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Snowboarders beware: Test rider Pete Loncarevich had so much fun riding a bike equipped with the Ski Bike/Flat Tires conversion kit that he said he would be willing to pay money to ride it again.



M O U N T A I N

# SKI BIKES!

test-ride ski bikes from Ludwig Sno-Bikes and Flat Tires.

Ludwig Sno-Bikes are ready-made, ground-up designs, and the less-expensive Flat Tires are special skis that mount up to the fork and rear end of your existing mountain bike.

## GROUND-UP DESIGN

### RIDING THE LUDWIG SNO-BIKE

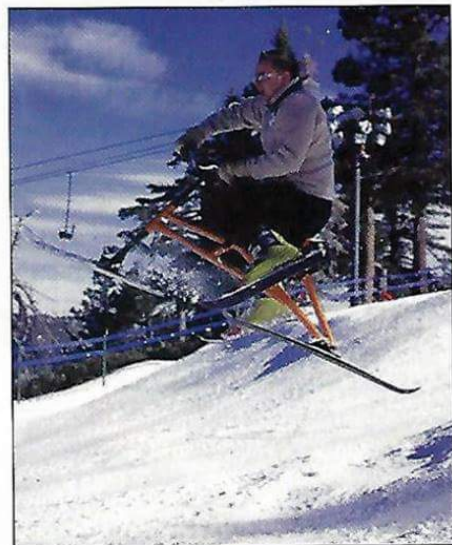
By Roman Roth

● It's a Friday night and I'm sitting on the couch in front of the television when the phone rings. It's John Ker, the MBA wrecking crew's photo meister. He wants me to test a bicycle that you ride on snow. That's life as a wrecking crew test rider. One minute chilling in front of the television and the next chilling on the ski slopes. We showed up on the mountain Saturday morning and met Luke Von Maldeghem, the designer of the Ludwig Sno-Bike.

#### WHERE ARE THE PEDALS?

I'm ready to ride, but Luke tells us we have to put on ski boots so we can ride the bikes. He pulls out two skis that are about a foot and a half long. Hey, that's not so bad, I think.

Here's exactly what Mr. VM told me in a nutshell. You turn it like a real bike, but a little more exaggerated. You stop by plowing your feet like on real skis or slide the bike sideways and dig the rail



**Air time:** Jumping the Sno-Bike is a little scary for novices, but for an expert like Luke, it's a cinch. He estimates that he's gone over 70 mph on his invention and has gotten as much as 15' of air. We don't doubt it. The things are FAST!

The first time the world saw a snow bike was in the '60s Beatle movie *Help*. The four young Brits with salad bowl haircuts rode around on funky looking bicycles with small skis in place of wheels. Despite the promotional push that movie gave the devices, ski biking never really caught on. More recently, moviegoers got a chance to see Leslie Nielsen riding a similar vehicle in *Mr. Magoo*. In Europe, Nielsen is far more popular than the Beatles, so it should come as no surprise that his

snow bike cameo in a third-rate film launched the genre. Two companies are riding the Nielsen wave in a race to capture a slice of the burgeoning winter recreation market.

Will ski bikes steal the slopes from snowboarders? Can traditional skiers stomach yet another alternative *schusser* sport? Or will ski bikes go downhill as fast as the street luge craze of the X-Games? MBA's snow detectives had a chance to find out. The wrecking crew ventured into our local mountains to

# CONQUER THE SLOPES

Two mountain bikes that you can ride on the slopes



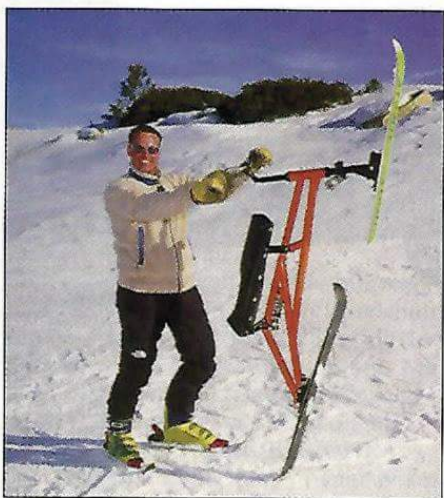
*Ride it like a bike: While skimming your tiny foot skis on the snow, you can corner the Sno-Bike like a regular mountain bike—only better.*

of the bike ski into the snow like a snowboard.

### IT'S TIME TO GO

When we got to the chairlift, I forgot everything that Luke told me about hitching a ride. I looked pleadingly at the chairlift operator as if to say, "Hey dude, can you stop this thing so I can get on?"

Instead, I hefted the 30-pound Sno-Bike onto my lap as John shoved me in front of the moving seat. At the last second, the chair gained altitude and my skis were clear. I was safe. I was happy for about ten seconds. High in the sky,



*Cool Hand Luke: Sno-Bike designer Luke Von Maldeghem shows off one of his full-suspension Ludwig Sno-Bikes. Note also the tiny skis on his feet. They offer both increased stability and improved maneuverability when riding. As one gets the hang of Sno-Biking, though, Luke says, it's best to use them less and less.*



*Up, up and away: Ludwig Sno-Bike's president, Luke Von Maldeghem, goes for big air at Snow Valley Resort near Big Bear, California. Snow Valley plans to rent out the Sno-Bikes to its customers.*



No climber: Flat Tire's Ski Bike conversion lowers the bike by about 6" and slices 2 lb. off the rolling (gliding) weight. Bungee cords hooked to the front and rear runners control ski attitude when the bike leaves the ground.

## SKI BIKES

and approaching the step-off point, I realized that Luke never told me how to get off the chairlift. The guy in the shack sees the fear in my eyes and stops the lifts. I can shoot off the chair like an errant piece of popcorn.

We are on top (actually we only went to the first stop on the lift). My first impression of the Sno-Bike was how easy it was to ride. I started out slow and stayed away from anything steep. That was cool. After about ten minutes, I had made it to the bottom. Brimming with confidence, I told Mr. Von Maldeghem that I wanted to go faster. So, up we go again, higher and steeper.

The second time down the hill was a snap. I remembered to get off the chair this time. It wasn't really like riding a bike, although I was sitting on one. My feet weren't clipped into the pedals. I wasn't pedaling. I was skiing on a bike.

### LET'S HIT THE BIG ONE

"Let's hit the big one," I said when we came to a stop at the bottom of the hill. "I want more speed!" Mr. VM seems thrilled that I'm enjoying myself, but John wants nothing to do with the top of the mountain. He says he will stick with the small slopes.

On the way up, I made the mistake of looking down. "Wow, that's pretty

steep," I said out loud. "I'm not sure I should be doing this." Once at the top, I'm instantly heading for the bottom—speeding down behind Mr. VM. Big mistake. He drops straight down the steepest part of the slope. That John is a pretty smart guy. All I can think is I'm going too fast. I'm going too fast. Then I shifted into mountain bike mode, relaxed my body and attacked the hill like I was on a real bike with wheels. I started apexing the turns and catching air off the bumps while dodging skiers.

I got to the bottom in a hurry. Whew, great fun! On the fourth run, I jumped into the snowboard obstacle park for a little more challenge. I was hitting all the jumps and berms with big air results. I couldn't believe how easy it was and how confident I felt.

### THERE ARE DRAWBACKS TO SNOW BIKES

The hardest part about my first day on a snow bike, besides telling all the snowboarders they couldn't ride it ("No, I'm playing with it now"), was pushing the bike to the chairlift. However, with some ski experience, this wouldn't be a problem. The bike has footpegs on the front, but it feels unstable when resting your feet there. I'm told those are mostly for getting your feet up on slow, flatter parts to decrease the drag. They are also used like a kickstand, so the bike doesn't slide away when resting it on its side.

The biggest drawback is the sticker price—\$2500 for the stock Sno-Bike and \$2750 for the full-suspension ride. The good news is that you can rent them at some ski resorts (like California's Snow Valley, Washington's Steven's Pass or Oregon's Ski Bowl at Mt. Hood) for \$30 a day.

### NUTS & BOLTS

Sno-Bikes are made in Canada by Yes Products, then shipped south to be assembled in Ferndale, Washington. The frame is heat-treated, 6061 aluminum and available with custom paint or a powdercoat finish. The bike's Atomic skis are custom-made for Ludwig Sno-Bikes. Right now there are only 80 Sno-Bikes in existence. Luke firmly believes the price of his creations will drop as the popularity of the new sport burgeons and Sno-Bike sales increase.

For further information contact Luke Von Maldeghem at Ludwig Sno-Bikes, 7056 Portal Way, Ste. 107C, Ferndale, WA 98248; (360) 366-5088. ●

**FLAT TIRES  
FOR YOUR BIKE  
BOLT-ON SKIS THAT RIP**

● Add-on skis for mountain bikes were brainstormed by cancer specialist John Stevenson and industrial engineer Jim Simpson, brothers-in-law who were also longtime ski and mountain bike bud-

# SKI BIKES

dies. The idea culminated after a few seasons of witnessing SoCal's Bear Valley Resort convert from the mountain bike program to the ski format. It made little sense to them that perfectly good bicycles were stored over the winter when all they needed were a pair of skis to convert them for use on the slopes.

Latching skis in place of wheels and bolting footpegs in place of cranks and pedals might sound like a recipe for disaster, but the two forged ahead (despite the heckles and guffaws their creation first attracted). Eventually, Evolution Ski Co. in Salt Lake City, Utah, took John and Jim seriously enough to help them custom-fit skis to a bicycle. The conversion kits were dubbed Flat Tires.

## POWDER HOUNDS

It takes about 30 minutes to convert any mountain bike into a ski bike. Step one is to remove the chain, cranks, bottom bracket and wheels. The skis include brackets that mount on the front and rear dropouts of almost any mountain bike using standard quick releases, and the BMX freestyle-type pegs bolt to the bottom bracket. Throw on some snow gear and hit the slopes.

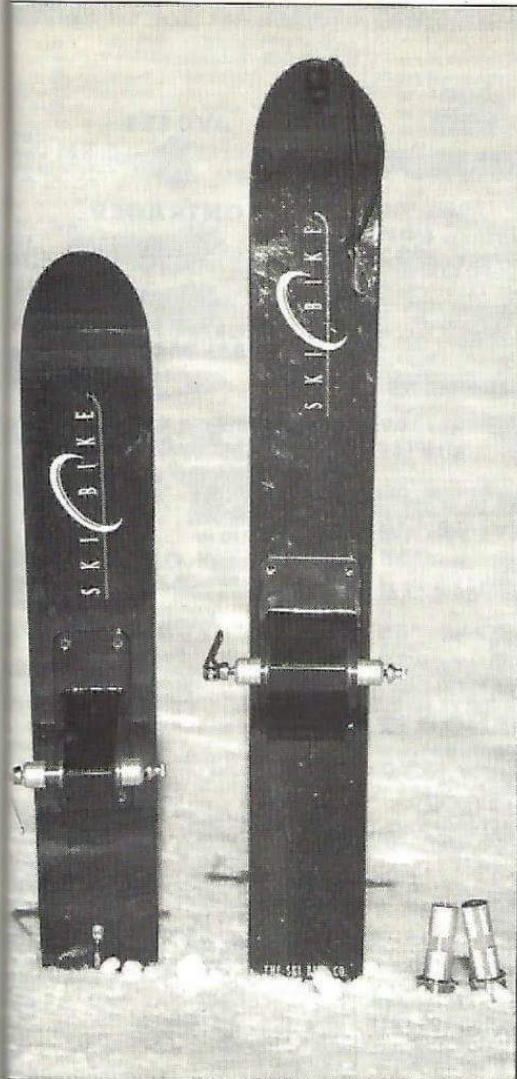
If you want to keep your limbs intact, it's best to first try the ski bike on more gentle runs. The first thing you will notice is how fast the ski bike accelerates. It glides through undulations in the snow with minimal fuss. Other than the effortless feel of gliding rather than rolling, it feels just like riding a bicycle straight down a hill. It's about this time that you realize just how fast you are going and that you have no brakes. Time for a ski stop! Don't turn with the handlebar, just lean the bike over onto the edge of the rear ski and slice an arc through the snow. The front ski will head in a direction relative to the rear ski. To stop, keep leaning on the rear ski and skitter the rear end out to scrub speed. Steering with the handlebar is effective until your speed picks up. Once you are motating, steering the handlebar causes the front end to push until it washes out completely.

## FREAKY CONTRAPTION

The Ski Bike is a freaky contraption that actually works. We rode the earliest version of the two-skied machine and found it extremely fun and relatively easy to ride, but more development is needed on ski shape. Skis with an exaggerated cutout in the sides



**Skiers beware: If you can ride a bike, you can ski a bike. Snow is soft and riders can expect to hang it out much more on the slopes than they would on dirt. Expect ski bikes to take the slopes by storm this year.**



**Flat Tires:** The kit incorporates a front and rear ski complete with pivoting quick-release bracket and two pegs that thread into the bottom bracket shell. Suggested retail is \$545, and the skis are available in multiple and custom colors.

might help the ski bike find a better edge in turns.

Test riders found that Flat Tires handled better on a full-suspension chassis. The rear-weighted handling bias compresses the rear and slackens the head angle, which better accommodates the current edging design of the skis. Work is also being done with the attitude control of the front ski so the front ski won't catch. Our riders had some problems with the front ski tip nosing down in the air, but the company claimed it would eliminate that problem with the production models.

As it now glides, the Ski Bike is easier for a non-skier to ride than either skis or snowboards. Our testers got right on and started riding them without trouble. The kit costs as much as buying a set of skis, is more fun to use and attracts much more attention.

The Ski Bike Co. can be reached at (805) 278-1011 or [www.skibike.com](http://www.skibike.com). □

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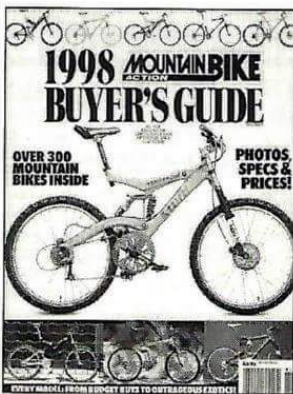
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