

Three More Ski Makers Add Fat to Their Diets

NEW YORK—Atomic, which started a small revolution with its ultrawide Powder Plus, will not be alone in marketing a “fat” ski in '93-'94. Three ski brands—Rossignol, RD, and Odyssey—are introducing new extra-wide skis on a limited basis this season, with full retail rollout scheduled for next fall. K2, which says it is working on a fat ski, may introduce one next season as well.

The Rossignol ski is the brainchild of Steve Dudley, Rossignol's Western VP of sales and marketing, who initially wanted it to supply the heli services (such as CMH) that have provided specially made Rossis to guests for years. Developed in Rossignol's race department, the ski is slightly narrower than the Atomic Powder Plus, with a different sidecut and flex. It will come in one length only during this test season—185cm—and the bindings will be centered on the ski, not offset to the inside as on the Atomics. Dudley says the first test results from New Zealand were encouraging. A limited number of skis will be made available to heli-skiing services this winter before a full launch for the '93-'94 season.

Over at RD, Tim Kohl says he'll have a limited number of domestically made wide skis for regular customers this season. He likens the new skis to “big-head tennis rackets and golf clubs.”

Odyssey Skis, a start-up based near Seattle, is introducing a ski the company calls a “wide short ski.” It is 163cm in length, with dimensions of 118.5mm (shovel), 99mm (waist), and 114mm (heel). (By comparison, the 180cm Atom-

ic Powder Plus is 115mm at the waist.) Called the Max F/X, the ski is intended to provide stability for older skiers and flotation for powder skiers. The company supplies stainless steel ski-brake extensions for Salomon bindings with each pair and is marketing the skis to heli services and to ski shops in the Northwest.

Perhaps the biggest unresolved issue for fat skis is what to do about brakes, which do not function due to the width of the skis. Atomic sells the Powder Plus premounted with Ess bindings with a powder leash. According to Atomic vice president and director of marketing Dave Donahue, the company is working on a number of options, including a change in the brake and/or a different type of leash. Salomon's Dave Bertoni says his company is “working on a brake with a longer arm. But it's taking longer than we expected, because there are liability issues. Will the brake with a longer arm stop the ski? We have to test that to find out.”

Another problem, says Bertoni, is that there are no norms for fat skis. “Some are 115mm wide, others are 99mm wide. How long should we make the brake arms?” Bertoni says Salomon will “definitely have a new [binding] design for wide skis by next year.”

Kirk Langford of Marker says the company is also working on a brake for ultra-wide skis. “We're communicating with the ski makers to find out what the dimensions of their wide skis are. We'll introduce it in the regular selling cycle, probably in January.” —*Bill Grout* ■