Practical gear gets higher tech

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This season's new or improved snow sports gear ranges from simple, practical items to traditional products with high-tech and innovative features. Here's a look at some favorites.

GPS-enabled goggles

Track your speed, altitude, and vertical gain, or check the time and temperature while you're on the slopes with a quick glance at your goggles. Zeal Optics' new Transcend goggles have a built-in data screen that displays these stats and more in an unobtrusive way. The easy-to-read screen, located in the lower right-hand corner of your field of view, can tell you all about your last run, including your maximum and average speeds, distance covered, and vertical descent in feet. You can even check your GPS coordinates, and time your runs using the stopwatch feature. The goggles have an anti-fog lens, and come in either a polarized (SPX) or polarized and photochromic (SPPX) version (the tint of photochromic lenses auto adjust based on lighting conditions). They sell for $399 (SPX) and $499 (SPPX) at Zeal Optics (888-454-9325, www.zealoptics.com).

Cushy headgear

Salomon's new all-mountain Custom Air helmets cradle your head like contoured pillows. The men's Ranger Custom Air and women's Icon Custom Air have a glove-friendly, built-in air pump just behind the left earpiece that you press to inflate the helmet's internal bladder. Release air by pressing a button behind the right earpiece. The result: You can get a customized fit and therefore better head protection in case of a crash. The Ranger comes in Bluetooth-compatible and non-Bluetooth-compatible models. The Icon has a ponytail cutout, and faux fur on the inside of the chin strap and earpieces, but no Bluetooth option. The helmets sell for $130 (or $300 for the Ranger) at Salomon (800-654-2668, www.salomonsports.com).

A binding with give

Thousands of skiers injure their knees each year, prompting a Vermont-based company to create KneeBinding, an alpine ski binding with a lateral heel release system that helps prevent injuries. Manufactured in Stowe, it is specifically designed to work with shaped skis. "When you catch an inside edge, or your ski is pulling your foot sideways and threatening to damage your knee, the binding senses that and releases," says John Springer-Miller, company chairman. The binding comes in adult sizes only and mounts on all flat skis. Choose from four models, including a carbon fiber or woman-specific version, or two with different DIN settings (or indicator release values). They are available for $399-$459 a pair at RJ Bradley's Ski, Bike and Sports in Westford (978-692-6355, www.rjbradleys.com), or contact KneeBinding (802-760-3026, www.kneebinding.com).

Bombproof point-and-shoot

You can knock it against the chairlift, drop it in the snow, or take it backcountry skiing down to 14 degrees Fahrenheit. Pentax's new Optio W90 is shockproof, snowproof, waterproof, and coldproof. With its 12.1-megapixel sensor, it takes stunning pictures, too. The Optio has 32 shooting modes, including "smile capture," blink detection, and digital microscope modes, and a 2.7-inch LCD screen to better compose and review images. It even shoots widescreen, high-def videos. The palm-size camera has durable rubber edges for absorbing bumps, a rechargeable lithium-ion battery, and smartly designed covers protecting the battery compartment and terminal ports, so you won't accidentally open them. The Optio sells for $299 at Hunt's Photo and Video in Cambridge (617-576-0969, www.huntsphotoandvideo.com), or contact Pentax (800-877-0155, www.pentaximaging.com).

Pentax's Optio W90

Transcend goggles from Zeal Optics

Strap Pad's stomp pad

Salomon's Ranger Custom Air helmet

Ski caddies from Ski-Z

COOL STUFF
See the latest ski gear at www.boston.com/ski.

Made by New Hampshire-based Roces, the cleverly constructed boot can be adjusted to six sizes. Rotate a metal lever located near the outside heel of each boot using a small screwdriver (included) to adjust the length of the boot. Then use the boot key to change the boot's height and width settings. A bellowed liner expands or contracts as you change sizes; fine-tune the boot's instep with the two micro-adjustable buckles. The boots come in three sizes, each one of which expands to six sizes: toddler 9 to 12; toddler 13 to youth 3; and youth 4 to 7. They come in pink, red, white, and black, and sell for $99.95 at the Sports Stop in Wenham (978-468-4488, www.sportsstopwenham.com).

Ultimate ski caddy

You can shuttle your skis from car to base lodge by tucking them under your arm or slinging them over your shoulder. Or you can attach them to the Ski-Z and roll them along in front of you. This simple, easy-to-use "ski caddy" is nothing more than a plastic binding with a Velcro strap that's attached to a rollerblade-style wheel. Slip your ski tips into the binding, secure them with the strap, and wheel away. The Ski-Z is available from Ski Junk (337-406-2446, www.skijunk.com). It sells for $27.95 and comes in gray, pink, lime green, and red.

Stomp pad aimed at knees

Snowboarders, give your free leg a lift with the Strap Pad. This stomp pad has an adjustable Velcro strap that you can slip your dangling foot into while riding the lifts to help distribute the load of your board and prevent knee and ankle strain. It also gives you more control while coming off the lifts, and can be used as a grab loop when pulling tricks. It's handy, too, for carrying your board when you're not on the slopes. The stomp pad is see-through so it won't cover up your cool graphics. This year's new "universal" model works for goofy or regular riders. The pad sells for $22.50 through Strap Pad (310-571-5438, www.strappad.com).

Spring-loaded ride

The idea for Manic Snow's new suspension snowboard binding — the only one of its kind on the market — came from owner Carl Lindemann's background racing motocross bikes, landing big jumps, and navigating rutty terrain. The Massive Pop 1.0 (MP1) bindings have titanium springs sandwiched in between magnesium foot beds and base plates. The strong yet lightweight springs provide superb rebound that reduces chatter when you're riding through crud and pops you back into action when landing jumps. Adjust the rebound while you're on the slopes by tightening or loosening a series of nuts that control the spring compression. The fully adjustable MP1s can be customized to suit park, pipe, and backcountry riders weighing anywhere from 60 to 320 pounds. The magnesium plates and titanium springs are 100 percent recyclable. The California-made MP1s will sell for $299 through Manic Snow by late this month (707-319-9749, www.manicsnow.com).

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