



By Kari Bodnarchuk
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

This year’s hottest ski and snowboard gear ranges from hand-crafted products made of sustainable materials to high-tech equipment that can be folded, molded, or battery-powered. Here are a few top picks.

Goggles with gigabytes

Not many goggles come with a USB power cord and a hex wrench. Liquid Image’s new Apex HD+ goggles look like something James Bond might use on a mission: They have a small high-definition video camera that records your fun on the slopes. It captures 1080p video footage (at 30 frames per second) that you can stream live to your smartphone or tablet using the built-in Wi-Fi feature. It also takes 12-megapixel still shots. Just charge the lithium battery, hit the slopes, and start shooting with a push of the glove-friendly button on the goggle strap. Or select Continuous Photo Mode to take a hands-free shot every 2 seconds. The goggles come with amber and ionized lenses, and a 4GB micro SD card (expandable to 32GB). \$399.99. 707-284-1585, www.liquidimageco.com

A sturdy point-and-shoot

Prefer a more traditional camera? Slip the Olympus Tough TG-1 in your ski jacket and go. This durable point-and-shoot can withstand drops from 6.6 feet, temperatures to 14 degrees Fahrenheit, sweat, snow, and even an après-ski dip in the hot tub. What sets it apart from other rough-and-tumble cameras? It has a blazing-fast image processor that lets you take up to 60 shots a second, meaning you won’t miss a photo waiting for the camera to process and save an image. The 12-megapixel camera also has a 2.0 lens for low-light shooting, a built-in GPS that records the location and altitude of each shot, and Eye-Fi capability for wirelessly uploading images to your computer without Wi-Fi. Double locks on the battery and charging compartments prevent them from accidentally opening. \$399. 800-622-6372, www.getolympus.com

Boots made for walking

Toss out those four-buckle boots. Salomon’s new Quest Max 100 provide just as much power and stability with one less buckle, thanks to their TwinFrame technology. They have a stiff polyurethane material on the sole and partial upper that gives you more power and control. The all-mountain boots also have a 360-degree heat-moldable Custom Shell that conforms to feet ranging from 98mm to 104mm wide.

Go to East Coast Alpine, a Salomon dealer, on Commonwealth Avenue and they will bake your boot shells in a special oven, and then mold them to your feet for a perfect fit. Tweak the fit by adjusting the buckle above your ankle bone to three different positions to alleviate pressure (carry a hex wrench with you until it’s dialed in). The cool Ride and Hike feature provides lots of extra comfort, whether you are hiking from your car to the lodge or up to a fresh snow stash. Flip up the “backbone” switch so the boot comfortably flexes with each step. Size 24-29½. \$690. 888-207-6249, www.salomon.com

Retro with bamboo poles

Soul Poles transports us back in time with its simple yet sturdy retro bamboo poles. These hand-crafted poles, designed by World Cup and Olympic competitors Bryon Friedman and Erik Schlopy, are made from sustainable bamboo that has been harvested by a Utah family for generations. The lightweight poles weigh only 2 ounces more than my high-end carbon fiber poles and have the tensile strength of steel. The grips, baskets, and straps are made from recycled plastics, and the tips are made with recycled aluminum. Buy the natural-colored bamboo Original Soul poles for \$125, the Vibrant Soul poles with bands of orange, blue, or green for \$175, or the Ltd Edition Soul poles with colorful designs by a California artist for \$350. Available in 110cm to 135cm; customized sizes \$25 extra. 888-612-7685, www.soulpoles.com

1 if by board, 2 if by ski

Riders who resist split boards will love the MTN Approach Skis, which have adjustable free-heel bindings with rubber straps that can accommodate snowboard boots. These clever skis also have permanent climbing skins and heel elevators for steep ascents. Their top feature: Each ski folds in two places, so you can stash them in a purpose-built daypack that also swallows spare clothes, snacks, and emergency gear. Lash your snowboard to the ski pack, skin up a hill on your approach



LAUNCH PAD

Olympic champion Picabo Street, spokeswoman for Launch Pad, helps a young skier learn to turn and balance using Hookcase. Top left, Liquid Image’s new Apex HD+ goggles.



Olympus’s Tough TG-1 is water-, dust-, freeze-, and crushproof. Left, Soul Poles retro bamboo poles.



Salomon’s Quest Max 100 boot has three buckles.



The women’s-specific Quest 100 W from Salomon.



Kulkea’s Boot Trekker swallows boots and other essential gear.



Scott’s Zuri women’s jacket.



Scott’s Drexler men’s jacket.

skis, and then fold up and stash the skis for your snowboarding descent. Folded, each ski measures 21 inches long, 5 inches wide, and 2 inches thick. Unfolded, they run 138cm. Fiberglass locking hinges prevent the skis from folding up or flexing too much as you maneuver. The skis weigh eight pounds per pair, support up to 250 pounds, and fit women’s 5½ to men’s 13 feet. Skis \$750, with backpack \$795. 208-928-7628, www.mtnapproach.com

A backpack for ski gear

Kulkea’s ingenious new bag, the Ski Trekker, was created by a Westwood dad who understands the challenge of carrying mounds of gear. It can haul

one pair of adult skis, plus boots, clothes, and other equipment in an organized, civilized way. The backpack-style bag, with pockets galore, has a sleeve that extends through the main compartment and holds a pair of skis in place, a boot pocket on each side with air vents, a helmet sling, a snow cover, a microfiber-lined goggle pouch, and other handy pockets. The bag has adequate back and shoulder padding for hauling your load from car to base lodge. Kulkea’s Boot Trekker includes similar features, but has two large main compartments for storing gear. Buy the bags at the Ski Stop in Canton and Westwood, around ski areas up

north, or through www.bestskibags.com. Ski Trekker \$179, Boot Trekker \$129. 781-366-0754, www.kulkea.com

A multi-tasking ski jacket

Wrap yourself in down-like comfort while fending off wet weather with Scott’s new Drexler (men’s) and Zuri (women’s) jackets. These athletic-cut ski jackets offer hard-shell protection on one side, but when the clouds lift and the temperatures drop, you can turn the jacket inside-out and enjoy the puffy comfort of 540-fill synthetic down. Both jackets come with an adjustable helmet-compatible hood, hand-warmer pockets inside and out (and lined on the shell side), and a lower back to provide insula-



Kulkea’s Ski Trekker bag holds skis, boots, and a helmet sling, a goggle pouch, and other pockets.

tion while riding lifts. The Drexler has two vertical chest pockets, whereas the Zuri has one. Pick up these waterproof yet highly breathable jackets at Summit Ski and Sport in Framingham, or at other shops heading north. Drexler \$275; Zuri \$230. 208-622-1000, www.scott-sports.com

Simplifying learning to ski

Hookease, made by Utah-based Launch Pad, is one of slickest and simplest learning tools for helping beginners of any age learn to ski. “It shortens the time it takes to learn, and it shortens the drama,” Picabo Street, Olympic gold medalist and Hookease spokesperson, recently told me. Attach your poles (using the provided hooks) to brackets on the back of the beginner’s skis to help steer and guide the person down the slopes. With a turn of your wrist, you can roll the beginner’s skis up on their edges and teach the skier, through repetition and muscle memory, how to maneuver through turns. “I taught two of my children the hard way, and it took five or six times of going to the mountain and a lot of tears,” said Street, who taught her next child using Hookease. “With my third, it literally took 30 seconds of skiing, no joke, and he pretty much had it.” \$59.99. 888-774-1118, www.launchpadgear.com

Kari Bodnarchuk can be reached at travelwriter@karib.us.

Nostalgic skiing off the top and all sides

New England offers challenging options for backcountry fans

By Marty Basch

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Bretton Woods is going retro. In an age of high-speed lifts, meticulous grooming, and expanded snowmaking, the ski area in New Hampshire’s White Mountains is unveiling an old-school T-bar lift that provides a dose of nostalgia for parents and grandparents with the thrill-seeking spirit of younger skiers and riders.

The 2,000-foot surface lift takes riders to a wooded natural snow area on Mount Stickney with steepes, cliffs, and trees. Dubbed the Telegraph T-bar, it got its name from pieces of old telegraph cable found during installation that once linked a tower on a neighboring mountain to a hotel.

Near the summit there is a rustic, solar-powered, 600-square-foot cabin set on a ridge with inside and outdoor fireplaces, food service, and mountain views. “You really get a sense of place for the backcountry,” said Chris Ellms, director of ski operations.

Intermediate and advanced snow lovers can hit terrain that increases in difficulty on both

sides of the lift line. A groomed bail-out path allows those with second thoughts to glide elsewhere. Ski resorts aren’t all following the lead of Mad River Glen, the eclectic Vermont area known for its natural snow trails, stingy snowmaking, and wild terrain, but some are providing a taste of the sport’s hardscrabble beginnings. Pockets of glades, ungroomed runs, and off-piste skiing are opening across New England with easier access than the hiking up the mountain of the early days.

Though advanced skiers and riders relish the challenges, even newbies skiing in control can take to gentle woods runs with trees spaced not too tightly and errant branches removed. Ski schools provide lessons and guided backcountry tours such as the one at Sugarbush with ski legend John Egan.

Many areas — including Vermont’s Jay Peak, Stowe, Smugglers’ Notch, Sugarbush, and Magic Mountain — are known for their gladed and backcountry runs. Western Maine’s Sugarloaf continues to expand its off-piste terrain, adding 400 acres in Brackett Basin and the



SUGARLOAF

Sugarloaf in western Maine is among the New England ski areas known for its glades.

Eastern Territory since 2010 with 60 acres set to open, and Saddleback’s Casablanca Glades tests snow nation’s met-

tle. Granite State stalwarts like Cannon and Wildcat are revered by the hard-core crowd. As more take to the woods, a

new term has emerged: side-country. Take Sugarbush with the 2,000-plus-acre Slide Brook Wilderness between Lincoln Peak and Mount Ellen. Get there with a lift. Then go a short distance to some terrain while hiking to more challenges.

What’s the difference? “From my perspective it really comes down to access,” said Sugarbush public relations coordinator Patrick Brown. “Anything that can be skied from the top of a lift but is out-of-bounds can be described as sidecountry, but could be called backcountry. . . . To me, backcountry . . . is where the only means of getting to it is by hiking.”

Skiing off the top, back, and sides isn’t limited to downhillers. Nordic skiers do it, too. Jackson Ski Touring Foundation’s legendary lift-accessed Wildcat Valley Trail from the top of Wildcat to serene Jackson Village was cut in 1972.

For the past four years, off-piste terrain has been emerging at Trapp Family Lodge in Stowe, where skiers climb on groomed trails to plunge into virgin powder before reconnecting with groomers. Outside Burlington, the Vermont Public Land Trust signed a contract to purchase 1,161 acres used by Bolton Valley’s backcountry

trail network and is looking to raise \$1 million by March 31.

Southern New Hampshire’s Windblown XC in New Ipswich cut some 30 acres of new glades over the summer while Bretton Woods has plans in 2013-14 to add a 5-kilometer-high elevation loop off that Telegraph T-bar for its XC network.

All of these trails need one essential item — snow.

Cannon Mountain’s bally-hooed reopening of the adjacent Mittersill ski area as a lift-served backcountry area in 2010 brought legions to a hill that for years was accessed only by hiking up or over from Cannon.

To ski Mittersill is a badge of honor. Spokesman Greg Keeler says it will open this winter when there’s enough snow, but there is interest in turning a portion of it into a ski race training hill with snowmaking.

Since opening historic Mittersill, Cannon has kept track of days it is open. The first winter, it was open about 80 days.

Last year? “Last winter not so much,” said Keeler. “We got in about a week. That’s how it goes.”

Marty Basch can be reached at www.onetankaway.com.