



BEYOND THE BINDINGS

Snowskating offers an alternative for winter fun. | By Laura Lieff



Snowskating has become a favorite off-resort winter sport for Eagle County youth.



Although snowskating has been part of the snowsports lexicon for over a decade, in the long term history of snowsports, it is still relatively new compared to skiing and snowboarding. While skiing dates back to the Scandinavian miners of the 1800s, snowboarding started in the 1960s and 1970s with pioneers Sherman Poppen, Tom Sims, and Jake Burton.

As for the sport's history in Eagle County, snowskating made its unofficial debut in February 2013 when a group of 20 curious side-stance snow enthusiasts—including Beaver Creek snowboard instructors, members of the Beaver Creek park crew, former professional snowboarders, and local shredders—spent the day trying it for the first time.

Hovland Snowskates co-owner Dan Russell fondly remembers that day as the catalyst for quitting his previous job to focus on his new company full time. "I thought I was going to drop off snowskates with Beaver Creek Snowboard School, take a few runs, and leave, but there was such a large interest that it turned into an all-day skate-a-thon."

For those who have not seen a snowskate in person, a basic description is that it looks like a skateboard deck sitting upon trucks/risers that connect to a subdeck resembling a miniature twin-tip ski. Snowskates do not have bindings but they do have a leash (similar to a surfboard) and riders usually wear snowboard boots or regular snow/hiking boots.

RESORT RIDING

While snowskating has been legal on resorts for many years, local pro rider Dan "The Wrench" Rolfe still gets strange looks in the lift lines from inquisitive bystanders. "I get a lot of questions when I'm on a snowskate," he explains. "Some people don't understand what they are and can't believe that I don't have bindings, while others think it's the coolest thing they have ever seen."

Rolfe, who rides for Hovland, enjoys snowskating so much that he hasn't been on a snowboard in three years. He initially began focusing on snowskating because he felt like he hit a ceiling in terms of improvement on a snowboard. "I reached a point in snowboarding where I wasn't going

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Rider (and photographer) Jeremy Jones slides a backyard rail on a Hovland snowskate.



Local snowskaters can be found setting up features in backyards throughout the winter.



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to do anything bigger than what I was already doing,” he explains. “So instead, I decided to ride something smaller and more technical. In terms of design, I like the simplicity of the equipment (it has fewer moving parts), the comfortable footwear, and that the sport offers a greater sense of accomplishment.”

Snowskating has provided a new challenge for many local riders because even though there are similarities to snowboarding, the bindingless aspect makes it unique. “The simplicity and rawness of snowskating is what sets it apart,” says longtime Beaver Creek local and former snowboard pro Brian “Wookie” Fleming. “Being able to maneuver the equipment in a fashion of control and expertise makes just riding a snowskate a trick in and of itself.”

“Another facet of resort snowskating appreciated by expert level snowboarders is that the sport provides a way for seasoned riders to have more fun on family ski days and/or with visitors who aren’t as advanced,” adds Fleming. “Snowskating takes me back to the beginner level because features that are easy on a snowboard

become difficult again,” adds Fleming. He also says that snowskating keeps the mountain more interesting when the snowfall is less than average and provides more options for an alternative type of workout.

OFF-RESORT RIDING

But resort riding isn’t always where local snowskaters spend their time as many of them prefer backcountry and side country, as well as local parks, hillsides, backyards, and golf courses. Fleming says that off-resort snowskating allows for more opportunities to be creative, learn new tricks, and sharpen techniques—especially since the equipment is lighter and bindingless. He explains, “The accessibility of snowskating is ideal for off-resort play as smaller accomplishments become just as satisfying. Also, there is no unstrapping and the whole setup is easier to carry.”

Rolfe adds that although snowskating at a high level is challenging, learning to snowskate is not as hard as it looks. “It’s easy to teach because the person learning spends less time with their butt on the ground, they can separate themselves from

the equipment, and they are able to catch themselves with four limbs rather than just the upper body.”

Hovland offers a variety of snowskates and flatdecks—which look like the top portion of a snowskate and are fully sealed to keep moisture out—regardless of riding levels or venue preferences. Ideal for off-resort riding, Hovland’s flatdecks are built with urethane sidewalls, a fiberglass wrap, a laminated core, and a sintered base which makes them light and durable. “Flatdecks usually work best for off-resort riding because you don’t need leverage to carve and it’s more like a skateboard that you take to session a spot or feature,” Russell explains.

Offering a “Snowskate Guide By Terrain and Riding Style” that lists their recommendations for everything from backyard to backcountry, Hovland has made an effort to appeal to those without easy resort access. Russell adds, “Snowskating merges snowboarding, skateboarding, and surfing so choosing a snowskate depends on the preferred discipline and where the rider is spending their time.”

Because snowskating is more approachable for a variety of snow conditions, riders can be found on snow tubing hills, golf courses, snow-covered skateparks, and backyards with a decent slope. Fleming adds, “Snowskating has opened up many new options for riders of all ages and abilities. I find it to be more like surfing because of the way you maneuver your feet on the vehicle—it’s a dance.” **MTN**

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