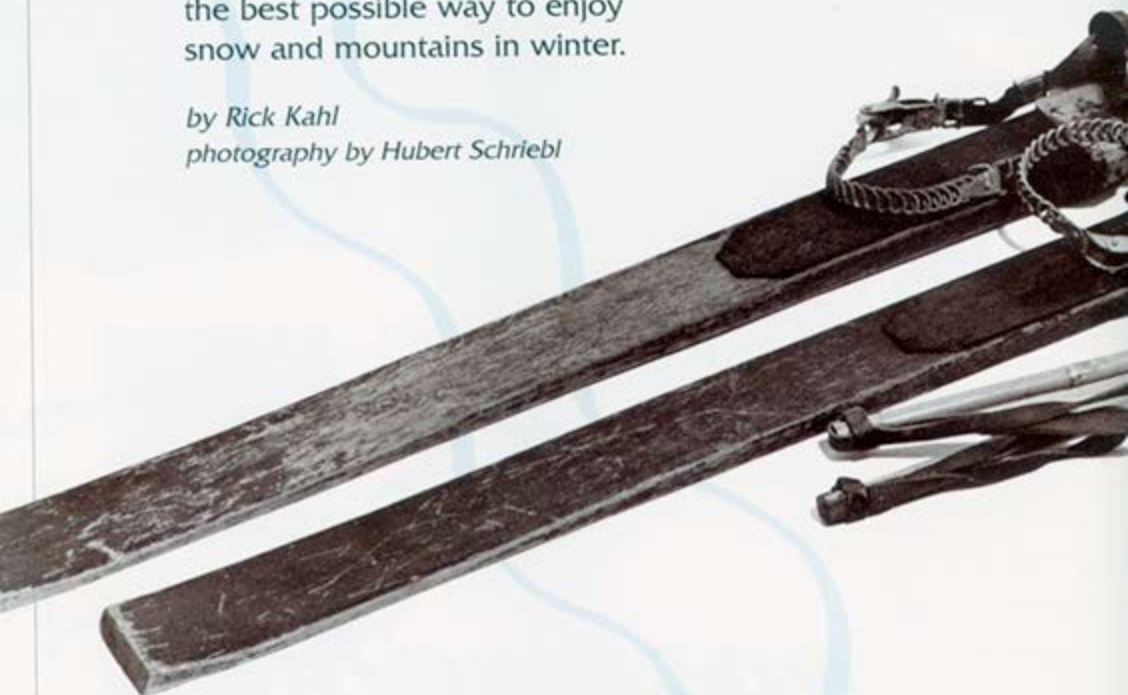


once and **FUTU**
skiing

Times and fashions and equipment may change, but skiing remains the best possible way to enjoy snow and mountains in winter.

by Rick Kahl

photography by Hubert Schiebl



R.É.



“**W**hat is the future of skiing?” It’s a question that comes up often lately. Usually, it’s inspired by a vague fear, expressed by long-time skiers, that snowboarding will overrun their sport in the next century.

And while the complete answer to the question is as yet unclear, there are at least a few things that we can surely count on in the future.

For one thing, mountain resorts (let’s not call them ski resorts, there’s a lot more going on than just skiing) will be around for awhile, and skiers will continue to enjoy them. Of course, they’ll share them with snowboarders, and probably with a host of other sports enthusiasts practicing sports yet to be invented.

Resorts fulfill our fantasies. They allow us to escape the pressures and routines of the daily lives of city folk and they become whatever it is that we want, wish for, uphold as the ultimate lifestyle.

The more we crowd into urban areas, the more we

surround ourselves with the trappings of post-industrial society, the more we feel a need to find a way to get in touch with the natural world, a simpler world. Mountain resorts have served this role since, well...

In the beginning, there was the Tyrol. And the Arlberg. The cradle of the sport that gave us instructor-legends Hannes Schneider, Professor Kruckenhauser and Emo Henrich. And let’s not forget Switzerland, Bavaria and the French Alps. In the first half of the 20th century, Europe gave skiing its culture: chalets, oompah bands, fondue, the snowplow, the wedel, the yodel, apres-ski. Europe gave skiing its romantic, adventurous glow.

Stratton was conceived in the late 50s, at the height of Austrian influence in skiing. So it’s not surprising that the ski area, finally born in the early 60s,

Europe gave skiing its romantic, adventurous glow.



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once and future skiing



1965

bore a strong Tyrolean resemblance. Stratton's founders imported the chalets, the Austrian instructors with their glorious accents, the oompah music. Private homes hewed to strict codes. The base lodge was modeled on the Austrian motif. Ski school director Emo Henrich epitomized the Stratton culture: the native Tyrolean built and managed the Alpine-inspired Birkenhaus and hired native Austrian musician-skiers who, along with him, taught skiing during the day and recreated the sounds and atmosphere of a gashaus at night.

Those were the days! If you were cool, you skied on Kneissl White Stars or Allais 60s and wore Bogner. You yearned to ski parallel, with your feet together, and wedel. You wore hand-made Molitor boots, or perhaps Strolz, and stretch pants. If you did all this, you were a god. Yodel-ay!

But times and fashions change. Despite the endearing and charming efforts of the Stratton Mountain Boys, skiing in the U.S. has altered its character frequently. And with the birth and rapid growth of snowboarding, skiing isn't just skiing anymore. It's becoming something else

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that's still emerging.

Right from the beginning, skiing—in the East, at least—went its own way. Geography is partly to blame. The relatively low-altitude, windy, weather-laden mountains of the East dictated narrow trails to hold and protect the snow cover, in contrast to the broad snowfields of Europe. Even with the heavy Tyrolean influence, Stratton has always had this aspect of New England ski character. The trails spill down the mountain, twisting, turning, offering double fall lines. This has always been one of the real joys of Eastern skiing, though we've forgotten that from time to time.

Let's not underestimate the controlling influence of the American work ethic, either. America has been much more of a nose-to-the-grindstone society than Europe for much of this century and American skiers of the 40s and 50s approached skiing with great determination.

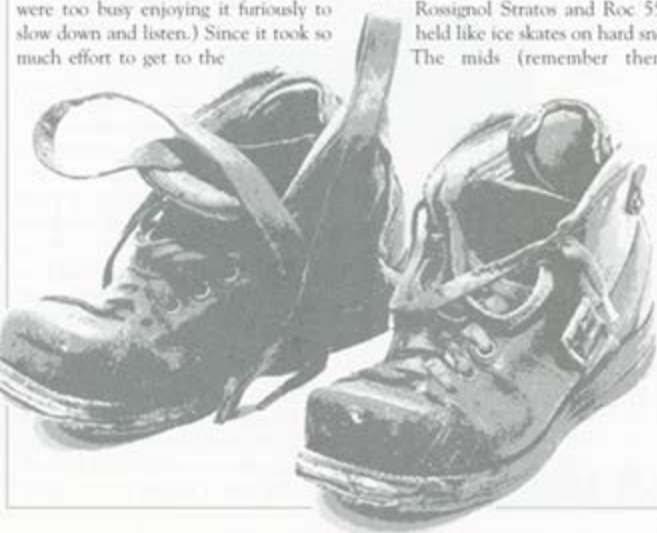
Hey—to be a skier in the 40's and 50's, you had to. The mountains were an eight-to-ten-hour drive away for many people. We Americans really had to work to become winter sportsmen. Europeans simply walked out the door. (Emo Henrich was constantly reminding us to savor the joy of skiing, but we were too busy enjoying it furiously to slow down and listen.) Since it took so much effort to get to the

ski areas, we worked very hard to become good skiers. So as the European motifs became familiar and old hat, we came to value skiing itself more than the trappings of skiing.

RESORTS FULFILL OUR FANTASIES... THEY BECOME WHATEVER IT IS THAT WE WANT, WISH FOR, UPHOLD AS THE ULTIMATE LIFESTYLE.

Broader forces were at work, too: acid rock replaced Tyrolean music, the frug replaced shuhplatteln. Gear fashions evolved equally fast. Howard Head popularized the metal ski; his Standard became standard. Jean-Claude Killy and the French dominated the later years of the 60s, and the fiberglass Dynamic became the

hot ski. **70s**
The European influence dimmed further in the 70s. Americanized condos sprouted and flourished, even at outposts such as Stratton. Skiing grew like a snowball rolling downhill, aided by extensive snowmaking and grooming and new teaching techniques. And by equipment innovations: supportive plastic boots replaced leather, fiberglass Rossignol Stratos and Roc 550's held like ice skates on hard snow. The mids (remember them?)



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Once & Future Skiing

turned on a dime. Skiing was becoming easier than ever. And almost entirely unnoticed, Jake Carpenter was quietly experimenting with his snowboards, trying out prototypes at Stratton. Apres-ski action shifted to discos. Haig's entered its hey-day. What could be better than that?

80s

Few things ever stay the same.

The Western influence ruled the 80s. Spurred by the phenomenal growth of skiing in the West, especially in Colorado, and aided by advances in snowmaking and grooming, Eastern skiing went through a great change: the birth of supertrails. Emulating the wide-open spaces skiers found in the West, Eastern areas carved wide swaths where narrow trails once weaved through the forest. Skiers were no longer hemmed in, but could freely cruise. Resort design began taking its cues from the West, too; witness Stratton's Vail-inspired village (which still had its echoes of Austria, Vail itself having strong Alpine roots). Clocktowers became *de rigueur*.

Snowboarding, too, began to explode upon the scene. After 15 years of sputtering along out of skier consciousness, snowboarding blossomed almost overnight. Stratton — conservative, cliquish, dare we say, snobby! — was, oddly, one of the first ski areas to encourage snowboarding and helped the outlaw sport gain acceptance. And snowboarding has set off changes that are still rumbling through mountains all over the world.

The other revolutionary development was high-speed lifts. Express quads and gondolas may be the ultimate

service—you gotta go up before you can slide down and the faster you go up, the

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more times you can come down. Faster is better, right? But this, too, had an earth-shaking effect: it shattered the old American ski-from-opening-to-close mentality.

Suddenly, you could get your fill of skiing in less than a full day. And once skiers got tired and stopped in mid-afternoon, a funny thing happened.

They discovered there was more to the mountains than skiing. Which brings us to...

90s

The 90s. Resorts are becoming more complete entertainment centers.

Outdoor recreation centers. And not just because skiing has been joined by snowboarding. No, Alpine areas are increasingly offering

skating, snowshoeing, sledding, tobogganing, bungee-jumping.

Sports centers and spas add other options. Skiers now find time for shopping and relaxed dining, on and off the mountain. We skiers are taking time to smell the coffee, which is just as likely to be a half-cafe latte as plain old Folger's. You can even go to a modern resort and have a great time without going downhill.

Do you see what's happening? We Americans are at last gaining the same appreciation of the mountains that Europeans have enjoyed for centuries. Europeans have always had a more relaxed attitude about



1968

continued

skiing: take a few runs, enjoy the scenery, savor a two-hour lunch with a schnapps or two, maybe ski a bit more, then relax over dinner and go out dancing. Skiing has never been the only thing for Europeans, as it has for us Yanks. But we can now get in as much



skiing as we like, and the Interstates and 4WD's make it easier to get to the mountains in the first place. So we're learning: Live life, don't just ski it.

And being Americans, we'll certainly come up with new ways to enjoy the mountains. We'll insist on faster, more comfortable lifts. Easy-to-use skis, comfortable boots. Clothes that breathe like mesh, and regulate temperature like a Thermos bottle.

We'll also insist on having more fun. Be honest now: haven't you become just the teensiest blasé about all those wide, smoothly groomed slopes?

IT SHATTERED THE OLD AMERICAN SKI-FROM-OPENING-TO-CLOSE MENTALITY.

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pipes, terrain parks, their bonking and jibbing. The invasion has not been painless by any means, but snowboarding has made the mountain experience richer.

Already, it's brought renewed energy and excitement, and it supplies the bulk of ski-area employees once known as ski bums. Today, most of the bums are riders, not skiers.

But skiers are rediscovering the joys and thrills of skiing, too.

Extreme skiers like Scot Schmidt and Glenn Plake reminded two-plankers skiing off-trail could be exciting. Fat powder skis helped thousands of skiers experience the joy of deep-snow skiing. And most recently, super-sidecut skis are making it possible for more skiers to feel the thrill of carved

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turns, to ski the trees and more challenging snow conditions with greater ease. It's unclear how these oddball skis will shape the skiing adventure, but they no doubt will. Super-sidecut skis may do for skiers what snowboards have done for riders. And the new sidecuts may lead to changes in ski boots, perhaps making them easier-flexing and more comfortable. Skiing will remain a tremendous way to enjoy the mountains in winter.

And that's the future of skiing.

Think fun, and pray for snow. ♦

Rick Kahl is Editor-in-Chief of Skiing Magazine. This is his first piece (in a long time) for STRATTON.