

# Out of Bounds

Brands and buyers get crazy about lightweight ski and snowboard gear that's built for the backcountry.

**AFTER A STRING OF DRY SEASONS**, everyone has been praying for snow—and this year, nature answered the call.

At yesterday's whiteout All Mountain Demo, people slipped on snowshoes and romped through the powder while skiers made turns down Solitude's slopes, but it wasn't just yesterday that delivered the snow. "It's snowing coast to coast, and it's been exceptional," says Chris McKearin, U.S. commercial manager for Salomon (#35093). "Skiers are in a great mood."

Although the season had a late start, retailers report that sales continue to rise as powder falls across the nation. But skiers and riders aren't staying in the bounds like they used to, which is why everyone is looking to create the perfect backcountry setup. Salomon, which traditionally manufactured alpine racing equipment, is heading full force into the backcountry. The brand has simplified its bindings so there are fewer moving parts that could break while touring, and this is the first year it's offering a binding and boot specifically dedicated to the backcountry, the MTN Binding (\$509-\$549) and S/Lab XL Boot (\$1,000). Why? McKearin says since it is only recently a growing segment, companies haven't dedicated the time to it as they have to other ski styles.

The racers' needs are set, park skiers aren't asking for anything new, even the freeriders aren't asking for much new," he says. "So, by going into the touring world where there are unmet needs, we are able to develop new technologies."

Dynafit (#36073) launched an entire ski line this season, which they refer to as a "lightweight rebirth." Learning from their top-selling Teorite freeskis, they've fine-tuned the shape of their new Beast line. Like most manufacturers, they are making boots and bindings that are flexible for the uphill and stiff for the downhill. While Dynafit initially made a ski setup suitable for the high peaks of the Himalayas, it is finding that skiers want hybrid designs they can use to cruise in the resort, delve into the sidecountry, and end the next day backcountry touring. "It's hard to be able to afford a backcountry setup and an alpine setup, not to mention multiple different skis within different setups, so that versatility is key," says Jamie Glaw with Dynafit.

Black Diamond (#6009), which has held true to its backcountry roots, says it is simply in the right place at the right time. Skis, beacons, and backcountry gear sales are cranking, says Keith Christensen, director of sales. He reports a surprising boost in sales for full backcountry sets, which most likely means more buyers are investing in their first backcountry setup.

Even outside of the ski demo area, everyone had backcountry on the mind. Native Eyewear (#24041) added to its line of ski goggles with the Spindrift and the DropZone (\$129-\$199), and they're made for



Jeremy Jolley, sales manager for Arva Equipment, shows off the Reactor 18L backpack (\$599).

touring. The goggles have an anti-fog coating 16 times the industry standard, which means you get eight minutes without fog even when stopped between the uphill and the downhill. Arva (#35072) also launched a new line of smaller ABS backpacks, the Reactor Ultralight Series (\$649, 15L; \$749, 25L) since the backpacks are increasingly becoming a standard part

of an avalanche safety kit.

As people are lugging more gear up mountain, lightweight is the word everyone wants to hear. From lightweight probes from Arva to ultra-lightweight boots from La Sportiva (#5027), it's all about finding the perfect balance between a low weight and a high performance. Voile (#32063) has been able to perfect that balance by reducing the amount of carbon in the Ultra Vector skis. Voile also showed off its splitboard, the only option for snowboarders at the All Mountain Demo. The real game-changer was the binding, though, which vastly improved the setup from splitboard to snowboard. La Sportiva also showed off the Vapor Nano lightweight carbon nano-tube skis (\$1,200), which maintain rigidity and keep an edge while carving.

"Everyone is looking to do more with less," says Jonathan Degenhardt, marketing director for La Sportiva. "In the backcountry, people are doing longer, more adventurous tours. A lightweight setup translates to a longer day and more laps."

As snow continues to dump across the nation, retailers hope ski sales will only continue to grow, and the ski companies will keep their eyes on the needs of the backcountry demand. "There's been a shift in the last few seasons has been backcountry," Degenhardt says.

Like the snow, it shows no sign of stopping.

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