

The aerodynamic Zeek ski poles

What's in store?

Equipment editor **CHRIS EXALL** takes a look at some of this season's innovations, including the development of a new British product

ALTHOUGH the development of skiing by the British has a long and historic tradition, the UK has never been a major producer of ski hardware. British company Zeek hopes to change that.

Zeek, a UK manufacturer of ultra-high-performance carbon fibre equipment, has launched what they claim to be the 'world's most advanced carbon fibre ski pole'.

With a wing like cross section, the shaft has been designed with aerodynamics firmly in mind. This enables the poles to cut through the air with minimal wind resistance making them easy to control, particularly at higher speeds.

Zeek poles have been designed with high strength as a primary focus. The material and shape work together to make them significantly



stronger than traditional cylindrical carbon poles.

Customers can even design these poles themselves, picking their own handles, straps, decals and even surface finish so that

it looks and feels just right for each individual. The poles have a stiff upper shaft in conjunction with a degree of flexibility in the low portion. This dampens the vibration along the shaft and contributes to an improved 'feel' from the pole.

These poles are not cheap and are available in the UK for £199 including VAT, but I can see them being a hot with British skiers.

So, what about skis this season? With the exception of ski racers, what most skiers really want is a one size fits all ski that will suit most conditions. A model that will float in the deep, grip on blue ice and make short and long arcs with equal ease.

It's become the oxymoron of ski design - the narrow waist and deep sidecut that make a ski grip on hardpack tends to compromise flotation in the deep. But a waterski like waist floats in the most cut up of mashed potato snow but rarely grips.

The Salomon's XDR 84 Ti has attempted to square this circle. Putting aside racing for a moment, this ski will do almost anything that you ask of it with precision and power.

With a wood core reinforced with titanium and diagonal sheets of carbon, all terrain rocker and traditional vertical sidewalls it's hard to find any question that the XDR 84Ti has difficulty in answering. Any

advanced or expert skier can leave the second pair of skis at home and save on baggage charges.

And so to boots. With an approach to design that can best be labelled as evolutionary, when Lange and sister company Rossignol launch a new race boot it is big news.

Both companies have new race boots that looks identical to last year's offering, except for a few minor changes to the paintwork.

But the classic look exterior hides some very clever thinking. Both Lange's RS and Rossignol's Hero models are made by injecting materials with a different level of hardness into the same mould. Instead of using a single plastic for the shell of the boot, the boot is a sandwich with an ultra-thin, hard external shell encapsulating a softer core. Changing the mix of plastics allows fine tuning of flex and rebound. This year's boots also have much more anatomical heel pockets.

Where Lange and Rossignol's offerings are very much at the performance end of the spectrum, Alpina is re-entering the UK market with some innovations more orientated towards all day comfort. The Intemp liner has an integrated heating system that is plug and play with a thermostat to keep your feet at a consistent temperature. Unlike many other systems, Alpina has a flexible heating element that wraps the entire forefoot - so flexible that they even offer it in walking boots.

