

A Few of My *Favorite Things*

As ski buffs dialed in to gear technology as much as on-hill technique, four Snowsports School instructors suggest the hottest gear for you from the 2009/2010 lines. :: BY BRIAN SCHOTT

Some of the best gear experts at Big Sky are professional snowsports instructors in the ultimate classroom. While these professors of snow are constantly honing their carving techniques, wisdom of the best gear follows naturally in their quest for the perfect turn. Being so focused on their own skills is how they can really see and feel the minute differences between this or that boot, helmet, or binding. It's also why the manufacturers often look to them to test the tools before the gear ever hits the shelves. So we tracked down four of Big Sky's leading "faculty" to let us in on their favorite 2009/2010 ski and snowboard gear using Big Sky Sports – a shop bubbling with the ingredients to cook up the best day on snow – as their laboratory.

In the pages that follow, these four instructors, with more than 100 years of collective on-mountain experience, share their equipment expertise for a category of skier or rider that they know intimately well from teaching them all season long. If you fit into one of these four categories, it's time to straighten up and pay attention. But don't worry; this is an open-book test. You can use this as a cheat sheet when you head over to the shop, where all of the gear highlighted here is available.

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Instructors (from top) Chris Jones, Aunge Thomas, Tom Marshall, and Matt Larson stay informed on the best tools of the trade.



(HEAD SHOTS) CHAD JONES

Masters of the *Mountain*

In the Master the Mountain program, longtime groomed-run skiers are pushed off the corduroy to learn how to ski the off-piste terrain for which Big Sky is famous. This gear, selected by Big Sky Adult Program Manager Chris Jones, will help make the transition flawless.

SALOMON IMPACT 8

Adopting practices from the prosthetics industry to mold the shell to each skier's foot, the Impact balances the flex and comfort enjoyed on groomers with the performance needed off-piste. Women's version: The Idol. \$635, salomonsports.com



AXIAL² WORLD CUP 120

A lighter version of Rossignol's World Cup model, this binding is durable and performs well over time – just ask the tons of Big Sky snowsports staff who ride them. \$350, rossignol.com



HESTRA ANJA PÄRSON PRO MODEL

The outer layer of this short, supple glove for women is made entirely of cowhide aniline, featuring a tight fit and outseams to add increased comfort and a perfect and firm pole grip. \$125, hestragloves.com/



SALOMON X-WING STORM

Jones says this forgiving and softer model has been a star at ski tests, featuring an early-rise tip so the ski doesn't dive when in deep powder. \$975, salomonsports.com



About the Expert: Chris Jones

Jones, 34, started skiing when he was 2 years old and essentially grew up in bindings at Stevens Pass in Washington's Cascades. After graduating from Montana State, he competed in freeskiing competitions in Europe and

North America and then launched his ski school career in 1989 that has extended from Washington to Germany. At Big Sky since 2001, he's also a member of the Professional Ski Instructors of America (PSIA) Northern Rocky Mountain Demo Team.

Kid *Rippers*

Big Sky has scores of beginner trails to hook kids on the sport for a lifetime, including the famous three-mile-long Mr. K. These essential tools and the right teacher – like instructor and expert Aunge Thomas – will make their first experiences as fun as they are effective.



YOUTH COLDGEAR UA BASE 2.0 CREW

Aunge says a base layer that is warm and soft but also low-profile, like this quilted medium-weight top, is key for kids so layering doesn't become bulky or uncomfortable. \$40, underarmour.com

OBERMEYER CARGO PANT

Coated with a water-repellent fabric protector, these sporty pants are breathable and durable enough for kids who get into everything on and off the slopes. \$80, obermeyer.com



GORDINI QUILTED TODDLER MITT

The sidewall-length zipper allows for easy entry to fit little fingers without a struggle, and the flexible fabric with ultra-soft micro fleece keeps their digits toasty. \$18, gordini.com



GIRO SLINGSHOT

An internal adjustment system allows this helmet to expand so your kid won't outgrow it in a year. Removable padding adds different layers on colder or warmer days. \$60, giro.com



About the Expert: Aunge Thomas

The 27-year-old started skiing at the age of 3 at Bogus Basin and honed her race skills through high school out of her hometown of Boise, Idaho. When she graduated from Montana State with a civil engineering degree in 2004, she

decided it was too early to start such a career, so she postponed “real life” for one season to begin teaching part time at Big Sky. Five years later, she is teaching children full time and training to become a PSIA clinician.

(HEAD SHOT) CHAD JONES

Peak *Experts*

Lone Peak is the ultimate calling card of Big Sky. And Tom Marshall, celebrating his ninth season with the mountain this winter, loves increasing skiers' confidence to make the tram's expert lines not only accessible but unbelievably fun. If that's you, here are Marshall's equipment suggestions to maximize the experience.



ROSSIGNOL S7 CABALLERO

With stunning art on the top sheet, twin-tip construction has been combined with a new rockered, reverse sidecut shape that makes the ski wide at the tips (so it will float in powder) but then still features a sidecut underfoot (so you can carve on groomers). \$1,100, rossignol.com

PATAGONIA MEN'S SIDEWALL JACKET

This technical two-layer hard shell with a waterproof barrier helps combat wind whipping off the mountain; the removable hood and neck gasket hold your heat and easy-access pit zips let it out again. \$275, patagonia.com



ORTOVOX S1

One of the quintessential lines in big-mountain skiing is the Big Couloir – but you'll need backcountry gear for the descent. This avalanche transceiver gives an easy-to-understand overview on the display and includes a compass, temperature information, and inclinometer. \$530, ortovox.com



SMITH PHENOM

Marshall likes the versatility of the Phenom's Platinum Mirror lens: The coating kicks back the sun on bright days, while the platinum rose lens tint increases depth perception during snowstorms. \$140, smithoptics.com



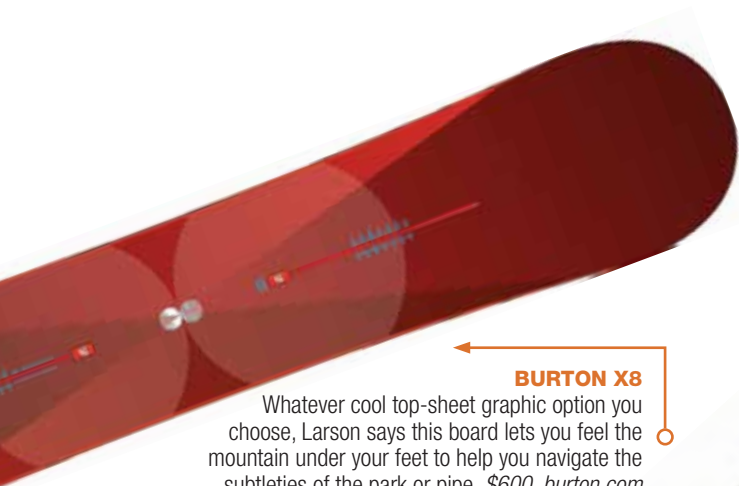
About the Expert: Tom Marshall

A Bogus Basin ski native, Marshall, 30, headed east to race for Dartmouth College's Nordic team. After graduation, he opted for skiing year round, spending

summers at New Zealand's Mount Hutt and winters back at Big Sky. He's sponsored by Rossignol and Patagonia, and is a member of the PSIA Nordic Team.

Park *Acrobats*

No group of riders puts their gear through more than the terrain park set. Add the rocky spires of Lone Peak to the mix and you'll know why Minneapolis native Matt Larson buys a new board each season. A freestyle educator, he's intent on giving riders the best park and pipe skills, but just like his favorite gear here, he also looks to extend it to the tram on a powder day.



BURTON X8

Whatever cool top-sheet graphic option you choose, Larson says this board lets you feel the mountain under your feet to help you navigate the subtleties of the park or pipe. \$600, burton.com



PATAGONIA MEN'S DOWN SWEATER

This lightweight underlayer delivers warmth without the bulk, leaving you feeling unrestricted and free when spotting a landing or on crucial takeoffs. \$200, patagonia.com

BURTON RONIN AUDIO STROLL DOWN JACKET

Compatible with your pick of headphones and MP3 player, the Ronin keeps you warm with 550 down fill, while still rolling with a little style. \$420, burton.com



DAKINE COBRA GLOVE

Boarders put their gloves to the test, and these tough leather palms stay flexible in the cold. Gore-Tex keeps them dry; articulated fingers make them comfy and warm. \$80, dakine.com



About the Expert: Matt Larson

Larson, 28, built his years at Montana State around a dedicated twice-a-week morning class schedule so he could feed his snowboard habit seven days a week (including the afternoons of his class days). Completing his eighth season at Big

Sky in 2009, he serves as a Rocky Mountain Division freestyle educator for the American Association of Snowboard Instructors and he's working on a proposal to build a team of freestyle coaches who would travel the country teaching park skills and safety.

(HEAD SHOT) CHAD JONES