

SNOW
EAST!

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BOOT CAMP!

What's Up with Ski Boots

The basic function of today's ski boot is to transmit foot and leg movement directly to the ski. A century ago this was far from true. Back then boots were not even considered ski equipment. Skier footwear ranged from items such as shoes with gum rubber soles to standard work boots designed for farming, logging or hunting. Though warm and comfortable, this footwear provided little ankle support while giving the skier absolutely no control over his skis. Back then they wrapped a long leather strap (long thong) around the boot several times to improve performance. Today's boots do a great job of allowing skiers the ability to do amazing athletic movements on their skis. However, these boots are available in many different forms with lots of confusing terminology. I've listed below the four general types of ski boots available today.

- **Four Buckle Overlap*** - By far the most popular ski boot sold today are front entry overlap boots. The shell consists of a lower and an upper (called the cuff) that overlap on itself at the top of the boot to give the buckles the ability to change the internal size. The upper cuff is hinged to the lower shell at the ankle and adjusts laterally.



Above - 3 types of inside boot liners; Thermo Fit (left), Standard (center), Foam (right)
Left - Four Buckle Overlap Boot

Inside the shell is a boot board (zeppa) which puts the foot at an inclined angle and also may give some arch support and help fight excessive pronation. To cushion the foot from the hard shell, there is a liner. Today's liners give a skier many options. Liners can be minimally padded for racers for a "close to the shell" performance fit. More often, liners are padded with layers of foam for comfort. Some parts of these layers can also be heat moldable (hot air heats the foam up to mold to your foot) or the whole thing can be customized to your leg and foot. Here are some examples of cus-

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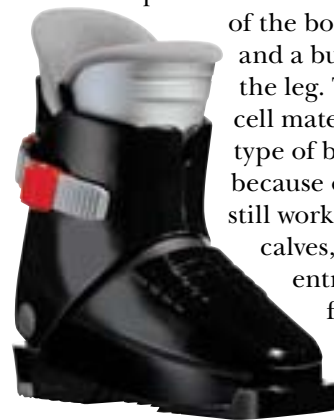
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tom moldable liners. **1. Thermo-fit** liners which are heated to help them conform to your foot and typically have an overlap that creates the tongue of the liner. These are not always for the advanced skier or racer but have the ability to keep the foot warmer than other liners types. **2. Foam** liners have tubes attached to them for injection of foam thus customizing the liner to an individual's foot. Foam injection liners have been around along time and take a skilled boot technician to do this right. These liners are uncomfortable during the foaming process but worth it for those with hard to fit feet or racers.

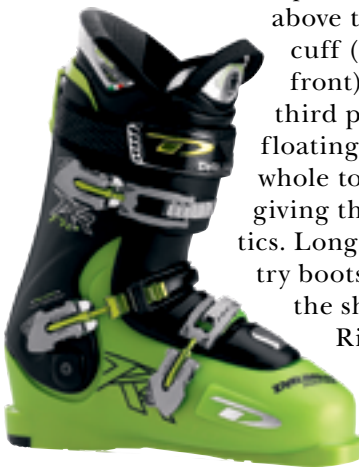
• **Rear Entry** - Unlike the overlap these boots use a solid lower shell and change fit by adjusting inside cables and plates around the foot and ankle. The back



of the boot opens rearward for entry and a buckle closes it to tighten it on the leg. The liner is foam or a closed cell material like a thick wet suit. This type of boot has fallen out of favor because of lack of performance but still works well for skiers with large calves, as rental equipment and as entry level boots. Slang name for these are "hatch backs."

Rear Entry Boot

• **Open Throated (three piece boots)** - If you have heard of Raichle Flexon Comps (no longer produced) than you know this category. Besides the liner, this boot is made of three parts. The lower shell has no material over the top of the foot and comes well up



above the ankle. The upper cuff (again no material on the front) hinges at the ankles. The third piece is an interchangeable floating tongue which covers the whole top and front of the foot giving the boot its flex characteristics. Long buckles on these front entry boots close the tongue against the shell for fit adjustability.

Open Throat Boot

Right now there is one manufacturer targeting the freestyle market with this design, Dalbello. • **Mid Entry** - Like rear entry boots, these are a dying breed. They combined an overlap shell to secure the foot area with a hinged back for ease of entry and closure around the lower leg. These boots work well with newer skiers looking for comfort and ease of entry. *

* Soft boots are overlap boots with parts of the shell made of soft materials to aid comfort and ease of entry.

photography courtesy of Dalbello Boots