



Friends in high places

There's a special-interest ski group up there for everyone, says **Rachel Oakes-Ash**

NO ONE likes to ski alone, but skiing with friends can often mean having to keep up or slow down, and if it's a powder day, you don't want to be held up by anyone.

New group programs in Australia and New Zealand this winter let you ski or board with peers who share your level of expertise.

Whether gay, straight, single adult, first-time child, lawyer, free rider or female, there is a program for you.

Be prepared to spend \$70 to \$2000 or more for up to 12 days of camps, clinics and coaching. Most prices include lift passes, but check with the resort when booking.

CHICKS ON STICKS

WOMEN ski differently from men. Blokes like to get to the bottom of the hill as fast as possible, women want to look good while doing it.

Women-specific ski clinics provide a non-threatening environment in which women can improve their skiing techniques.

Usually, some spa pampering and apres action are thrown into the mix, and women will find themselves breaking the powder ceiling by week's end.

In Victoria, go to Falls Creek on July 31 for the five-day Mim Sodergren Women's Week (\$980) or Mount Hotham on July 24-28 for the L'Oreal Visible Results program (\$799). Mt Buller has scheduled a Ladies Day Weekend for July 30-31.

Further north in New South Wales, Thredbo's Women's High Intensity Program runs for five days in three different weeks in August —

the 7th, 14th and 21st — and Perisher Blue offers two three-day female-specific ski programs on August 8 and 22 (\$624).

Across the Tasman, Treble Cone launches its inaugural women's clinic in the South Island, with three days of video analysis and female instructors for NZ\$498.

Nearby Cardrona ski field is holding two-day women's clinics on July 4, 11 and 18 (NZ\$300).

Mount Ruapehu in the North Island is home to the four-day Lindauer Ladies Week (NZ\$299) on August 7 and September 4 at Turoa ski field, and on the other side of the mountain at Whakapapa on July 24, August 14 and September 4.

CHICKS ON TRAYS

ALL-GIRLS snowboard camps are held at Snow Park (www.snowparknz.com) in New Zealand. The weekends are filled with women teaching women how to ride. Instructors are world class and the weekends are full of on-piste and off-piste fun.

There's one weekend in July, August and September. Go to www.snowgirlsnz.com for confirmed dates.

FOR THE GUYS

KIWI men have their own bonding ski week at Mount Ruapehu's Turoa on September 4 and Whakapapa on August 14 (NZ\$299), sponsored by Speight's Ale.

UPGRADE

IF YOU want to improve your skiing in mixed company, choose an im-



Snow buddies: (above) it's best to ski with people of similar ability and interests; and (left) many programs are available to help children learn.

provement program guaranteed to have you jump at least one level in the week.

Intensive coaching in small groups ensures personalised instruction and similar ability ensures a safe learning environment.

Perisher Blue's Mountain Improvement camp provides three days of coaching and video analysis on August 8, 15 and 22 (\$624).

Thredbo has the SLAP (Ski Like a Professional) program for levels 5-7 on August 7 (\$964).

The super advanced can do the Power Slap on truly challenging terrain. Same dates apply.

Treble Cone is home to the Alpine Ski Achievement Program (ASAP), five days of moguls, powder, off-

piste and racing skills with video analysis and social program during August for NZ\$840.

GAY-FRIENDLY SKIING

IF SAME sex is more your thing, Queenstown hosts the southern hemisphere's biggest Gay Ski Week from September 2-9.

Think loads of schussing and twice the apres action. For early bird package deals for flights, accommodation and all the mountain extras visit www.gayskiweeknz.com.

MEN IN UNIFORM

MOUNT Hotham serves up men in uniform in August. The RAAF Games are held at Hotham from

August 2-4, when the blokes will battle it out for snow-sports glory.

The Police Winter Games do it all again the following week, and the Australian Defence Force Alpine Snowsports Championships is on at Buller, August 6-11.

If suits are more your thing, hang out with the legal crowd in Thredbo on August 5-6 for the annual Volvo Lawyers Ski Race.

You don't have to be a legal eagle to join in, just sign up at www.lawski.com.au and act like one.

AGEING DISGRACEFUL-SKI

THE advanced technology of ski and snowboard equipment has lengthened the average ski career by more than 10 years.

Over-30s can choose from a range of masters ski programs. Thredbo runs a five-day training camp from July 24 for masters racers (\$964).

Falls Creek caters for the over-50s with a dedicated ski week. Think dinners, cocktails and age-appropriate instructors taking small groups for personalised tuition over five days (\$760).

Over-55s get four dedicated days at Seniors Week at Whakapapa on August 21 (NZ\$299).

TEEN SPIRIT

TEENS are well catered for with Team Black Diamond workshops at Perisher Blue, where kids from 6-14 years ride and ski freestyle.

One, two, three and five day programs are available from \$115.

Thredbo has Club Freeride from half-day to seven days (\$70-\$677), and Falls Creek has a 12-day program called Air and Style with instruction from former Olympians.

Burton Learn to Ride Freestyle sessions are available daily for kids over 10, teens and adults at The Remarkables, near Queenstown.