

# Tour de Frost



Don Koski, right, and his business associate Jeff Butcher, center, enjoy a day at Hoodoo Mountain Resort in Sisters, Ore., testing some of his skibike products. (Courtesy photo)

## Skibikes entertain athletes young and old

**S**it or stand. Either will do. Lets talk about those eye-catching bicycle-like devices people ride down the ski mountain each year. They are few and far between, but it can be a tantalizing prospect when a different way to cut powder comes along.

Skibikes allow riders to continue the winter sport they love without putting stress on their knees. They're not just aides for physical limitations, however. They also can be equipped for even the most daring riders.

### In the beginning

Don Koski, owner and manufacturer with Koski Snowsports, was the on the ground floor of the introduction of suspension amenities seen in modern skibikes. Working on motocross and mountain bikes in the San Francisco and Oakland bay area, Koski was inspired to test prototypical models at Homewood Mountain Ski Resort in Lake Tahoe West Shore.

Koski has been building skibikes for about 43 years, he said.

"We opened a bike shop in 1970 in California," Koski said. "I had seen skibobs with the foot skis and bent over models with skis attached and use your feet as outriggers."

When the movie "Help" featuring The Beatles came out, they were riding skibobs, which were the primitive form of skibikes.

Koski said he began to look into the feasibility of building skibikes and contacted people who knew of the Swiss and German versions.

His inspiration began to combust, and he found that it was possible to add suspension to the front and back of the bikes.

"We all (in the shop) knew how to weld, and I thought, 'You know what? I can build a better one,'" Koski said. "So I built my first with back suspension and brought in front suspension. We took it to a whole new level and produced trick bikes as well."

Koski also attested to the ease of learning how to ride skibikes.

Going down a slope, "They're the simplest besides tubing or

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One of the first Koski models of skibikes, pictured in front, did not have front suspension. Today, Koski makes his skibikes with rear and front suspension. (Courtesy photo)

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sledding," he said. "Since I brought the sport into high-end technology, most of the new manufacturers (today) are all going with full suspension and riding it more like a mountain bike or motocross. You steer with the front and slide the back. The learning curve I'd say takes about 30 minutes."

It is an inviting and inclusive sport, he said.

"One of the great things is with blown-out backs or knees, you can stand or sit, and it allows people with disabilities to get on the mountain," Koski said. "You can go as slow or fast as you want."

Koski said the world speed record is about 131 miles per hour, and he has been able to clock bikes at about 72 miles per hour. He also said the bikes can stop fairly quickly and can be controlled without having to crash.

Using small skis or putting your feet on the pegs are the two ways to ride the skibikes.

"It is going to sell a lift ticket and get people on the mountain," Koski said. "One of the great aspects is you have people with handicaps, and it opens a whole new world."

Koski said he once had someone call him whose son had a bad infection. He could only move his leg back and forth about an inch or so. But after learning how to skibike, Koski said, "His dad hadn't seen his son so happy in four or five years. The people who are involved in it are very dedicated."

Koski said he hopes larger sporting venues such as the X-Games will

pick it up, but he said the sponsorships are not coming around.

#### American SkiBike Association

Melanie Kimball, vice president of the American SkiBike Association and owner of SkiBikeFun.com, was introduced to the sport about 10 years ago. When she and her husband, Randy, looked into the sport, Randy started seeking ways to sell skibikes.

"Randy went to the first Ski Bike festival in Durango and took the lessons and fell in love with it instantly," Kimball said. "He wanted to figure out how he could start selling the skibikes. We started selling conversion kits, and Randy scoured the web to find companies. We would bring in a shipment if we liked them."

Kimball said that the American SkiBike Association plans to do demonstrations at Sipapu Ski and Summer Resort the first weeks of January and February.

"We have found that on skibikes that the learning curve is much faster than skiing or snowboarding," she said. "We show them how to ride at the base, then take them down the mountain from a tour in case they have problems turning or things like that."

Kimball said there is an estimated 98 percent success rate for people learning the proper techniques.

"It's really rewarding to see people get back up on the mountain," Kimball said. "When we started, we thought we'd be marketing to children. But our poster child is 83 years old. It's a great sport. Randy and

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Above: A man rides down the slopes at Sipapu Ski and Summer resort on a skibike during opening day. The resort hosts multiple ski bike events throughout the year. (Photo by Eric Heinz) Below: Don Koski sits with one of his skibike models in front of a chair lift in Hoodoo Mountain Resort in Sisters, Ore. (Courtesy photo)



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I have invested all our time into it."

During the summer, Kimball said, they focus more on ordering supplies for the start of the season. With duties of the American SkiBike association, that fills up time, too.

### Living proof

Carlton Harrand, an 82-year-old Korean War veteran, still enjoys the thrill of the slopes. The problem is his knees think otherwise.

When he was introduced to the skibike, he had some trepidation about the thought of riding a bike down a ski slope.

"About the time I was 75, my knees were giving out from alpine skiing," Harrand said. "My oldest son said, 'If you want, I'll fix you up with a skibike.'"

Harrand's son bought a conversion kit to turn a regular mountain bike into a skibike.

"So I went up, and I actually found out that it's very easy to learn," he said. "If you have skied before in your life, you can learn to do it the first time. You have to kind of take it easy, but there's really no learning curve to it. You can go right ahead."

Since he got into the sport, the Kimballs have named Harrand their "poster child."

It may be that he's confined to the easier slopes, but he still finds the adrenaline rush from the speed he picks up.

"I'm 82, I've been doing it for seven years, and it's given me a new lease on life as far as skiing is concerned," he said.

Harrand wears "shortie" skis in order to give himself four points of stability on the ground. This also helps him get off the chairlift instead of running and more control during busy and congested ski days.

"I don't use them if I don't have to," he said. "I'll be up on my pegs. But it also helps me to get off the lift. Otherwise I'd have to run. The key for me is to keep as much weight off the knees as possible."

It's not as though he's not getting a workout, as Harrand still uses muscles in his legs to control the bike.

"If I go down the more challenging (slopes), I find that it does give a workout to my knees," he said. "I have to make turns constantly on the more challenging runs. I spend most of my time on the easy trails like 'Heading Home'" at Angel Fire Resort.

Because he is retired, Harrand said that there are days where he can be on the slopes by himself.

"Anybody who has reached a point where their knees are giving them trouble, they should give it a try," Harrand said. "I think they would find that it extends their ski life."

Additionally, Harrand said he has never fallen on his skibike except for two times when a snowboarder was out of control and clipped his bike. But he was still able to stay on his feet.

Harrand said he was able to get in 45 skiing days two years ago and about 25 last year.

"In seven years, I haven't ever gone down on my own," he said, "but I am very careful about it."

It doesn't seem as if Harrand will slow down anytime soon.

"There was one day where I was really zipping along, and this woman came up to me and said, 'You're having too much fun,' and I said, 'You're right,'" Harrand said. "I think it's just as much fun as regular downhill skiing."

If you are interested in skibiking, call the ski area you wish to visit to make sure they allow bikes on their slopes. For more information and official dates on Sipapu skibike events, visit [www.sipapunm.com](http://www.sipapunm.com).

— Story by Eric Heinz