designed for AT skiers, telemarkers and big mountain lift-serve, this is a soft snow-focused ski with dimensions of 147/118/135 mm, but with a stiffer tail and less rocker for all-condition versatility. K2 is offering the ski with pre-cut skins for retailers who want to offer a package for the backcountry.

Volkl (#38113) offers custom-trimmed skis with skins such as the Nunatag (MSRP \$825), and made big news when it came to Salt Lake City last year for the first time to debut the AT Duke binding from its sister brand Marker at Winter Market. This year, the joint introduction of a new AT binding from **Salomon** (#32112/32113) and **Atomic** (#34112), both longtime exhibitors of cross-country and telemark skis, means that the brands have more downhill-focused skis, such as Atomic's Atlas (MSRP \$879) and Salomon's Rocker2 (MSRP \$875) on the floor here at the show.

One ski that doesn't need pre-cut skins is the **Marquette Backcountry Ski** (#38076), premiering its brand and product to show goers this year. Built with a reverse scale system on the base of the ski

(MSRP \$189) that grips while climbing but doesn't catch for gliding downhill, inventor David Ollila said he's here to talk about the ski's versatility, as well as the fact that it has green credentials and is made in the United States.

"It represents the power of small manufacturing in the U.S., and the power of the specialty retailer to bring truly innovative products to the consumer," Ollila said. Marquette Backcountry builds a 100 percent recyclable product that anyone who gets three inches of snow or more can use.

Voile (#30027E) has a similar story in its Vector BC (MSRP \$550), an AT or telemark ski that features a waxless base for climbing without using skins, saving weight and reducing the amount of necessary gear. Dave Grissom, sales and marketing manager for Voile, said, "It makes it so easy to just get out in the backcountry without putting your skins on and off that I found it became one of my go-to skis last year."

In other ski news, **La Sportiva's** (#7013) Hang5 (MSRP \$825) is a new powder ski with dimensions of 145/117/135 mm. **G3** (#32105) hits the floor with the Empire (MSRP \$800), with hefty dimensions of 153/127/139 mm and full rocker. And **Dynafit** (#36093) debuts the Huascarán (136/115/125 mm), which has rocker in the tip and tail, and a progressive big mountain turning radius for big terrain.

--PETER KRAY

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