

by Charles Bevier

Citizen staff reporter .

BOTHELL — Seeking a new way to bust powder or carve through the heaviest Northwest crud this ski season?

A family here has come up with an innovative answer.

No, we're not talking about getting traditionalists to join the ever-increasing hoard of knuckle-draggers on snow boards. These new skis turning heads on the slopes this season are short, fat and fast enough for experts; and easier for novices to handle.

Named Odyssey, their slogan could be, Go wide, if you want a better glide.

The brainchild of a former construction-worker, Odyssey skis are more than an inch wider and about a foot shorter than traditional downhill skis.

"It gives you better balance, better stability, and it's more energy efficient," says inventor Paul Nelson of Bothell.

Targeted mainly at older skiers who don't want to work as hard on the slopes, Odysseys, however, do provide advantages for all levels of skiers — from the beginner to the hard-core powder hounds, says wife Coni Nelson, who handles the marketing for Odyssey.

"It's good for every level of skier, because it has the mechanical advantages in being able to turn using less effort, having a higher degree of stability and better floatation — all in one package," she said.

The Nelsons say their skis require as much as 20 percent less effort, for turns, stops and other maneuvers.

And from their headquarters in Mountlake Terrace, the Nelson family has been working since April to carve their own niche in the ski industry.

Unlike one other fat ski on the market, Atomic's Powder Plus, Odysseys are made for all kinds of snow conditions — from powder to the heavy "corn" snow of spring.

Paul says his wide design (1¼ inches wider than traditional downhill skis) and 163 centimeters in length, gives the ski the same surface area as a conventional ski.

But besides having greater maneuverability, because of its shortness and width, the height of the ski tip allows it to "ride high," or float above both heavy snow and powder, alike. "It's light, too," Paul says.

But the Nelsons maintain that you shouldn't compare their ski to conventional downhill skis. You have to try it, they say, to like it.

Their daughter Rebekah, a

sophomore at Bothell High School, has proven to be a quick convert. She uses the Odysseys exclusively now.

"People notice them a lot. They come up to you when you're skiing on them and go, 'What are they?' " she said with a laugh.

"But I like them a lot better because I don't have to work as hard. Before (using traditional skis) I had to think about each turn before I did it. Now it's more fun. I'm able to go fast and not have to plan turns."

Paul started exploring the idea of "alternative sliding devices" because he was affected by Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, a flu-like malady that can persist for years, leaving sufferers bedridden after just a little physical exertion.

A longtime skier, Paul was determined to find a way to continue to ski.

He eventually came up with the idea for Odysseys and later field tested a prototype on Mount Hood during summer months. When they were perfected, the family took their new ski design to the major manufacturers.

But the Nelsons say the major manufacturers, hurt by the recession, didn't want to invest in the idea.

"So we decided to go ahead with it ourselves because we believed in it that strongly," Coni said. They've also applied for a patent, the results of which should be completed by the end of this season.

So far, the skis have proven popular in demo shops at Crystal, Stevens, Mount Baker and other area runs.

"They are coming in and asking where are these Odysseys, where can I get them," Coni says with satisfaction.

Some may be put off by the \$455 price tag for a pair, but the Nelsons say they are comparable in price to other specialty skis, which typically run in the \$500 range. (For more information or to order call 670-6522).

For manufacturing, 22 layers of fiberglass, wood and other materials are sandwiched in a hot press in their Mountlake Terrace shop.

The whole family lends a hand in the manufacturing process, including Rebekah, who cuts fiberglass, and helps out around the shop.

The Nelsons say it's only a matter of time before their Odysseys catch on. For the aging baby-boomers out there, Odysseys may be just the ticket back to the slopes.