

» nordic report



Say goodbye to **traditional** ski sizes,
while integration comes back in for
'05/'06 racing.

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HERE MAY NOT BE UNANIMITY AMONG THE CROSS-COUNTRY SKI SUPPLIERS WHEN IT comes to a preferred boot/binding system, ski sidecut profiles and top-sheet cosmetics, but there is when it comes to the biggest trend in the sport for the 05/06 season.

"There's no question that mid-length ski sales are growing," said Ted McGinnis of Karhu. "Particularly now that all major cross-country ski vendors are behind the concept. Mid-length skis simply work better for beginners and occasional skiers, and the price points are more palatable to these consumers."

"If you look at the sales figures for the 03/04 season," added Steve Kvinlaug of Alpina, "you see the huge dip in sales of traditional length skis. Obviously, mid-length skis are here to stay. Sure, the category needs to be tweaked a bit more as we go along, but face it, the mid-length concept has taken hold."

Call the category exercise skiing, fitness skiing, Nordic cruising, whatever—just know, it's where the action is. And it's not just for in-track touring.

"More and more suppliers are moving away from traditional length skis, no matter the use category," said Fischer's Peter Ashley.

MID-LENGTH SKIS

Mid-length skis are where the development is for 05/06. Here's a rundown of what the industry companies will be churning out for the season.

» **Karhu** will remove the Escape model from its Snowblade line (it'll become more of a wide-body touring ski) and add the Aero Skate to complement the existing Aero classic and the new Aurora wood-core models.

» **Atomic** will expand its fitness ski group with wider models for off-track use and add a second skate model designed to work in not-so-perfect track conditions, such as groomed snowmobile trails.

» **Alpina's** exercise ski line will get all new graphics and a new model called Control Edge with 65/53/62 mm sidecut in 162 cm, 172 cm, 182 cm and 192 cm lengths. These skis feature a new tip design, more of an upturned tail and a raised binding installation area.

» **Madshus** will offer the all new mid-length Nordic Exercise ski group. There are five models in the group, all with different shapes and widths and in four sizes.

» **Rossignol** is adding a new family of exercise skis called Zynex at what Robert Lazzaroni called, "that fourth price point" (i.e., around \$150). There will be a skate version in 170 cm, 180 cm and 190 cm sizes, and a classic version in 176 cm, 180 cm, 196 cm and 201 cm sizes.

» **Salomon** is adding the completely new Elite line of skis as it comes off its first year with cross-country skis. "They're Norwegian inspired," said Michael Chiasson, Salomon North America's cross-country manager. That means slightly longer and a bit wider than the current Salomon ski line. The Elite line is comprised of three models: Elite 9, 6 and 5. All three are available with either waxable or waxless bases.

Elite 9 skis have a 48/46/43/46 mm sidecut profile and come in sizes 176 to 206 cm in 5-cm increments. Elite 8s come in sizes 171 to 201 with a 52/49/46/50 sidecut profile. Ditto the Elite 5s.

In its second season, Salomon's Snowscape line gets the new Snowscape 8 model. It's basically the same ski as last year's Snowscape 9 except with a de-tuned core to bring it in at a lower price point.

» **Fischer** has told us it will not change its Nordic Cruising line.

BOOTS FOR CRUISING

To match the Snowscape and Elite skis, **Salomon** adds new outsoles to the Escape 7, 6, 5 and 4 models of boots. The soles are more rigid torsionally and easier to walk on.

For the beginning classic racer and the skier interested in high performance in-track skiing, the



new Active 7s have the same new touring outsole but with more race-inspired uppers.

SNS-Profil compatible, **Fischer** expands its Centrix boot line to incorporate new recreational models.

BACKCOUNTRY COMEBACK CONTINUES

While sales of general touring skis have lagged the past several seasons, the metal-edged backcountry touring category has started to come alive. For 05/06 that means more ski models to choose from and many more boot choices.

Atomic will expand its rugged touring line with the new Selkirk and Chugach models. The Chugach is interesting because it's a wide-body ski that will support three-pin and cable bindings as well as AT bindings. A new fabric/plastic three-pin boot has been added to the Atomic line to complement the new rugged touring skis.

Fischer will add the Snowbound ski model to its S-Bound line. "The ski has more of a traditional touring ski sidecut profile," Ashley said, "and is yet another move away from traditional length skis."

For years **Karhu** has been the one company that stood by backcountry touring, or in its parlance, "the XCD 9Cross Country Downhill category." For 05/06, the Pegasus ski becomes the XCD Pinnacle, the Pixis becomes the XCD-GT, and the Dorado becomes the XCD-Mt. There will be three new Karhu three-pin boots to complement the skis. According to Karhu's McGinnis, they'll be "a step below plastic boots but be stiffer than what we've had previously in the line with supportive ankle cuffs and straps."

Alpina has two new 1550 NNN-BC boots with lace hooks built into the heel counter for a snugger fit and a new entry-level BC boot.

Noting that the 05/06 season is "a big deal for us," **Salomon** is jumping into the backcountry touring category with three skis. Two models, X-Adventure 88 and X-Adventure 70, are metal-edged skis with waxless bases. The 88 has an 88/60/78 mm sidecut profile and comes in sizes 159 to 189 cm. The 70 has a 70/60/65 mm sidecut and comes in three sizes—169, 179 and 189 cm.

The waxless, unedged Escape 6 model has a 60/56/51/56 sidecut profile and is available in 180 to 205 cm sizes.

In BC boots, **Salomon** will offer the X-Adventure 7 to drive the new metal-edged skis. Inspired by the old SNS-BC Greenland model, the 7s feature articulating ankle cuffs and new, much stiffer outsoles.

Designed to partner with the Escape 6 skis, the new X-Adventure 4 boots also

have the new stiffer outsoles but with lower cut uppers.

RACE PACE

Toko's Ian Harvey put the high-end racing gear market into perspective when he said, "The business is so stable, so dependable." And so it's been every year for the past decade.

For ski season 05/06, a major racing development is the new NIS (Nordic Integrated System) developed jointly by **Madshus**, **Rottefella** and **Rossignol**. It involves new classic and skate boot outsoles that are wider in front and more laterally stable. The binding works much the same as current NNN race product but is clipped into a plate that's been thermo-glued into a ski. The plate can be moved a full centimeter forward or back to accommodate an individual skier's positioning preferences.

It's been almost 20 years since the last attempt at binding integration, and it bodes well that this time around two ski manufacturers and a binding manufacturer are involved, unlike the past when only **Rossignol** took up the project.

Look for **Alpina** to have new boots with the new Rottefella race outsoles. Kvinlaug described the skate sole as, "having the initial flex of a classic boot then flowing into a stiff skate flex." Boots with these soles can be tuned in the binding, "for a skier's ability level and weight." Ditto the new classic boots with the new Rottefella outsoles.

Alpina's new boots will also sport new looks more in the direction taken by **Fischer** last year with its successful Centrix line.

Fischer expands Centrix racing with the S-3000 skate and C-3000 classic models, both aimed at price-conscious consumers. A Centrix junior boot will also be added.

Salomon is very happy with last year's offerings and not making any model changes in its racing boot line the company told us—hard to argue with success.

In racing ski lines, **Rossignol** will offer a new look in its X-ium skate models. The shape will be slightly different and they will, according to **Rossignol's** Lazzaroni, "feel much faster on their initial contact phase with the snow." Called S-1 and S-2, the skis will come in small (173), medium (183), large (187) and extra-large (194) sizes.

Madshus will offer a new skate ski designed to work in softer snow conditions. According to Kvinlaug, "The sidecut is not as severe, and the skis are wider underfoot."

Atomic is also tweaking sidecut by adding 1 millimeter to its top-end classic and skate models. And it will no longer be necessary to use adapter plates to install bindings on Beta construction skis.

As integrated bindings are making a



comeback after years, prepare for another trend from yesteryear. Remember when chemical waxless bases were trendy and much maligned? Well, **Atomic** is coming to market with a new chemical base that will be used on a classic performance ski.

At **Fischer**, the new Racing Skate RCS is coming, but not in the Skate Cut shape. A new classic ski will debut and is designed exclusively for wet snow conditions. These two new skis and all **Fischer** race skis will feature new cosmetics.

Salomon enters the racing ski market with both skate and classic models. The top-end Equipe 10 Skate ski comes in a variety of flexes and features a carbon top sheet with built-in Pilot binding interface. "The interface helps for better thrust and glide," **Salomon's** Chiasson said.

The other two skate models (Equipe 9 is the same as the 10 but without the carbon top sheet, and the 7 is for beginning racers) feature the new Zeolit base technology. "It's a more consistent base," Chiasson noted. "The base material repels water better, offers better wax retention, and stays tuned longer."

For classic skiers, there's the new Equipe 10 Classic, which has all the same features as the Equipe 10 Skate model. The Equipe 9 Classic is made without a top sheet a la the Equipe 10 Classic.

POLING ONWARD

While **Swix** and **Toko** stand pat with their hands, both pole lines will have new cosmetics.

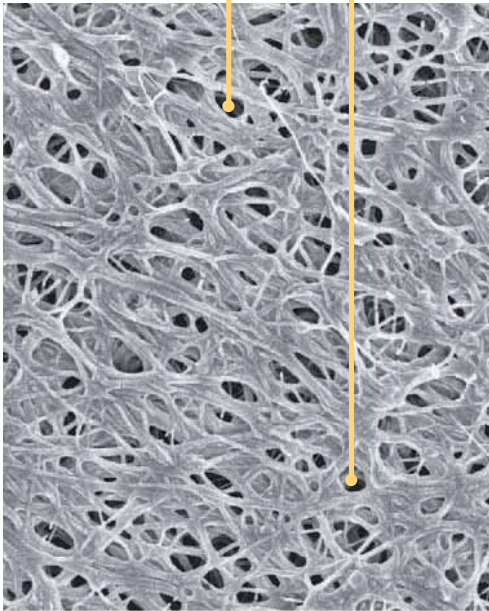
At **Leki**, Greg Wozer revealed that the company's Trigger system (which quickly releases the strap from the pole) is gaining traction with XC pole consumers, but not so much because of skiing. "Interestingly, a lot of the acceptance of Trigger is being driven by Nordic walking, which is an all-Trigger line," Wozer said.

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One noticeable change at Leki is the use of foam in all high-end pole grips. "Overall pole weight is reduced," Wozer said, "without changing swing-weight."

WAX ON, WAX OFF

Toko has new classic ski-only glide waxes. They're liquid fluorocarbon waxes, and Toko's Ian Harvey said these are "the future for most classic skiers."

At **Swix**, there's a new Cera-F FC-10 liquid glide wax designed for warm-weather conditions between plus 2 and plus 20 Celsius. For classic skiers, the new Swix VR-65 kick wax has elements of yellow, red and silver waxes for new fallen snow in the plus 3 to zero Celsius range.

Also new at Swix is a wax it calls Quick Kick. It's designed to be put on waxless patterns to give them extra grip when needed.

LOOKING GOOD

Apparel hasn't been totally neglected. In 2004, the **Swix** corporate mandate was to add apparel lines to its stable. Now the results of these acquisitions are showing up in a much broader Swix apparel line.

"We're starting to become more of an outdoor and active sports supplier as well as a Nordic apparel supplier," Swix's Steve Poulin said.

That means for 05/06, Swix will offer five different lines of synthetic underwear. Some of the underwear additions come from the company's acquisition of **Bavac**. There will also be an array of new Swix-branded soft shells and socks. In addition, the recently acquired **Vegaard Ulvang** line will keep its name and offer retailers wool underwear, socks and hats.

At **Craft**, there's the entirely new line of Nordic Cruising outerwear. "The entire line is targeted at the mid-level user with target price points around \$100," Huub Valkenburg said.

BRINGING US BACK TO EARTH

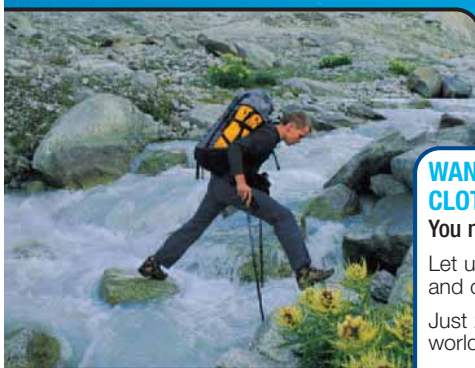
As always, when writing about new apparel, new gear, trends and futures, there's the tendency to wax enthusiastic. Then someone like Toko's Harvey brings us back to reality. "By far the No. 1 indicator of the health of the cross-country business is not the sport's image or its new gear. No, it's about if snow falls in the major metropolitan areas of the snowbelt states. If snow falls, recreational ski gear and apparel sales go up and business is good."

So, while we appreciate all the new gear and goodies, it certainly won't hurt to just pray for new snow. And lots of it, please. ❄️

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