

▲ Nitro 14 TEAM



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# Growing the Stoke Factor

New focus on rental snowboards aims to attract riders of all levels

Snowboarding manufacturers are arming rental shops with a range of improved products, and just in time. According to [SIA's 2012 Snow Sports Market Intelligence Report](#), snowboard participation last season dipped 7.5 percent compared to the 2010-11 season. Consequently, rental products are receiving renewed attention from resorts, retailers, and brands to help convert newcomers to the sport.

At the same time, the industry is looking to better meet the needs of experienced—and more discerning—rental customers. To aid all of these riders, and the rental shops that serve them, brands are debuting refined collections and new technology.

## The Importance of Efficiency

Efficiency is driving innovation in rental systems. “Process time has to be fast so the customer can get out of the shop and on the snow as quickly as possible,” says [Head](#) rental manager [Mike Poole](#).

Brands that offer a full range of hardgoods are expanding their use of color-coding to indicate sizes on binding heelcups and boot soles, as well as snowboard bases, topsheets, and sidewalls. The colors in Head's new 4D system, for example, are used across product categories to indicate their compatibility with one another. Through the use of [Boa](#) dials or quick-lace systems, brands are working to maximize comfort and minimize the time it takes to boot up and hit the slopes.

Tool-free adjustability in bindings has expanded from mounting systems and stance adjustment to include tool-less heelcups, highbacks, and straps. [Burton's](#) new Progression Lowstack II, for example, features an adjustable heelcup that has “made centering

a guest's feet on the board super easy,” says Global Experience Manager [Shaun Cat-tanach](#). [K2](#) is introducing a tool-free highback for its SR1. A number of manufacturers are also touting symmetrical binding designs that allow for interchangeability and, thus, enhanced efficiency.

## Easing the Learning Curve

While camber is making a slight comeback on the retail floor, rental boards are emphasizing zero camber, rocker, or hybrid cambers. For its System Rental Series, for example, [Arbor](#) taps into the same rocker profile used throughout its inline collection. Burton's LTR (Learn to Ride) boards have a zero-camber shape but an edge-to-edge base bevel. The combo allows people to learn to turn quickly and with less chance of catching edges. [Nitro](#) also uses a zero-camber design among its rental boards.

[Elan](#) uses an early-rise rocker, and some brands use hybrid camber profiles for their rental collections. [Rossignol](#), for example, employs AmpTek Auto Turn, with slight camber underfoot and rocker at tip and tail. PR and product information manager [Nick Castagnoli](#) says this delivers “incredible ease-of-use and strong full-length edge grip.”

## Designed for Durability

All brands are taking steps to ensure rental products are durable, and some innovations exist in this area as well. Head, for example, has a new sidewall design called Framewall, intended to eliminate delaminations. The design includes a circular, three-dimensional ABS sidewall that overlaps the topsheet. According to Poole, this enhances torsional



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stability and “protects the complete board from external stress and impact, improving the board’s durability considerably.”

In boots, brands are expanding the use of lace covers. Reinforced-rubber toe boxes and spines are also increasing the shelf life of rental boots. To enhance comfort and minimize pack-out, liners are receiving significant attention in the form of longer-lasting foams and more durable fabrics. Brands are tapping into anti-microbial fabrics and treatments to keep things clean. **Deeluxe** has even developed a range of rental liners that can easily be washed.

### Discerning Customers, Premium Products

Suppliers are also catering to more experienced rental customers. From music and movies to bikes and cars, people realize that they can get more value through renting rather than owning. “One huge trend we see happening in snowboard rental is the shift from product to service,” says **Salomon’s** director of product creation, **David Farcot**. So suppliers are offering more performance-oriented models.

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—David Farcot, Salomon

To that end, more rental products look and perform on par with retail models. Nitro’s rental boards, for example, are the same as its inline offerings. **Flow’s** Revolve—a high-performance rental binding with a reclining highback—is based on the brand’s consumer collection.

For its rental bindings, Salomon now uses the aluminum ratchets common in its retail products. Burton’s Progression Mission binding uses the same technology as its inline counterpart. With a smaller baseplate and a hinged mounting disc, the binding maximizes board flex and feel.

Brands, resorts, and retailers are also addressing women’s and children’s equipment, offering refined products, additional sizes, and programs tailored to their specific needs. Burton’s Riglet Reel (an accessory that enables young riders to be towed) and Riglet Parks, for example, are introducing riders as young as three to the slopes.


Increasingly, resorts and retailers are investing in premium demo products. Shops that rent **Never Summer** boards are akin to car rental locations “that rent Cadillacs and Harleys,” says Never Summer snow sales manager **Mike Gagliardi**. For **Contract**, demo programs provide a means to introduce riders to its boards and encourage them to try a boutique brand.

With premium demo programs, many brands customize their offerings for their partners. **Venture**, for example, works with a select number of resorts, retailers, and guiding services to develop demo programs based around its freeride and powder-specific snowboards and splitboards. The program helps educate riders about equipment and ensures they feel comfortable with it before exploring the backcountry. “High-end demos are a great opportunity for riders to try different types of snowboards as their skill set improves and find out which product will work best with their riding style,” sales manager **Jerome Boulay** says.

“The challenge will always be to keep people stoked on snowboarding from the very moment they step on a board,” observes K2 International team manager and marketing coordinator **Peter Mullenbach**. Luckily, resorts, retailers, and brands are working hard not only to get riders on the snow, but also to keep them there.

—Michael Sudmeier

*This article is adapted from the SAM magazine Rental Buyer’s Guide 13/14, which is available online at [saminfo.com/marketplace](http://saminfo.com/marketplace) and in print at the Rental World exhibit, booth #4501. Don’t miss the new seminar “You Always Remember Your First Time. But Was It Any Good?” Join TransWorld Business, Burton’s Jeff Boliba, and AASI’s Scott Anfang to discuss best practices in your snowboard rental department. Fri., Feb 1., 11 a.m., at booth #4501.*



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