



## There's a new way to race down a snow-covered mountain

[By Steve Bergsman]

WHISTLER, British Columbia - There are three things I never do when skiing: take air, ride the trees and tackle black diamond moguls. It's not for lack of courage - well, maybe it is. No, it's because I don't have the skills.

So, here I was snowbiking for the first time in my life and I'm ducking off the groomed slopes into the trees and then launching from a snow ridge into the air to land back on the trails. I'm having a blast. At least I was until my guide, a flatland-born, now mountain enthusiast, took me down a steep mogul course.

"I didn't realize how mogulish it really was," he confessed, although I really suspect it was his way of testing my resolve.

Paul, my guide, had already led me over some moguls and I guess I made the mistake of saying how much fun that was. Now he was going to see exactly how much fun I could endure.



That's the thing about snowbiking, it's really kind of a wacky thing to do, albeit at very fast speeds. Perhaps snowbiking is too much of a blast because, although it has been around in one form or another for about 60 years, it has never really caught on.

"It hasn't got the cool factor like snowboarding," Paul explained.

Paul, one of the few certified snowbiking guides at Whistler in British Columbia, has to put up with quite a bit. First off, the folks at Whistler who guide tourism and maintain

the slopes often don't even know the famed ski resort offers the sport. From my hotel to stops along the slopes, my refrain "I'm going snowbiking" was often met by a blank stare, and the exclamatory, "Huh?" I could visualize the gears of their collective minds working through the concept of what a snowbike might look like.

It really is a very simple piece of equipment. The bike is short, like a BMX racer, and the two wheels that normally sit at the front and back have been replaced by runners, or shortened skis. The seat is thin like a BMX racer, with a lot of spring - on moguls and jumps the springiness gives your body a cushion as you land on the hard pack. The real difference in snowbiking is that riders wear mini-skis on their feet. In effect, there are four points of contact on the snow. The front and back runners of the bike and the mini-skis. This is one reason why the sport is so easy to learn. If you already ski or snowboard, it takes about five minutes to understand snowbiking. The sense of movements, turns and shifting of weight are all the same, except you are doing it from a sitting position with your hands gripping handlebars.

The one part of the body that's important in snowbiking but not in skiing or snowboarding is the butt. It's important to keep it down and square on the back of the seat. A mountain bike rider would understand. Downhill enthusiasts of upright sports have a tendency to rely on the feet for the turns and the balance, which is not good form in snowbiking. Paul tried to reduce my reliance

on the feet. The correct positioning, he repeated, is to keep the legs in, somewhat tight to the seat.



The person who got me interested in snowbiking was a Canadian named Steve Ogden, who works at Sun Peaks Resort near the small city of Kamloops, also in British Columbia. So, after my introduction to the sport in Whistler, I took a four-and-a-half-hour ride north through some of the most spectacular mountain scenery in North America to arrive at Sun Peaks.

When I entered my hotel room, I noticed the television was turned on and set to Sun Peaks' promotional channel. The first advertisement I saw was for snowbiking. Then, the next day as I was getting ready to board a lift, I noticed a yellow pennant flapping in the wind; it advertised snowbiking. Here was one location aggressively promoting the sport.

On a bright Friday morning, Steve and I took a quad chairlift about three-quarters up Mount Tod, where we commenced our snowbike ride on a run called 5 Mile. By this time I felt like a professional rider, although I was still using my legs too much, and not turning by shifting my weight on the bike. I also detected that I was scrunching over the handlebars, whereas the correct position



is to sit somewhat erect with your arms straight out. I eventually got that all sorted out and Steve and I casually, if not speedily, swept down the lengthy run.

One very cold night, Steve, my wife and I trudged through the frozen landscape to a fine-dining establishment. While uncorking a bottle of Okanagan vino, we discussed the lack of enlightenment about snowbiking and came up with what we thought was a good idea to promote the sport: the creation of a downhill triathlon, three races of skiing, snowboarding and snowbiking. Steve gushed about the concept - probably too much wine.

However, if you find me back at Sun Peaks next year talking about a downhill triathlon, well, you heard it first right here.

#### IF YOU GO

Getting there: Alaska Airlines ([www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com)) to Seattle followed by a short Horizon Air ([www.alaskaair.com](http://www.alaskaair.com)) hop to Vancouver. Ground transfer to Whistler via Perimeter Transportation ([www.perimeterbus.com](http://www.perimeterbus.com)). Whistler-Sun Peaks Shuttle to Sun Peaks Resort, and, finally, Horizon Air from Kamloops to Seattle.

Where to stay: Fairmont Chateau Whistler ([www.fairmont.com](http://www.fairmont.com)); Delta Sun Peaks Resort ([www.deltahotels.com](http://www.deltahotels.com)).

Where to eat: In Whistler: Il Caminetto di Umberto ([www.umberto.com](http://www.umberto.com)) or 21 Steps ([www.21steps.ca](http://www.21steps.ca)). In Sun Peaks: The Pinnacle

Lodge ([www.pinnaclelodgesunpeaks.com](http://www.pinnaclelodgesunpeaks.com)) or Servus at Creekside (250-578-7383).

Bonuses: At Whistler, I got out of town for a day: a half-day snowshoe hike into the wilderness with Whistler X-Country Ski & Hike ([www.whistlerski-hike.com](http://www.whistlerski-hike.com)). At Sun Peaks ([www.sunpeaksresort.com](http://www.sunpeaksresort.com)), Nancy Greene Raine, Canada's legendary Olympic champion, is often on the mountain to ski with whoever wants to join her. A few tips from her helped my skiing.

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