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Off-Piste

The Backcountry Adventure Journal
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2015 Ski Review, Historic Patrol Race, Gettin' Schooled & more

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As a ski shopper, you are encumbered with the choice of which ski to buy, and despite the variety of skis available - in fact, because of all the options - spending your hard-earned cash on new skis is harder than ever.

Gone are the days of black or white, Rossi or K2, Tua or Karhu. Modern consumer culture is overrun with choice and thanks to the Internet, you are more empowered than ever with "expert" opinions and displays of technology, construction and specs. However, rather than empower, the information overload often clouds the process. What used to be a simple choice of powder ski versus mountaineering stick has become a mind-bending mission to find the ski that caters to your exact needs. Not only are there a dozen different brands of skis but, within that dozen, there are so many factors to consider - rocker, tip shape, width, camber (or lack of), carbon, wood, sidewall, cap, boutique or blue chip - the choices within the choices are endless.

It's no longer about finding the perfect ski; it's about building the perfect quiver of skis. But we can't all afford to have a garage full of choices. The good news is that there really aren't any bad skis these days. That said, we still have our favorites. And we start this year's ski review with seven select skis (ordered by width underfoot), the **Off-Piste Mag Editors' Choice Skis**.

K2 Coomback 114 - Dim's: 140/114/118; Size: 170, 177, 184cm; Radius 23m; Weight: 3.6kg / 7lb 14oz; \$750. K2 tweaks the iconic Coomback's size and shape even more to deliver the Coomback 114. The added width, tail rocker and new tail taper yield an increased responsiveness. Though still not what we'd call drift-y or loose, the Coomback 114 was hailed by all as stable and easy to ski. The big platform charges through mixed conditions just like its namesake. The new tail shape quickens the ski's response when driven with a little gusto and bumps the Coomback's overall liveliness up a couple of notches. It's got the damp K2 character and makes for a nice crossover resort/backcountry board.

Prior Husume XTC - Dim's: 137/109/124; Size: 175, 181, 188, 193cm; Radius: 21m; Weight: 3.79kg / 8lb 6oz; \$1099. On the surface, the Husume is a responsive powder-minded ski that is right at home making medium and big radius turns in untracked snow that can hold its own at the resort, too. Dig a little deeper and you'll find a ski that can be driven hard in any snow condition. Every time you push, this ski responds. It's not quite as playful as a ski with more tail rocker/taper, but it has enough to provide a modern, responsive ride through all conditions. It skis well with modest touring boots, yet responds well to the added power of a more alpine style boot, too. You can find a lighter carbon lay-up, but you'll be hard pressed to find a more versatile ski with an equally fun and even-tempered personality.

Black Diamond Carbon Convert - Dim's: 133/105/117; Size: 164, 172, 180, 188cm; Radius: 23m; Rocker: 370/280mm; Weight: 2.9kg / 6lb 8oz; \$900. Carbon construction gives the Carbon Convert an extra dose of responsiveness and performance above the regular Convert. Described as perky and agile in test notes, it offers a versatile blend of generous tip rocker and modest tail rise for quick turning, surfy fun. There is a bias for medium and shorter radius turns, making it at home in the trees and tighter terrain. Its sub-seven-pound weight yields a remarkably lightweight feel underfoot, but also acts to govern its top speed. No need to overpower these boards, they respond to subtle smooth input. The Carbon Convert's forte is all-day touring in powder snow. It's a versatile choice as a dedicated backcountry board, and its 105mm waist is well set to handle a wide range of backcountry snow conditions. Consider stepping up a few cm's in length as the Convert's agile personality let's you ski it a bit longer.

La Sportiva Vapor Nano - Dim's: 130/103/120; Size: 164, 172, 180, 188cm; Radius: 20.7m; Rocker: 392/375mm; Weight: 2.4kg / 5lb 5oz; \$1200. La Sportiva sets a new bar for lightweight performance with the Vapor Nano. Truly feather light describes its feel in hand or underfoot. On snow, the ski exceeded performance expectations. Über-light skis have their performance drawbacks - namely nervous tips, but the Vapor Nano rises to a new level of stability and power for its weight class. Construction is described as carbon nano tube with a Kevlar composite core. Sounds space age for sure, and it's quite literally the lightest ski in its class. The Vapor Nano handles soft and carvable snow with ease, responds well to today's lighter touring boots and delivered big smiles for testers. What are you waiting for, long tours and speedy ascents beckon.

Voile V6 - Dim's: 124/100/109; Radius: 19m; Weight: 3.35kg / 7lb 6oz; \$650. The V6 defines all-conditions versatility and modern playful performance. Voile has found the magic balance between rocker, camber and taper. Its combination of easy initiation, smearability and carving ability earns it a solid quiver-of-one status. Testers described it as a "more playful V8" and a "utilitarian tool for backcountry adventure." From hut trips to dawn patrols and spring volcano slaying, the V6 handles speed, mixed conditions and responds well to input from modestly beefy boots. Top it all off with a respectable weight in the seven pound range, down to earth pricing, made in USA credentials and Voile has set the bar for the daily driver.

DPS Cassiar 95 - Dim's: 129/95/116; Size: 178, 185cm; Radius: 18-21m; Rocker: 278/222mm; Weight: 3.52kg / 7lb 12oz; \$1299. DPS builds on their existing Cassiar line this season with the addition of a new 95mm waist model. In general, the Cassiar line offers a more traditional shape than the Wailer series, providing more carve and less surf. The 95 is the widest in the group and features Pure3 Carbon construction with light rocker tip and tail. It's a lively turner well suited to ski mountaineering and spring touring where stable, confident carving is the order of the day. Though biased to medium and short radius turns, the Cassiar 95 rips out big high-speed arcs with ease, too. There's some beef to the construction (it's heavier than the Wailer series) and though still respectably light, it yields a solid feel underfoot for taking on mixed conditions and firm technical terrain. In other words, it walks the fine line between downhill power and uphill ease. The Cassiar 95 would round out ones quiver nicely or make a nice all-mountain board for those who's home snow demands more cave than float.

Vökl BMT 94 - Dim's: 122/94/112; Size: 166, 176, 186cm; Radius: 23.4m; Weight: 3.14kg / 6lb 14oz; \$1275. V-Werks technology proves to be every bit as dynamic on the BMT 94 as it is on the bigger Katana. In fact, the 94mm waist ski gleaned high praise in testing for its responsive yet ever so capable personality. It's one of those skis that seems to perform larger and stouter than its dimensions and weight would have you believe possible. The BMT 94 holds its own when the snow gets funky, and it's pure point and shoot in good conditions with this lightweight but big-mountain minded ski. It's sub-seven pound weight should turn the heads of any light-is-right skier who thinks they need more power from their ski.

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2015 Ski Review



110mm + Waist



Black Diamond Carbon Megawatt – Dim's: 145/120/127; Size: 178, 188cm; Radius: 27m; Rocker: 426/213mm; Weight: 3.2kg / 7lb 1oz; \$1,000. Black Diamond's new carbon construction and ABS sidewalls deliver a Carbon Megawatt with a brand new personality that pleased the test crew with its big radius, giv'r personality and a responsiveness that its predecessor did not offer. Healthy tip rocker and modest tail rise deliver easy initiation and easy smearing at all speeds, without full clown shoe style. The remarkably lightweight and surfy ride is balanced by a confident, stable platform for serious powder consumption. There's a major bias for speed and it's a quiver ski for sure, consuming large swaths of open terrain in a blink and a balanced platform to stick your landings. Thanks to its modest weight and easy initiation, it's easily manageable with a four-buckle or equivalent touring-biased boot.



G3 Empire Carbon 115 – Dim's: 145/115/126; Size: 175, 180, 185, 190cm; Rocker: full; Weight: 3.3 kg / 7 lb 4 oz; \$910. Keeping in line with the carbon theme at G3, the new Empire Carbon 115 and Empress Carbon 115 Carbon skis take the existing Empire/Empress platform to new heights of lightweight responsiveness. The Carbon Empire maintains the big radius, loose ride of its predecessor and adds a new light-and-lively feel thanks to its reduced swing weight. The 115 handles pow like it should and did remarkably well in mixed resort snow, too. Despite being wider and more heavily rockered than the Synapse series, the Empire offers more power to handle mixed conditions and more tail engagement – the titanal layer is part of this. It also likes a more aggressive driver and more boot.



DPS Wailer 112RP2 Pure3 – Dim's: 141/112/128; Size: 168, 178, 184, 190cm; Radius: 15-18m; Rocker: 450/400mm; Weight: 3.4kg / 7lb 8oz; \$1299. The DPS Wailer 112 has a dedicated following and is held up as a performance standard to which many skis are compared for good reason. It's an incredibly versatile board with a serious funhog sensibility with a good weight profile. The latest edition, the RP2, offers subtle changes to the rocker and tip rise - both have been decreased by small increments - and it continues to live up to its reputation. To say we discerned a noticeable difference in the new design is a stretch, but the Wailer 112RP2 continues to get universal praise. Big radius, short radius, fast or controlled, the 112 is forgiving, floats, turns and rides through all but the firmest conditions with confidence. It's loose and surfy when you want it to be and delivers a solid carve when called to action. There are few skis that are as fun as the 112. Don't be afraid to run 'em a few cm's longer than you might first think, and they work well with today's lightweight three- and four-buckle style touring boots.



DPS Yvette RP2 Pure 3 (w's) – Dim's: 141/112/128; Size: 168, 178cm; Radius: 15-18m; Rocker: 480/400mm; Weight: 3.34kg / 7lb 5oz; \$1299. Though its solid pink top sheet color may conjure images of fragile snow bunnies, the Yvette is serious when it comes to ski performance. Its shape and design come directly from the Wailer 112RP2, and the Yvette offers the same versatile blend of surfy powder performance and remarkably capable carving. Don't let the rockered tips and healthy dimensions intimidate you or the pink color fool you, the Yvette is a fun, playful turner that's ready to charge your favorite stash.

Your Backcountry Quiver Guide



Voile V8 – Dim's: 141/112/123 (176); Size: 165, 176, 186, 193cm; Radius: 17m; Weight: 3.57kg / 7lb 14oz; \$650. The V6 may have been the talk of the test from Voile, but the V8, a top pick last year, still holds its own in the 110mm plus underfoot category. The V8 is a smooth operator with generous tip and tail rocker, camber underfoot and Voile's tapered tip and tail design. It's loose and drifts when you want it to be and holds a carve when driven. It's a ski with the admirable ability to roll with big radius arcs as well as it punches out short playful turns, and it just loves to ski deep snow. For some, its width puts it in the quiver category, while others seek the stability of the wide platform for everyday use.



Voilkl V-Werks Katana – Dim's: 143/112/132; Size: 177, 184, 191cm; Radius: 24m; Weight: 3.5kg / 8lb 4oz (184cm); \$1099. The Katana launched the V-Werks construction last season and continues to impress with its striking design profile and responsive ride. The Katana encourages aggressive skiing and high-speed vertical consumption in just about every snow condition we could find during testing. If there's a flaw in its design, it's that it is happiest going full-tilt – a characteristic that is sure to please many, but it's not for the rank beginner.



Dynafit Huascarán – Dim's (mm): 134/112/123; Size: 167, 177, 186, 196cm; Radius: 35/20/20m; Weight: 3.5kg / 7lb 12oz; \$900. The Huascarán returns unchanged this season and tops the Dynafit line for width. The

Huascarán's modest rocker profile is more nimble than it looks and the ski offers a great balance of weight versus power for ski touring. Its personality is offers less drift and more tail than more rockered or tapered designs but, overall, offers an easy balance of nimble handling and predictable finish. It pairs well with modest or better touring boots.

101-109mm Waist



Voilkl BMT 109 – Dim's: 134/109/119; Size: 166, 176, 186cm; Radius: 26.5m; Weight: 3.48kg / 7lb 11oz; \$1275. Taking their V-Werks carbon construction to a new touring line, Voilkl shows they are serious about the freeride touring category. The new BMT (Big Mountain Touring) 109 is a dedicated touring ski that is prepared to charge. It wowed testers with its looks and its performance. Big radius arcs are its bread and butter, but short playful turns are well within its bag of tricks. The construction, featuring a layered wood core and carbon fiber, is unique in its design. The ski's thin profile may look unusual, but it performs great. We found it to be damp, powerful and playful while maintaining a strong degree of Voilkl's trademark edge control. You get all of this in a mid-seven pound package, impressive. The BMT 109 may be light, but it's not afraid to charge. The only tester complaint was the price tag.



G3 Synapse Carbon 109 – Dim's: 137/109/125; Size: 170, 175, 180, 185, 190cm; Weight: 2.9kg / 6lb 8oz; \$900. Utilizing G3's new carbon construction matched with a lightweight paulownia and birch wood core, the Synapse Carbon 109 hits a sweet spot for deep snow turning. Its responsive ride comes to life as the snow deepens and its featherweight construction is

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lightweight boot compatible. The 109 likes a light touch and, though it handles the occasional carvable zone, it's happiest in the pow at modest speeds. Like other skis with flat camber, it skis short; so don't hesitate to go 5-10cm longer than a more traditional design.



Scott Punisher – Dim's: 142/108/130; Size: 173,183, 189cm 4.3kg / 9lb 8oz; \$700. Despite the name, the Scott Punisher is all about fun. Healthy rocker, modest camber, sidewall construction and traditional tip/tail shape make for a versatile blend of easy initiation, reliable edging and responsive downhill energy. Though less drifty than a ski with more tapered tails, the Punisher still responds nicely to your every move. There's no hiding it's heavier construction but, as a result, it delivers a smooth, controlled ride in all conditions. You'll want a medium to bigger boot for these guys to harness their full potential.



Kastle TX107 - Dim's: 135/107/124; Sizes: 177, 187cm; Radius: 21m; Rocker: 200mm; Weight: 3.2kg / 7lb 8oz; \$800. A couple seasons back, we picked the TX97 as a great Haute Route ski because it offered a confident blend of edge hold and all-condition tourability. The wider TX107 (Tour Cross) offers the same blend of confidence and edge hold found in the 97 with a bit more tip rise and real estate underfoot. Overall, the feel is still relatively traditional and full-length in its ride. The Tour Cross construction uses a lightweight, wood core and metal-free laminate that keeps it damp and weighing less than eight pounds a pair. Though not as playful and powder-centric as some skis, the TX107 is a confident, all conditions ski that responds well to a strong driver.



K2 Coomback 104 - Dim's: 140/114/118; Size: 170, 177, 184cm; Radius 23m; Weight: 3.3kg / 7lb 4oz; \$700. The latest La Grave edition Coomback 104 adds light tip/tail taper plus slight tail rocker to the venerable Coomback. The result is an overall more responsive ski without moving to the full drift feel of a more heavily rockered ski. If there's one word to summarize the Coomback 104 test notes, it's versatile. There's enough beef to handle the gamut of snow quality, and it's light enough for full-day touring. It's more traditional in ride character than many of its competitors, but that might just be what keeps it so versatile. What it lacks in new school sex appeal, it makes up for with predictable turnability.



Kastle FX104 - Dim's: 133/104/123; Size: 174, 184cm; Radius: 23m; Rocker: 340mm tip; Weight: 4.3kg / 9lb 8oz; \$1200. Kastle's FX skis are defined as freeride cross. The construction differs from TX (Tour Cross) with the addition of titanal (metal) in the laminate. The result is a heavier ski, but damper and more unwavering in its fall line feel. The FX104 likes to go fast and likes powerful boots to give it direction. It remains stable and smooth with a reasonably big radius bias in all conditions. Given its affinity for speed, testers found it best suited to confident skiers who are ready to charge.

Anthony Lakes
SAME AS IT EVER WAS



G3 Synapse Carbon 101 – Sizes: 165, 170, 175, 180, 185cm; Dim's: 130/101/118; Weight: 2.6kg / 5lb 10oz; \$870: G3 steps into the carbon ski construction ring with both feet. Their new carbon layup boards are light and lively, the Synapse Carbon 101 especially so. This feather-light powder board rises out of soft snow and transitions between turns with little effort. It's got a short to medium turn radius bias that's well suited to storm-day tree skiing. Given its ultralight personality and only slight camber underfoot, it favors powder bliss over carvable conditions. It's a dedicated backcountry board that mates well with the growing field of lightweight touring boots. Healthy rocker and minimal camber means you should go longer when choosing a length.

90-100mm Waist



DPS Wailer 99 Pure 3 - Dim's: 125/99/111; Size: 168, 176, 184, 192cm; Radius: 16-19m; Rocker: 460/368mm; Weight: 3.2kg / 7lb; \$1299. Building on the popular tip and rocker design found on the award winning Wailer 112, the Wailer 99 is, as DPS calls it, a daily driver. It's a ski that bridges pure storm skiing with everything else that Mother Nature delivers. What you lose in funhog floatation you gain in edge response, a nice compromise in dream versus reality. You get a fun, surfy ride that still finds an edge with ease. Though mostly described as new school, rockered fun, the 99 holds its own in a variety of snow conditions and offers enough tail to keep it engaged. The Wailer 99 only requires a light touch to perform, yet it responds nicely when driven hard, too.



K2 Talkback 96 (W's)– Dim's: 128/96/118; Size: 163, 170cm; Radius: 17m; Rocker: 30% rocker / 70% camber; Weight: 2.72kg / 6lb; \$700. Like its sibling the Wayback, K2 tweaks the women's specific Talkback shape this season, giving it 96mm underfoot and a tapered and slightly rockered tail. The Talkback still has the forgiving initiation and damp ride of its predecessor, but it's got a new springy step. The Talkback 96 is utilitarian ski that can do it all. It's not as light as some of the higher-dollar carbon boards, but its ride is more damp. You'll feel as confident in shin deep pow as on spring ski mountaineering pursuits.



K2 Wayback 96 - Dim's: 128/96/118; Size: 160, 167, 174, 181cm; Radius: 17m; Rocker: 30% rocker / 70% camber; Weight: 3.1kg / 6lb 11oz; \$700. K2 tweaks the Wayback's shape this season, giving it 96mm underfoot and new light tail taper and rocker. The result is a versatile ski that provides classic, damp K2 performance with a noticeable performance upgrade from last year's model. It's not superlight, but it's light enough to feel good underfoot when paired with a tech binding. It's not super wide, yet it's wide enough to bridge a variety of snow conditions. The Wayback 96 is the new do-it-all tool from K2.

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Black Diamond Carbon Aspect - Dim's: 127/90/113; Sizes: 166, 176, 186cm; Radius: 19m; Rocker: 260mm/none; Weight: 2.6kg / 5lb 12oz; \$850. The all-new Carbon Aspect blends traditional tails and camber with conservative tip rise and Black Diamond's new pre-preg carbon construction. The result is a solid carve and predictable turn finish with easy initiation in varied snow conditions. The Aspect skis true to length and makes a fine companion to technical ski pursuits and firmer snow conditions. What you give up in deep snow fun you make up for with firm snow carvability. It's not one to hang onto turns too long, and testers found it most at home making medium and short radius arcs in carvable snow. It's a quiver board for spring alpine tours or a do it all tool for those in the land of firm snow and well suited to modern, light AT boots.



Dynafit Denali - Dim's: 131/98/116 (176) +1mm for bigger lengths; Sizes: 167, 176, 184, 193cm; Rocker: 430/200mm; Weight: 2.58kg / 5lb 7oz; \$900. The new Denali picks up where the original Manaslu left off. It's actually closer dimensionally to the old Manaslu than the new 2.0 design. Dimensional similarity aside, the Denali is its own ski. Modest tip rocker, traditional camber and slight tail rise deliver stable and predictable handling in varied backcountry snow. As you would expect, the ski responds well to light, modern AT boots like the TLT5 or 6. It settles into a happy medium radius bias but can hang on or release turns as needed. Though lightweight, it has a damp feel akin to the old Manaslu that lends it stability in firm snows.



Dynafit Manaslu 2.0 - Dim's: 124/90/108; Size: 158, 166, 174, 182, 191cm; Radius: 21m; Rocker 390/160mm; Weight: 2.8kg / 6lb 3oz; \$700. The oft-praised Manaslu gets a full update for 2015, hence the 2.0 designation. Dimensionally narrower than its predecessor, the 2.0 is a bit heavier in construction and stiffer in overall feel. On snow, the new construction lends the ski more power in marginal conditions, but takes from the original's easy-going soft snow personality. Heavier, aggressive skiers will appreciate the stiffer tails and added beef, while lighter skiers and original version devotees will find a ski that requires more input to find a sweet spot. Really, the new Manaslu is more ski mountaineer and less easy-going powder ski than the original model. It fits in the quiver for peak ascents and technical adventures.



Dynafit Manaslu 2.0 (W's) – Dim's: 124/90/108; Size: 158, 166, 174cm; Radius: 21m; Rocker 390/160mm; Weight: 2.76kg / 6lb; \$700. Fully updated for 2015, the women's Manaslu shares the same evolution toward technical mountaineering ski as found in the men's model. It's heavier than its predecessor but it responds readily to the input of lighter weight skiers. Testers found it moves easily into a medium radius rhythm that is at home on spring corn. You'll find full edge engagement and a more traditional turn finish than many skis. Like the men's model, it's a great Haute Route board and peak bagger for full-day adventure.

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Voile Charger BC – Dim's: 137/112/126; Sizes: 171, 181, 191cm; Radius: 21m; Weight: 3.34kg, 7lb 6oz; \$625. The basis for the Charger is one heck of a fun and capable ski – we've written it up in past reviews. Add a no-wax fish-scale base for versatility and you get a ski that can handle a flat approach, efficiently, and still charge on the descent. In cold powder snow, the base is virtually unnoticeable on the descent, but don't discount the fish-scales ability to let you wander and scope. Full backcountry descent fun with the added twist of backcountry utility, what's not to like.



Altai Kōm – Dim's: 124/98/119; Sizes: 150, 162, 174cm; Weight: 2.83kg / 6lb 4oz; \$400. The Kōm is a new do-it-all light-duty backcountry ski. Named after a small settlement in the Altai Mountains of northwestern China, the Kōm is a lightweight, no-wax ski that bridges the nordic and backcountry worlds. Dimensionally it appears to be solidly in the downhill, touring-for-turns category, but its lightweight construction and fish scale base give it many of the advantages of a more traditional nordic ski. Think of blended downhill and nordic DNA. On snow, the Kōm is smooth and predictable, encouraging round tele turns. We tested it with a three-pin binding and two-buckle plastic boot – an ideal combination. It's a great choice for rolling terrain and classic telemark tours.



Voile Vector BC – Dim's: 118-94-107; Sizes: 160,170,180cm; Radius: 21.7m; Weight: 2.76kg, 6lb 2oz; \$575. Voile blends traditional no-wax backcountry utility and modern rocker shape in the Vector BC. This agile ski can do it all – day tour to hut trips. The beauty of the Vector is how well the ski responds to light boots. No need for the alpine-crossover gear here, two and three buckle tele and AT gear is the perfect match for this nordic downhill ski. The fish-scale base adds flexibility to your day without compromising your turns.



Madshus Annum – Dim's: 109/78/95; Sizes: 165,175,185,195cm; Weight: 2.6kg / 5lb 13oz; \$370. We keep the Madshus Annum in the quiver because it embodies the classic backcountry touring vibe and not every day is about big mountains and big lines for us mere mortals. This quality single camber, kick-and-glide ski is not as descent minded as some of the wider boards in the xc category, but the Annum makes for efficient cruising and exploring in your local hills. Put those three-pin boots to use!

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