

# UTAH ADVENTURE JOURNAL



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# Hell on Wheels

## Learning to Ride a SkiBike

By Michelle Mulder

SLIDING ON SNOW, in any form, is a good time. Going downhill on a bike is also a good time. Therefore, when I got word of skibiking going on in the Wasatch I had to check it out. I was able to meet up with Jim Cameron from Utah Ski Bikes, who gave me the lowdown on the rig and gave me some tips on riding.

Jim is a great guy to be in this position. He's worked in the ski industry for 35 years, doing everything from working in ski shops and resorts in Utah and Colorado to skiing all over the Wasatch, to being a product manager at Fischer; and he loves to ski. We met at Park City Mountain Resort, one of the local resorts that allow skibikes.

The skibike incorporates a simple bike frame without wheels, which instead slides on a front ski and back ski. The handlebars initiate the turn and the back ski follows it through to complete the turn. I was initially intimidated by the fact that Jim asked me what kind of boots I had (ski or snowboard) because he wanted to make sure that he had bindings to accommodate my footwear. Nothing about being strapped into a metal frame and sliding downhill sounded good but I quickly learned that the bindings were for mini skis that work like training wheels, and a simple snow boot would have worked just fine. The next intimidating part is the chairlift. Luckily the staff at PCMR is familiar with the skibike scene and allows each bike to count as a person, which allows for plenty of space. I was able to load the lift just like a normal skier and simply load the bike on my lap. This was easier than I thought; the skibikes are actually light (just under eight pounds) and easy to manage. They also have safety straps that can attach to the chairlift.

Speaking of safety, I was also worried about the injury potential of these bad boys. Luckily, the low center of gravity means that the impact of any fall is significantly reduced but the previously mentioned mini-ski training wheels make it very easy to stay upright.

We started with a few easy green runs and eventually bumped it up to blue runs. Being that I've skied and snowboarded before I had a decent concept of how edges on snow work but I'm sure that jumping on a skibike would be simple, even for someone who isn't an advanced skier. It's much easier than skiing, and learning to ride a ski bike was far less painful than learning to snowboard. It's perfect for someone who wants to get on the slopes but isn't a confident skier/boarder or who wants to try something new. It's also a nice rest day activity if your legs are sore from skiing.

My next question was whether or not people were getting these bikes into the terrain park and of course, they are. Apparently people are getting rad, sliding rails and hucking backflips. Brighton is especially hip to ski bikes in the park, sometimes has a skibike specific jib park, and will be hosting a ski bike demo day February 13<sup>th</sup>.

One problem skibikes currently face is getting into resorts, similar to the way snowboarding was (or still is) rejected at resorts. Besides Brighton and PC, skibikes are welcomed at Snowbasin, Sundance, Beaver Mountain, and Brian Head. There is also a national association for the sport to promote and grow



the sport, increase rider safety, promote competitions and increase rider safety, awareness, and improve access to ski areas for adaptive and non-adaptive participants in the sport.

After a couple of groomed runs I was feeling fairly confident so it was time to jump off piste and into the powder. Jim warned me to keep my tips up, which I was promptly reminded of when I dug my tips into the pow and came to a haul which was the closest I came to falling off of the bike. One tip is to lightly squeeze the seat with your legs, which helps keep your feet (those handy training wheels) parallel with the front ski.

Riding on the lift with Jim I got a chance to hear details about Utah SkiBike. He and his partner Todd Marriot are both snow enthusiasts, and while there isn't an actual rental shop, they are happy to bring rental gear to your desired location. The guys at skibike are even available for tutorials or what they call "ride-a-longs" in which they educate riders about responsible riding, how to get on and off the lift properly, and the basics to control the skibike. "We ride with our customers until they feel comfortable and in control," said Jim.

As the day went on I was starting to feel real good about this skibiking thing. I was surprised that this method of sliding on snow is fun, and easier than I thought which makes for a great self-esteem builder... Then Jim's partner Todd showed up, and that he might want to "step it up a notch". That he did. My first day on a skibike I was able to lap black diamond runs at Park City. This didn't happen without a little screaming, and rallying turns on steep pitches in the powder is very exciting. This is also very promising for anyone interested in giving it a go because if I can do it, you can do it.

I was amazed at not only how fun it was but at how well received the ski bikes are. If I had a dollar for every time a skier, boarder, grom, or parent came by and said, "check out the skibikes" or "that looks rad", I'd have enough to buy my own. ♦

For information regarding rentals, lessons, or to purchase a ski bike check out the website at [utahskibike.com](http://utahskibike.com).

