

Boots and Bindings Focus on Terrain as Well as the Feet

Comfort, less weight, refined lacing systems top list for bottoms

At the SIA Snow Show, brace yourself for conversations about shedding weight, creating comfort, and pursuing a purpose. But rather than coming from motivational speakers, these phrases are being uttered from within the industry. Strangely, next year's crop of boots and bindings promises the same results as countless self-help seminars.

The industry is evolving to meet the diverse needs of today's riders, leading to an increase in discipline-specific boots and bindings. "The snowboard industry has been very focused on creating hardgoods that are specific to one type of terrain and riding style," says Nitro Marketing Manager Knut Eliassen. On the sales floor, this is leading to more nuanced conversations about a product's intended purpose.

This is especially true with boots, where a new paradigm is emerging. Flex and price—the primary means by which boots have often been sold—are now part of a broader dialogue. Brands and retailers are placing a greater emphasis on offering boots built for specific terrain. To develop boots for working the streets, brands are using softer foams and trimming down soles. Typically, these low-profile boots offer enhanced board feel and aesthetics appropriated from skate shoes.

Brands are also developing sophisticated boots for freeriding and life outside the access gates. In addition to offering a stiffer flex, these boots tend to feature waterproof and breathable membranes, and soles designed for hiking, splitboarding, and rocking crampons. Some models even feature leather linings and liners with outsoles so they can be used around camp on hut trips.

When it comes to boots and bindings, comfort will always be king. "Fit drives everything in boots," Rome International Sales Manager Dan Sullivan explains. "If your foot feels good and is held comfortably in control, it lets you drive your board the way you want." This has led to a renewed focus on building better liners, which tap into a range of fabrics, foams, and closure systems to maximize both comfort and longevity.

In addition to perfecting their liners, brands are continuing to refine their lacing systems. "A complex, multiple-tiered approach to lacing systems seems to be one of the biggest trends in boots," explains Nina Eriksson, Salomon's product line manager for boots. Many of these systems revolve around zonal lacing, which can aid in adjusting the fit and flex of specific areas within the boot. In part, many of these lacing systems aim to hold heels in place. According to Scott Barbieri, vice president of Anon and Burton hardgoods, "Technologies focused on improving heel hold are another trend currently hitting the market." They tap into everything from internal lacing harnesses to new applications of BOA. Despite the continued focus on lacing systems, traditional laces are making a slight comeback.

Advances in binding technology also aim to enhance comfort. Although that might seem like an indulgence, it is essential for products to perform properly. As brands continue to streamline their baseplates—often by reducing the footprint, coring out material, and even offering hinged mounting discs—footbeds are receiving greater attention. Increasingly, these footbeds offer sophisticated features like canting or gel pads to aid in absorbing impacts.

Next year's boots and bindings provide a snapshot of evolving technologies. For boots, "Everyone has their version of the unibody construction—or one-piece shell design—that helps reduce weight and maintain durability," Flow Product Line Manager for Boots Alex Zhao explains. Through the use of new fabrics and seam welding, these designs can also yield boots with a smoother flex.

Among bindings, "Highback flex and support is something that many companies are focusing on right now," says K2 Design Engineer Steve Moenaert. As a result, manufacturers have developed new pairings of familiar materials, like urethane and carbon fiber. Other developments worth noting include the prevalence of refined rear-entry



A Growing Demand

"Binding sales for men last year grew again over the previous year and are continuing to sell well this year."

—Travis Anderson, co-founder, zAKs Boardroom, Anchorage



Last Season's Surprise Sales

"Women's snowboards, bindings, and boots. We were taken by surprise on how many girls came in the shops for mid- to high-end products last year."

—Phil Grisé, owner, Empire snowboard shops, Quebec



What to Watch at SIA

"It all depends on November and December. We need a real winter with real winter temperatures and that will make a world of difference for us real deal snowboard shops. I'll also watch who distributes the most beer."

—Ben Olson, owner, Damage Boardshop, Duluth, Minn.

Next year's boots and bindings offer a range of discipline-specific designs. Whether developed for working the streets or exploring the backcountry, these products also aim to maximize comfort.



▲ Nitro Raiden Phantom



▲ Gnu Weird



▲ Burton Genesis



▲ Burton Driver X



▲ Deeluxe Spark Summit



▲ Vans Infuse

bindings and new construction techniques that forgo EVA and PU foam for strap materials with a reduced impact on the environment.

When it comes to boots and bindings, don't shy away from promises based in purpose, comfort, and reduced weight. Despite their association with self-help seminars, these things are worth pursuing—especially on the snow.

—Michael Sudmeier