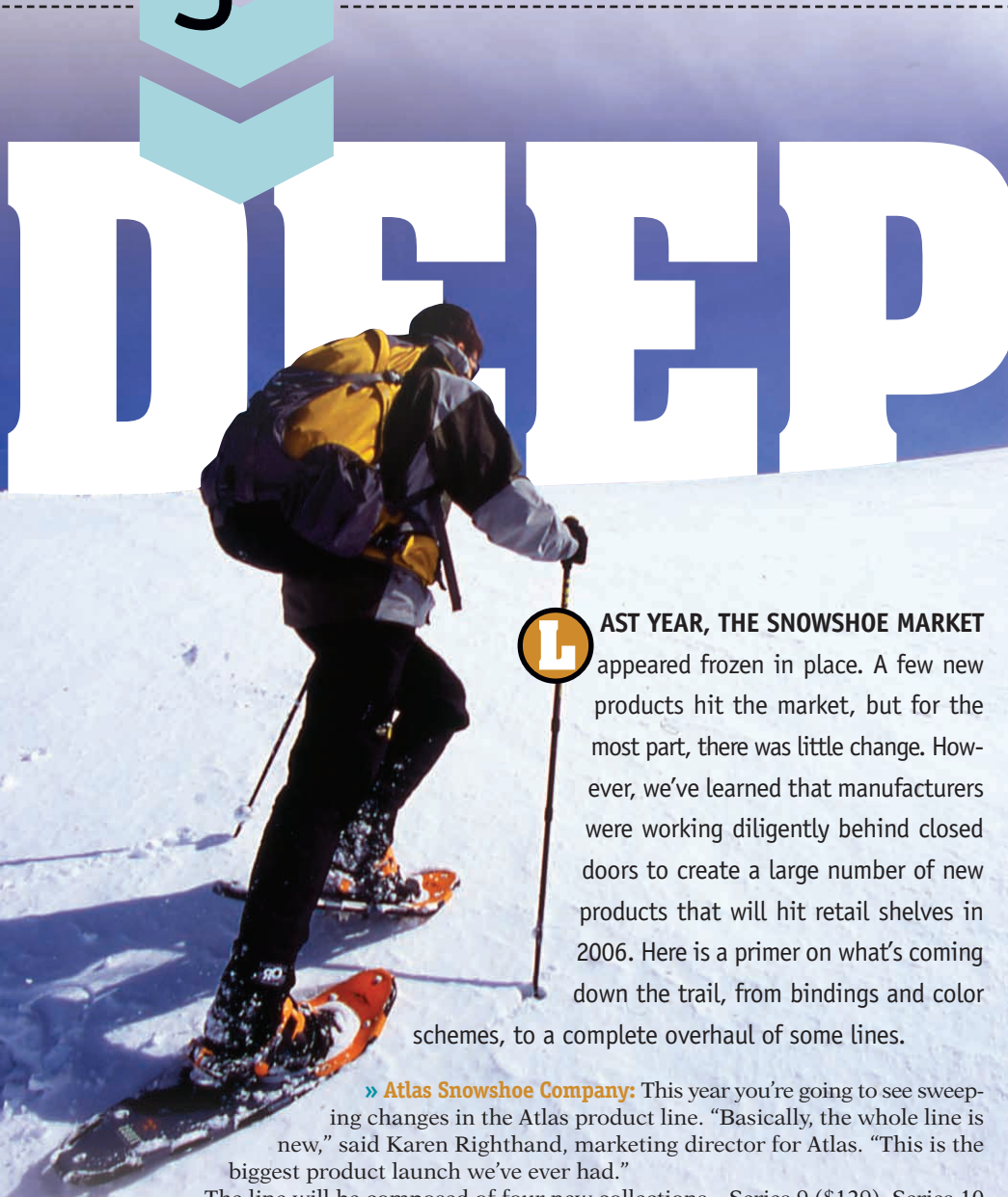




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GET READY TO SEE **STACKS** OF NEW SNOWSHOE PRODUCTS THIS YEAR.



LAST YEAR, THE SNOWSHOE MARKET

appeared frozen in place. A few new products hit the market, but for the most part, there was little change. However, we've learned that manufacturers were working diligently behind closed doors to create a large number of new products that will hit retail shelves in 2006. Here is a primer on what's coming down the trail, from bindings and color schemes, to a complete overhaul of some lines.

» **Atlas Snowshoe Company:** This year you're going to see sweeping changes in the Atlas product line. "Basically, the whole line is new," said Karen Righthand, marketing director for Atlas. "This is the biggest product launch we've ever had."

The line will be composed of four new collections—Series 9 (\$129), Series 10 (\$179), Series 12 (\$249) and Series 13 (\$269). Each shoe will be constructed with the Atlas Spring-Loaded technology, in which the shoes' spring action comes from the frame. (The Atlas website provides an excellent demonstration of the Spring-Loaded technology.)

Shoes in the Series 12 and 13 have a new tubing design in which portions of the tubing have been flattened to add strength. (Imagine trying to bend a wood 2-by-4 that is on its edge, rather than positioned flat.)

For the past two years, Atlas has been developing a completely new binding for the Series 13. Dubbed the Flex, the binding allows greater freedom of movement. "You can roll all the way through your natural stride and flex your metatarsals," said Righthand.

The newest feature is a cam device that secures the sole of footwear to snowshoes. "It doesn't rely on top pressure, and you don't have to crank the binding down," said Righthand. She notes that this product is for fit, experienced snowshoers. "You want to have the leg muscles and musculature around the ankle," she said. "But for people in shape, it will feel so much better."

Atlas is also launching the BC 24, a backcountry shoe for those whose primary

BY MARCUS WOOLF

activity is not snowshoeing, but rather snowboarding, ice climbing, air boarding, etc. It has a binding that packs flat, and the shape of the shoe is compact, with a flatter nose and tail. www.atlassnowshoe.com

» **Crescent Moon Snowshoes:** Crescent Moon was early to the party in developing a one-hand-pull binding. Jake Thamm, president of Crescent Moon, said he hopes that the popular SPL binding will evolve into a true step-in binding. "We're working on prototypes, but it doesn't look like we can introduce it at this year's winter OR," said Thamm. "But we may make an announcement this coming spring or summer."

When it comes to snowshoe design, inspiration can come from unlikely places—like the golf course. Over the past few seasons, Crescent Moon has incorporated into its shoes a DuPont product called Surlyn, which is used as a covering for golf balls. "We've been using it in the clear deck material on our shoes," said Thamm. "It's incredibly resistant to abrasion and very lightweight." He said he'll continue to bring the Surlyn material into other parts of the snowshoe line as Crescent Moon continues its never-ending quest to produce the market's most lightweight, performance-oriented shoes. www.crescentmoonsnowshoes.com

» **Mountain Safety Research:** Take a look at MSR's snowshoe line, and it's apparent that function outweighs fashion. But the company has realized that when consumers buy snowshoes they do have style on their minds. While the company isn't launching any new snowshoe models this year, it will update the colors of its Ascent shoes. Also, MSR has realized that the primary colors used on the Denali shoes are outdated, so they'll get a fashion overhaul as well. The Lightning shoes, introduced last year in metallic colors, probably won't change. www.msrcorp.com

» **Redfeather Snowshoes:** Consumers and retailers will appreciate that snowshoe manufacturers continue to simplify binding systems. For its Stride and Pace women's shoes, Redfeather is introducing a new binding that is lighter and more streamlined. As with the previous binding, it cinches down easily with one hand, but designers eliminated one strap while adding a

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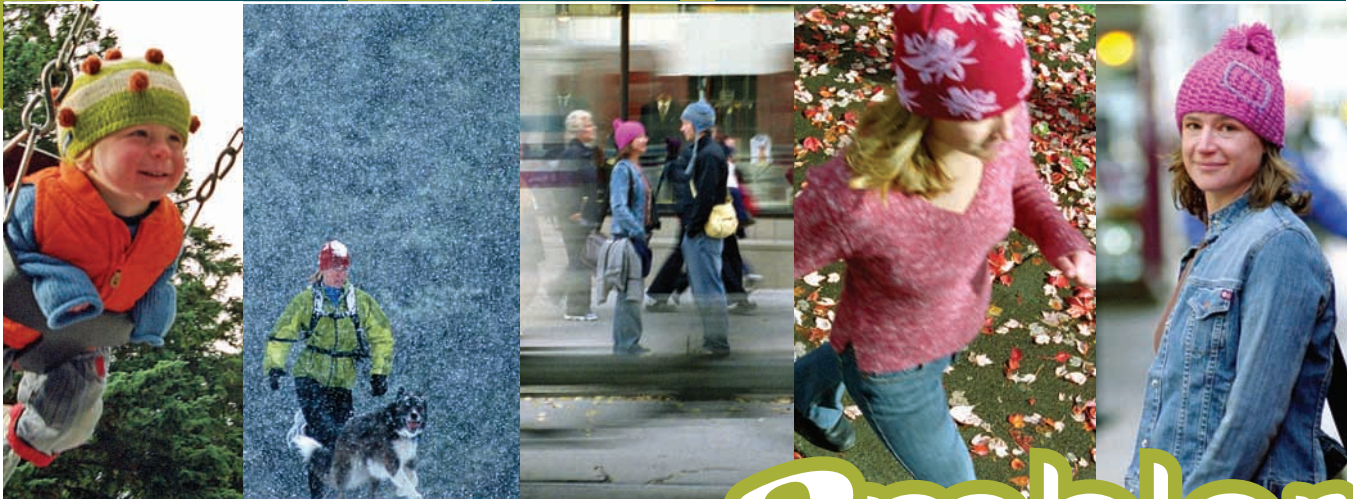


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quick-release buckle to the heel strap.

"Women are a big part of our market, so we felt it was time to give them something better," said Bonnie Glover, vice president of sales for Redfeather.

The company also noticed that its Hike Snowshoe Kit (with shoes, poles and a carry bag for \$129) proved very popular. So this year, it's launching a kit for the middle-price-point Trek and Pace shoes, which have the V-tail design. The kit, including poles that break into three sections and a tote bag, will have a retail price under \$200.

Redfeather is also introducing a shoe that it previously supplied only to schools for PE programs. "We were selling it to schools and figured why not have it available to the public," Glover said. The new Youth 2 serves kids up to 125 pounds, whereas the previous youth model was for kids up to 80 pounds. The Youth 2 also has a more sophisticated binding than the previous youth shoe. "It's durable and fits a wider range of shoe sizes," said Glover. With a V-tail design, the new shoe will retail for \$64.95. www.redfeather.com

» **Tubbs Snowshoes:** Similar to Atlas, Tubbs has made significant changes to its whole snowshoe line. "The acquisition by

K2 has afforded us amazing resources," said Kathy Murphy, general manager of Tubbs Snowshoes.

Celebrating its 100th anniversary, Tubbs has created three completely new series of shoes, the Odyssey, Ridgeline and Wilderness. Each series has three women's sizes and three men's sizes. Plus, the shoes incorporate five new men's and women's bindings, new deck materials and striking sublimated deck graphics.

The Odyssey shoe, selling for \$199 retail, occupies a new price point for Tubbs. The day hiking shoe offers some high-end features, such as new, extruded deck material that performs extremely well in cold weather, as well as a stainless-steel crampon.

For the past few seasons, Tubbs has focused on creating bindings that wrap the foot more effectively and secure it from all directions. It has taken this "three-dimensional" concept to the next level with the Ridgeline Series (\$249). The company said the Threesixty binding on the Ridgeline is the most secure system it has produced. It added that it has looked at several ways to increase comfort, such as adding padding to the new 180 binding on the Wilderness Series (\$229).

With all the product innovations, per-

haps the most striking new thing is the graphics. You'll see fiery red and orange colors on the Mountain shoe; soft blues, lavenders and earth tones on women's models; and a nice palette of rich blues and earth tones on men's models. We have a hunch these new shoes are really going to liven up a retailer's wall.

Tubbs is also providing retailers a new product for older kids. The Glacier (\$79) is larger than the Storm youth shoe and fits a wide range of footwear and shoe sizes. Plus, it has a "Quick Draw" binding that's easy to use. www.tubbs-snowshoes.com

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