



Snow wars

In NSW, where you ski says a lot about you. **Rachael Oakes-Ash** sorts the Perisher posse from the Thredbo throng.

S NOW families traditionally pass on their favourite hill to the next generation, schlepping the kids to the same ski lodge or ski club their own parents hauled them to every winter. The resulting skiers and boarders then remain loyal to the mountain on which they learnt to stay upright the whole way down.

The two key players in the "ski loyalty wars" in NSW are Thredbo and Perisher Blue and like most rivalries there's something to be said for each, usually by each other.

It's a brave person who takes on the clique of Thredbo where skiers and boarders are dedicated, committed, some would even say hard-core. If you can get down the 5.9-kilometre Supertrail in one piece then you can ski anywhere in the world. Why?

Because in one run you'll have to adapt and handle a plethora of conditions from super groomed, to off-piste moguls, to powder pockets to ice and back again. Thredbo skiers believe they're the best on the planet and they may be right, just don't tell them I said that.

Tongue-in-cheek character generalisations aside, there is a tight-knit community in Thredbo based on 50 years of resort history and a pained bonding through the adversity of the 1997 landslide that killed 18 of their own. Thredbo devotees call their rival Pancake Perisher, convinced the ski area has no pitch. Perisher devotees call Thredbo-ites "stuck up" convinced they don't smile.

On a bad day when it's cold, windy and wet they're both right, on a good day they're both sooo wrong.

These taunts brush over Perisher Blue types, much to the chagrin of Thredbo-ites who can't quite understand why they haven't seen the

light and left the dark side for Thredbo pastures. Perisher Blue folk don't want to talk up their seven hills lest word gets out and they have to share it. If they were Sydney postcodes then Thredbo would be the eastern suburbs and Perisher the North Shore.

Emotional connections aside, the facts are that Thredbo has 480 hectares to Perisher's 1245 hectares of skiable terrain. Not to be outdone Thredbo's Supertrail is the longest run in Australasia and the resort boasts almost double the vertical (672 metres) of Perisher Blue (355 metres) and the most in Australia.

Perisher has 50 lifts servicing seven mountain peaks, meaning shorter queues, while Thredbo has 14 lifts. However, Thredbo skiers will tell you that you can waste a day linking lifts in Perisher while neglecting to mention you can spend 20 minutes on the Merritts lift getting to the Cruiser area on their hill.

Thredbo, (2037 metres) is beaten by Perisher (2054 metres) by a mere 17 metres when it comes to summit elevation but Perisher loses out with a village that sits at 1720 metres compared with Thredbo's 1365 metres.

Translated, it takes longer to ski down from Thredbo's summit to the village, which means

more time spent on snow. Perisher retorts that a higher village means true ski-in, ski-out accommodation, a bonus when having to trek from your lodge to the Thredbo lifts with skis, poles and paraphernalia.

A snowed-in, pedestrian-only Perisher village equals a winter wonderland but Perisher Blue has four resort areas, Perisher, Smiggins, Guthega and Blue Cow and it's not always easy to access one from the other after dark. Thredbo, on the other hand, has one main village square around which most of the apres activities can be found.

If you're a beginner, a snowboarder or travelling with a family you'll no doubt prefer Perisher Blue for its rolling hills, Tube Town snow tube park, four terrain parks and FIS-

Thredbo devotees call their rival Pancake Perisher

accredited superpipe. If you're a property mogul or a helmet-wearing speed freak who likes to be seen then head

to Thredbo where the pitch is traditionally steeper and terrain more challenging, the on and off mountain award-winning eateries finer and the real estate dearer.

But whoever said Perisher Blue doesn't present a challenge hasn't skied or boarded Kamikaze run through Yarrandoo on Blue Cow. The statistics say that Thredbo has 16 per cent beginner, 67 per cent intermediate and



17 per cent advanced and that Perisher Blue has 22 per cent beginner, 60 per cent intermediate and 18 per cent advanced. But if you're a beginner anything that's not horizontal is considered a challenge.

For many it's about the dollar - a lift pass at Thredbo will set you back \$94 for a day and at Perisher \$95. Both have night skiing and both are proud of their impressive squad of groomers: Perisher Blue has 19, but Thredbo's snow-making surpasses Perisher Blue's and is the best in the country with a quarter of its terrain supported by automated snow guns that ensure the white stuff.

Perhaps we should ask the experts? Gold medal Olympian Dale Begg-Smith calls Perisher Blue his resort, World Cup and Olympic skier Jono Brauer prefers Thredbo.

Snowboarding Olympic princess and World Cup champion Torah Bright says Perisher Blue and World Cup snowboarder Damon Hayler says Thredbo.

The good news is it's under an hour's drive between the two or you can catch the Skitube Alpine Railway from Bullocks Flat. So no matter where you stay you can check out the greener grass on the other side.

Ski communities attract like-minded individuals so whether you choose Perisher Blue for its chilled out and family feel or Thredbo for its swanky accommodation options and club-like atmosphere you will be with people who enjoy the same attractions.

When the sun is shining and the snow is on, you'll be smiling and that's all that matters.

■ Thredbo see www.thredbo.com.au, phone 1300 020 589. Perisher Blue see www.perisherblue.com.au, phone 1300 655 822.



WORLD CLASS: (from left) Perisher chairlifts; the Perisher Valley Hotel; Perisher Blue Resort; snowboarding, fireworks at Perisher. Main picture, skiing at Thredbo.

Pictures: TANYA LAKE, Travmed

