



Powder

How do you know if you?

Buying skis and snowboards can be overwhelming. With so many brands, styles and graphics, it is easy to get confused, especially when you can't try out the skis and boards in store.

Most resorts have at least one demonstration day each season and, when investing \$800 or more in new ski or board equipment, it's a good way to try before you buy.

On a recent Thredbo trip I test-drove 10 skis at a demo weekend held by *Australian and New Zealand Skiing* and *Australian New Zealand Snowboarding* magazines. Brands such as StepChild, Burton, Flow and Nitro snowboards and 4FRNT, Elan, Salomon, Rossignol and Atomic skis offered a "drive-through" trial for riders and boarders.

The type of board or ski you buy will be determined by your style of riding or skiing, and that can change as you advance in skill. Think about how much time you spend on and off piste. Do you like bumps or groomed slopes? Are you a terrain park rat or do you prefer the back country?

Traditionally, beginners want a "forgiving" board or ski, one that is softer in flex and absorbs the impact of lumps on the snow. Choices include the Salomon X Wing 6 ski

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re buying the right board or ski? **Rachael Oakes-Ash** tries out the latest gear.



for blokes (\$849) or the Siam 5 for women (\$699). Ride's Havoc is a good entry-to intermediate-level board (\$749).

A stiffer board or ski is less forgiving and better for a more aggressive free-ride boarder or skier who can move the ski or board around the terrain. The Stoeckli Stormrider is an all-mountain free-ride ski that is powerful across the mountain (\$1360), while the Nitro Pantera is a stiff free-ride snowboard (\$849).

The edge and taper on a ski will determine radius turns. This is calculated by reading the ski edge as an arc of a circle, then cutting that circle in half. The larger the radius, the wider the turns as used by giant slalom racers but if powder is your fancy then fat, wide skis allow you to float in the dry stuff. Try Head's Sweet Fat Thang if you're an advanced powder-hound man (\$1295) or the K2 Phat Luv for women (\$899).

Russell Holt is one of Australia's

premium pro snowboarders. He says it's most important to get a board that is right for your skill and size. "Width is also important as you don't want toe drag as you stand sideways on a board. If you're over a male size 9 or 10 you need a wider board."

Snowboard powder boards are wider than a standard all-mountain or on-piste board and have a tapered nose that allows the rider to remain on the back foot with the nose naturally out of the snow, making it easier to turn. The Salomon Burner snowboard is built for powder (\$949), as is the Burton Malolo (\$799.95).

Boarders who ride the terrain park want a softer board, such as the Burton Jeremy Jones (\$859.95), because it's more forgiving on landings and the board can flex over rails. Skiers hitting the terrain park want twin tips, which are designed to allow skiers to go backwards by tapering both the front and the back of the ski to match. The base is flatter and width is fatter than an average piste ski so there is more ski

contact with park rails. A contender in this category is 4FRNT's MSP pro model (\$999).

Skis have come a long way since the advent of snowboarding, which affected ski design. Gone are the days of matchsticks bound to each foot. Skis come in racing, carving, powder, all mountain and twin-tip styles, and snowboards have their own new technology with terrain park specific boards, all-mountain boards, powder boards and the latest Libtech Magne-Traction serrated edge for better grip. Different "edges" allow the board or ski to grip the snow when turning on packed piste, or glide on powder.

The fashion focus is on ski and board graphics designed by pro riders and international artists. Then add some funky names: K2 has its Public Enemy and Seth Vicious twin tips and the One Luv, Lotta Luv, Tough Luv and Burning Luv women's series. StepChild has the Hammer Head snowboard, Nitro has the Black Widow and the Misfit, and Ride has Havoc.

The female-specific hip and weight

ratio means the stance and balance sits differently to men's. Salomon has a fun twin-tip ski, the Mynx (\$799), while Atomic has the Foxy Mama all-mountain ski (\$1099).

My pick is the Elan Mag Spice (\$999). It takes on the entire mountain from intermediate to advanced level and is fat enough to hit the powder. If you're a female boarder who likes to take on the blokes in the terrain park then Ride has the Fever (\$839) and Burton has the GTwin all-mountain female-specific board (\$799.95).

The writer travelled courtesy of Thredbo Alpine Resort and Ski In Ski Out accommodation.

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VIDEO

Watch Rachael Oakes-Ash's video on snow gear and read her blog at smh.com.au/travel



Fashion and function ... (from far left) both sides of the Ride Havoc snowboard; Elan Mag Spice ski and Burton GTwin board for women.

