



Small & Independent Ski Brands: A Few Quick Impressions For 2016-2017

NESR / EWSRA

Stratton Demo Days – February 2016

by ExoticSkis.com

Each February in Vermont (USA), the New England Winter Sports Representatives (NEWSR) (<http://www.nesrr.org>) and Eastern Winter Sports Representatives (EWSRA) (<http://www.ewsra.org/>) sponsors the [Stratton](#) Dealer On-Snow Demo Days. This is typically the first opportunity for the major ski manufacturers to provide on-snow demos of the upcoming season's new skis to the retailers. Shop owners and hardgoods buyers from around the country descend upon Stratton, Vermont for three days to touch, smell, taste and test new skis in order to decide which brands and models to buy for the next season. NEWSR provides a unique

opportunity for sales reps, company executives and support staff to mix, mingle and even try each others products (*under-the-radar...of course...*) over several days. The best part is talking about next year's equipment and marketing approaches with sales reps, retailers and manufacturers' VIPs and marketing staff over a few beers each night....Boots and accessories are also part of the action at the Stratton Demo Days, but ExoticSkis.com will just focus on the smaller ski brands and innovative ski designs found at the event..

In the past, the ski industry was dominated by essentially 10 or 12 major brands such as Atomic, Rossignol, Dynastar, Elan, Fischer, K2, Elan, Salomon, Volkl, Head, Nordica and others. Annual industry buying cycles involved retailers visiting Las Vegas or ISPO to attend expositions where the manufacturers show off next year's models and pricing/payment term structures to hopeful retailers who begin negotiations about buying products for the next ski season. The first chance for these hopeful retailers to actually get on snow to test these skis in the U.S.A. is typically the NESR/EWSRA event at Stratton in Vermont OR SIA on-snow demo days at Copper Mountain in Colorado in February.



Helpful, happy event registration staff!

The first production runs of new skis are boxed up from the factories and shipped to the distributors and reps who mount and tune the skis (sometimes late at night before the event...the timing can be that critically close...FedEx and UPS trucks are full of skis heading for Vermont a day or two before the event) for Stratton, where they typically touch snow for the first time. Even for those who have been in the business for decades, the chance to get the first on-snow rides on these crisp, brand-new, fresh-out-of-the-wrapper skis for next year is like a trip to Disneyland, with old timers and newbies alike showing a near-giddy anticipation at getting their hands on the new models. The event is

for industry-members only, so the public is not allowed to participate, although the civilians looking-on at the circus-like atmosphere gawk in awe at the sheer number of tents and demo

setups occupying the entire acreage of the base area of the resort. Hundreds of manufacturer's reps and hundreds of brands fill the resort for the event.

SMALLER BRANDS:

2016 saw several smaller companies appearing at the NEWSR Demo Days along with the big-10 brands like Rossignol, Volkl, Dynastar, Atomic, Head, Elan, Fischer, K2, Blizzard, Nordica..etc.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sporten• Lib-Tech• Liberty• Scott | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Icelantic• DPS• Rocky Mountain Underground (RMU)• RAMP (rest in peace) |
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We took some quick test runs on a few models of several of the smaller brands we found interesting or significantly updated and report our observations here. We did not get out on everything we wanted...which is always sad.. The event goes on for three days. Day 1 was sunny, temps in the upper 20s, Day 2 was canceled due to driving rain and high winds. We did not ski on Day 3.

CONDITIONS:



Tuesday morning

Tuesday was in the upper 20s (F), sunny, bluebird day with boilerplate eastern hardpack covered in a loose granular, often cobbly, marbly surface. Evaluation of skis on these surfaces was tricky since the lack of consistent contact with the hardpack made most skis feel loose and unattached unless you could find cookie-free surface patches to grip onto.

Wednesday was a wash-out with heavy rain coupled with high winds...event suspended for the day.



Wednesday morning puddles

SKIS TESTED:

- RMU Super CRM 175cm
- RMU P802 178cm
- DPS Cassiar Foundation 82 178cm
- DPS Cassiar Foundation 98 178cm
- DPS Wailer Foundation 99 184cm
- Lib-Tech Wreckreate 100 178cm
- Lib-Tech Wreckreate 90 179cm
- Sporten Iridium 5 168cm
- Sporten Iridium 6 168cm
- Liberty Variant 87 172cm



2016-17 RMU SCRM (Super CRM)

(134-100-124) r=17m@175cm \$799 usd retail

Poplar/Yellow Aspen core with 2 Titanal sheets above the core, VDS rubber dampening strips, fiberglass, 1.54mm Isoport bases. Cambered with mild early rise tip and tail. This ski is billed as a charger all over the mountain for crud busting and high-pressure stability. At slow speeds, it felt relatively loose and friendly, not burly, but required some pressure to engage and really craved being flexed and edged into the surface to come alive. Performance was unexciting but stable, strong and capable of handling high-pressure and high edge angles with no real upper speed limit other than its 175cm length. Damp and quiet under pressure, cut through loose materials with zero deflection and would yield a nice, if slightly understated acceleration oomph when loaded and released. Definitely capable all over the mountain for frontside resort terrain. Slightly burly feel compared to most all-mountain designs. Nicely aggressive mount point for agility without sacrificing stability at speed. Ex racers will like this one when they want to go for a 100mm waisted ski that's not darty or surfy ...definitely directional. Nice build quality, sturdy edge mounting. Zero chatter. Lacked a little bit of pop, had been softened from previous year's build to appeal to a wider audience. Forward-looking company philosophy...RMU is maturing as a company to find its niche.

Conclusion:

Strong all-purpose ski with a strong, stable and somewhat unexciting personality to keep ex racers and experts happy crushing crud and holding across firm surfaces..

Pros:

Stable, powerful, quiet, secure, no deflection, great power handling.

Cons:

Somewhat unexciting and lacking final snap out of a loaded turn.



2016-17 RMU P802 (Project 802)

(130-96-112) [r=22m@178cm](#) \$799 usd retail

Maple core with fiberglass, VDS rubber dampening strips, Durasurf 4001 bases. Cambered with mild early rise tip and twin tip tail. This ski was designed for Vermont's Jay Peak and is billed as the eastern "do it all" ski. It feels like a detuned racecarver with a lengthened radius happiest in mid-to-larger sized turns. Feedback underfoot feels like a hardwood core ski right from the first turn (a good thing). Superb grip and carving prowess under pressure, needs a bit of speed to activate, delivers a nicely authoritative zing out of the turns when loaded and released and tracks across hardpack really, really well...definitely more racy than all-mountain. Grips and feels like a much narrower ski. Very high speed limit. More fun and interesting than the SCRM in my opinion for eastern groomers, where the SCRM would be happier cutting crud in tighter situations. Good mix of dampening and pop. Slightly traditional, directional feel. Ex racers and experts or athletic skiers will like this one. Might be a bit demanding for intermediates. Nice build quality.

Conclusion:

Strong frontside groomer bridging the gap between racecarver and all-mountain design, with a bias toward carving under power rather than surfing the surface.

Pros:

Stable, powerful, energetic acceleration, quiet, secure, great power handling.

Cons:

Somewhat unexciting and lacking final snap out of a loaded turn



2016-17 DPS Cassiar F82 (preproduction version)

124-82-107 r=15m @178cm \$799 usd retail

New model built from the new Foundation layup and F82-F95 shaping family. Unidirectional carbon, triaxial fiberglass, "bi-phase" bamboo+poplar core, UHMW sidewalls, high graphite-content bases. This version was pre-production, with final models changing the bamboo-poplar core configuration and proportions...so take this flash-review with a couple grains of salt...

I had high expectations about DPS's new Cassiar "Foundation" 82 model since we had been astonished at how well the Cassiar 85 T2 Hybrid frontside ski had performed over two different seasons since its introduction. (Our full test [HERE](#)). The Cassiar 85 T2 stunned us with its edge grip, smooth turn shape, auto-engaging turn initiation and ability to take race-like pressure levels, so naturally, I hoped the F82 would have similar traits. Beautiful topsheet graphic color depth and gradient saturation.

While the surface was not ideal for testing due to the "ball-bearings-and-rock-candy-over-boilerplate" conditions, there were enough patches of good snow and clean boilerplate to test the F82 pretty well. The F82 really lacked a solid grip on hard surfaces, even though it was tuned fairly well. The Foundation lineup is intended to provide a more compliant platform for a wider range of skiers than DPS's traditional audience of hard-core experts and gear junkies, and as such, exhibits a more forgiving, less-demanding core layup to a wider audience. I found the F82 to be super easy to ski, with a loose, playful feel, but when pressed, it would lose its composure and wash away predictably like many intermediate skis do when asked to sustain pressure along their length. This was unexpected since most DPSs we have tested over the years (Wailers included), respond strongly when pressured with authority and often dig trenches in the right conditions.

One of DPS's strengths is the refined shaping they deliver in production models after many prototypes tested throughout the previous season are tweaked and evaluated by their testers. The F82 shined with a very smooth, elegant turnshape and behavior when the ski could be submerged at least sidewall-deep into a nice layer of snow, while requiring a minimal level of input from the skier...feeling very light and effortless. When asked to sustain a tight grip on hard surfaces or track across the crumbly surfaces, the F82 felt washy and drifty...which was unexpected. These skis were pre-production prototypes, so we can't put too much emphasis on this quick impression to show how the final models will behave, but nonetheless, we call 'em like we see 'em, and the F82 frontside model felt out of its element on eastern boilerplate and crumbly surfaces. We will get more time on the production models in 2016 and let you know how the real products perform.



2016-17 DPS Cassiar F95 (preproduction version)

129-95-116 r=18m @ 178cm \$799 usd retail

Same description as the Cassiar F85 reviewed above, only in a wider platform. We had previously loved the Cassiar 95 Pure, and were underwhelmed at the performance of this preproduction prototype of the Foundation version. Stay tuned for a re-review when the final production skis are available on-snow.

2016-17 DPS Wailer F99 (preproduction version)

128-99-117 r=18m \$799 usd retail

The Wailer 99F is touted as the “go everywhere, do everything” model with new 18meter radius geometry delivering a less tapered tip and tail than

the Pure and Hybrid versions. People seemed to either love the original Wailer 99, or never come to terms with its personality. The Wailer 99F has a crowd-pleasing turn geometry and behavior, quicker than you might think for 99mm underfoot, but lacked the edge grip we came to expect from its hybrid and Pure3 versions. Again, this was a preproduction version with re-configurations already underway at the DPS shop in Utah, so we have to reserve final judgment until we experience the final production models.

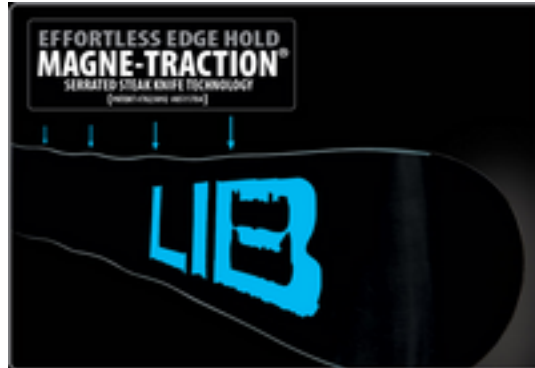


2016-17 Lib Tech Wreckreate 90

127-90-115r=17m @ 179cm \$699 usd retail

2016-17 Lib Tech Wreckreate 100

105-100-140 r=18m @ 178cm \$699 usd retail



Lib Tech's claim to fame is their unique "Magne-Traction" wavy-edge design, along with a super eco-friendly company attitude, recycling 5-7 tons per month in peak production times. The new lineup from Lib Tech for 2016-2017 features new cores with paulownia wood (very hard, dense & responsive) added to their proprietary mix, along with their unique triax & biax basalt/fiberglass fabrics. Having poached their new CEO Anthony De Rocco from the clutches of the big K2 corporate empire (Jarden Action Sports) to revamp their lineup, Lib Tech is excited about this season's products.



Lib Tech Wreckreate 100

The Wreckreate 100 is billed as a big-mountain daily driver to do everything, and it seems to do the job really well, liking a bit of sidewall-deep snow to come alive more than a slick, packed surface. The Wreckreate 90 is targeted at more frontside usage habits, and also prefers 3-dimensional surfaces to riding on top of boilerplate groomers. Both the Wreckreate 100 and 90 feel spunky, damp and fun with a center-bias mount position. The 100 was surprisingly agile for its

100mm width, and had a nice combination of vibration control and responsive power on the hardpack surface, while the 90 felt the same, just quicker and with a lower top-end speed comfort zone. The pairs tested at Stratton was a tuned a little dull for the hard surfaces, but showed great promise and a ton of fun, especially when they could get "into" some snow instead of riding purely "on top" of the snow. We've been a big fan of their use of basalt fabric in the layup for many years, and the new cores combined with the latest composite layers are delivering a new life into Lib Tech's skis.

Conclusion:

The Wreckreate 100 and 90 are stable and have plenty of energy to release when you load them up. "Super Friendly" is a great way to describe these new all-mountain skis from Lib Tech. Great looking graphics with vivid, deep colors (except the 90, which is an all-business black and white color scheme). Lib Tech has injected a new personality into their ski lineup this season, and it's all good. Definitely worth more demo time as soon as the snow flies.

Pros:

Fun, energetic and well balanced all-terrain design. Cool looking. Great company. You can just get on these and go without a learning curve.

Cons:

Doesn't have the fierce edge hold you might expect. (good tune might help this). Feels like a bigger radius than claimed. Both skis are not specialists in any particular area, but focus on all-around usage (not a bad thing really).

2016-17 Sporten Iridium 6

123-73-105 r=12-14.7m @ 168cm \$699 usd retail



Sporten is one of the biggest ski companies you never heard of. The Czechoslovakian company is over 100 years old and manufactures thousands of skis for export throughout Scandinavia, the EU and Japan, with a smattering of retailers in North America.

Sporten's claim to fame is a compelling price/value ratio and the ability to deliver a manufacturing capacity and level of experience in making skis and snowboards rivaled by only the biggest names in the business. At \$699 retail with Tyrolia PRD12 PowerRail bindings, the Iridium 6 is one of the bargains of the century. In Europe, you can see this model sold on Internet store sites with bindings for approximately \$550 usd.

Quite simply, the Sporten Iridium 6 is a top-of-the-line racecarver that can hold its own against any skis in its class...many costing nearly twice as much. The hardpack-craving, 73mm waisted Iridium 6 is a surgical instrument with a grippy tenacity and plenty of power and composure in a silky-smooth chassis. The Iridium 6 is a

traditional wood core sandwich layup with fiberglass and titanal sheets delivered through a dual-radius geometry wrapped in a handsome graphics. This is a ski to appeal to the technical expert or ex-racer looking for a slightly detuned race-like personality on groomers.

I was completely blown away how well this ski entered into turns, accelerated under varying degrees of pressure and angles and exited with authority and smooth response and complete security. Carving enthusiasts will love the way this ski exudes security and athletic prowess while being less demanding than a full-on race ski.

The Tyrolia PRD 12 PowerRail binding allows instant adjustment of the boot position on the ski without tools so you can fine-tune the personality of the ski's engagement to the surface and attitude of the pilot. We use Tyrolia PRD 12 PowerRail bindings as our standard adjustable test ski binding at ExoticSkis.com and have had many seasons of superb performance and reliability from them.



Conclusion:

The Sporten Iridium 6 is a classic example of a metal-infused, European race carver design with traditional construction and materials which has stood the test of time as a superbly satisfying and exciting ski for hardpack surfaces haunted by technical carving experts.

It has a professional, businesslike personality and can deliver impressively powerful, secure arcs into packed surfaces with a smooth and silky feel. If you have been playing with 90-105mm skis for the last

few seasons and remarked how well they worked on groomers...get yourself back on a classic racecarver and discover what real grip feels like. There is nothing quite like the feel of a race-carver with a sheet of metal above and below the wood core.

Pros:

Seriously effective classic racecarver with excellent mannerisms and very high performance level to satisfy experts. Feels like it has been refined for many seasons to become a standard by which many frontside carvers can be judged. Very high speed limit. Very stable. Confidence-inspiring.

Cons:

Really wants to stay on hardpacked groomers. Narrow waist makes it a specialized ski for those who stay on fast, buffed surfaces. A bit stiff in bumpy terrain. Happiest laying down knife-like trenches into hardpack. Wants to get a little bit of speed before it comes alive.



2016-17 Sporten Iridium 5 Special Edition

123-73-105 r=12.4-14.7m @ 168cm \$499 usd retail (*Not a misprint*)



Sporten's Iridium 5 is essentially the same chassis as the Iridium 6, but without the titanal metal layers in the sandwich. The 5 starts turn engagement at a slower, lower-pressure level than its bigger brother, making it easier to ski for those who don't want a full-on "race carver" and the attention it craves from the pilot. The snappier, sportier acceleration out of turns is more super-fun than businesslike, and the top speed is lower than the metal-infused model 6.

The 5 feels a bit shorter than the 6 in the same length and can become a bit more unsettled at warp speed on hard, sketchy surfaces. The 5 is ideal for those who want a frontside carving ski but are not heavy enough, strong enough or compelled to execute race-like turns all day long from a true race-carver.

The graphics are less attractive and a bit retro (for some of us) than the 6, and the Iridium 5 feels much lighter underfoot and more willing to play in bumpier terrain with less fuss and

protest than the 6. The ski's suggested retail price with binding at \$499 is a steal, plain and simple.

Conclusion:

The Iridium 5 is a bargain since it is fun, carvy, sporty and really effective all over the frontside groomers of any resort at nearly half the price of the same level of ski found at many of the "Big 10 Brand" retailers. It does not contain super-modern technology and cutting edge design elements, but its traditional wood core sandwich construction and geometry deliver a ride and fun factor just as good as you will find in the new offerings from other companies, with money left over for plenty of beer and nachos for the entire season.

Pros:

Super-effective frontside groomer carver with quick, lively response and excellent turn initiation and finish behaviors for a huge portion of the skiing population who don't want or need a metal-infused race carver. Good for executing technically-proficient carving sessions without burning all your calories.

Cons:

Graphics turn some people off. Lack of metal and other vibration control elements in the layup can result in a slightly light-weight feel at highest speeds most suited to thoroughbred race-carvers.



2016-17 Liberty Variant 87

129-87-116 r=15.5m @ 172cm \$725 usd retail



Liberty is one of those brands many skiers have seen, but rarely tried in large numbers in most resort areas. Liberty really made its mark in the industry and with its cult-like followers with its soft-snow skis, and has been introducing more and more grippy, harder-surface designs the last couple seasons.

Their Variant 113 really set a standard for harder-charging, somewhat damp, grippier 110mm+ lightweight skis several seasons ago and Dan and the guys at Liberty have been getting their bamboo/poplar and metal-infused sandwiches into narrower chassis each season...resulting in the Variant 113 leading to the Variant 97 and now the Variant 87.

[Bias Alert: I bought a pair of Variant 113s in 193cm two seasons ago and they are one of my favorite skis ever]

Each one has a light feel underfoot, but a solid, dampened behavior and ability to deliver a smooth, grippy hold with bamboo energy when loaded and released.

The Variant 87 I tested at Stratton was not tuned as well as it could have been, but despite the relatively dull tune and the marble-infested hardpack surface, the Variant 87 showed an athletic feel with plenty of civilized, controlled acceleration out of the turns if you loaded it up and released it quickly, yet would set an edge into the surface and delivered a smooth, silky ride with impressively quick edge-to-edge agility. Vibration control was excellent without feeling deadened (a trait we've found in all their titanal-infused bamboo/poplar core layups), The Variant 87 has the same genetic predisposition for smooth turn initiation, strong finishing energy and strong underfoot security as the Variant 97 and the bigger Variant 113, so the entire family has a similar personality. While being a 15.5 meter radius design, the Variant 87 feels longer and smoother, fully capable and happy to run GS-radius turns as well as quicker, snappier directional changes on demand.

While the Variant 87 doesn't immediately impress you as a "Wow" type of ski in any one aspect, the more you ski it, the more you realize it's a ski that delivers a really high level of performance

across a wide spectrum...a very sneaky ski that makes you grab it out of the quiver without thinking as the ski you want for a frontside day on the groomers. You'd find yourself grabbing this ski more than a dedicated racecarver, race ski or "recreational carver" when there is no powder to be found and you will be out all day. The titanal strip on top of the Variant's core lets the ski traverse cut-up snow and choppy materials quietly and in total control without feeling heavy-handed or requiring lots of input from the skier. It's no floppy noodle, and has a solid athletic feel to it, with some refined quietness in the mix.

The Variant 87 is an all-mountain ski narrowed down and amped-up to improve hardpack performance bias without jumping into the racecarve category, and as such, is very easy to ski at a leisurely pace and doesn't complain when surfaces get a bit choppy or thicker, yet sustains more intense arcing behavior when called upon to set some trenches into the snow at speed. Athletic and technical skiers will appreciate the Variant 87 more than purely recreational skiers (as with the 97 and 113). If you want a frontside ski that has better hardpack prowess than an all-mountain ski, yet can handle some fresh snow or cut-up surfaces in the morning without effort, the Variant 87 fits the bill. Heavyweights or muscle-head skiers might find the ski feels light on the snow, and could overpower it, which some can find unsettling when they expect a damp, heavier-feeling ride underfoot. It's an interesting compromise between all-mountain and carver designs, but as soon as you drive it for a while, you understand what the guys at Liberty are shooting for and you realize they created an all-day, no-compromise, high-performance frontside ski (with some off-piste rocker ability) that disappears underfoot after a couple of runs..and that's a good thing.



Colorful Liberty Lineup (Variants not shown)

CONCLUSION:

It's refreshing to see smaller, lesser-known ski brands appearing at industry demo events such as EWSRA/NESR in Vermont. The costs to attend the events can be huge for a small company since they need to pay for event registration, transporting people, gear, tents, tables, tools and supporting staff with hotel and food expenses. They hope they can attract the attention of some retailers to place orders for their skis. Now that the smaller brands are making an impact and capturing the attention of skiers everywhere, retailers are starting to add unusual or interesting brands to their racks to offer customers a wider choice and fresh excitement into the hardgoods business.

Smaller brands have definitely caught the attention of the major brands whose staffers can be seen checking out these smaller brands during the event.....

Let it snow!

Cheers,



Eric Edelstein

<http://www.ExoticSkis.com>