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The Ski's No Limit



Isabel Bohn with her outriggers.



With the help of voice commands (1&5), a bamboo pole (2), a mono-ski (3&6), and a bi-ski (4), these teens can flow with the snow.

CEREBRAL PALSY, BLINDNESS, AND A MISSING LEG CAN'T KEEP THESE TEENS OFF THE SLOPES



1



2



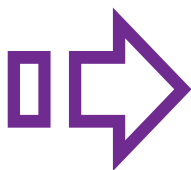
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5



4



You adjust your goggles and whoosh down the mountain toward the ski lodge. As you zigzag through the powdery snow, mysterious triple tracks catch your eye. Who—or what—has made them?

A woman is standing at the bottom of the slope where the strange tracks end. You can't help but notice: the woman has only one leg.

She is Isabel Bohn, director of the Pennsylvania Center for Adaptive Sports. She spends winter weekends at Camelback Ski Center in the Pocono Mountains. Isabel is an amputee, having lost her leg in an accident at age 11. She describes how she is able to ski with only one leg.

"This is an outrigger," she says, holding up a crutch-like device. She pulls a cord that releases a mini-ski on the tip of the crutch. "I ski on my one good leg, and use a set of these outriggers for balance and support." This is called "three-tracking."

It's a bit like skiing with training wheels. It also explains the three tracks in the snow.

As long as there is a "can-do" attitude, Isabel explains, people with disabilities are able to ski with a variety of adaptive equipment. Meet three teens from the Camelback program who haven't let their disabilities keep them from making serious tracks.



Ryan Kerr stays cool on the slopes with a mono-ski.

Karin

ROUNDING THE BEND IS KARIN

HITSELBERGER, 16. Most days she gets around in her power wheelchair. But every weekend in the winter, you'll find her zooming down the snowy mountain.

Karin was born with cerebral palsy. Her disability leaves her with limited use of her arms and legs. Her parents and siblings are all skiers, and Karin was not about to miss out on the fun. For the past 10 years, she has participated in the adaptive ski program.

The bi-ski is used by skiers who have limited strength in both their legs and upper bodies. It differs from a mono-ski in that it is fitted on top of two skis instead of one, for better balance. Its bucket seat provides full body support. A trained guide holds onto straps connected to the bi-ski, like reins on a horse. The guide follows behind to help control the skier's speed and stops.

"The cool thing about the bi-ski is that, in spite of my disability, skiing is a sport I can fully participate in with my friends and family," says Karin. "I don't have to settle for being a spectator."



Ryan

SPEEDING DOWN THE SLOPE IS

16-YEAR-OLD RYAN KERR. When he lost his leg to cancer, he refused to give up his favorite sport. Ryan now skis with a device called a mono-ski.

Mono-skis are designed for people who have lost the use of one or both legs, but have strong upper bodies and arms. It enables Ryan to ski with total independence, much like any other skier.

"It has a bucket seat which is fitted on top of a single ski," he explains. A pair of outriggers assists him with stops and turns, the way ski poles aid regular skiers.

Ryan also plays sled hockey, another adaptive sport. "It's like a mono-ski, but with ice-skate blades instead of a ski," he says. "There's a lot of equipment out there for disabled athletes."

Karin Hitselberger on a bi-ski.





Ben Vercellone (left) with his dad, who guides him with his voice.

Ben

ZIPPING DOWN THE “BLACK DIAMOND” SLOPE IS BEN VERCELLONE. Ben is an able-bodied 18-year-old. He is blind.

When he first learned the sport, two guides each held an end of a special bamboo pole while Ben grabbed the center. All three skied down together, as the guides directed him and controlled the turns.

As he gained confidence, Ben began to feel limited by the bamboo pole. “I wanted more independence,” he says. So a few years ago, he traded the bamboo pole in for regular ski poles. His guide taught him to descend the mountain with only the aid of voice instructions.

A number of different techniques are used to verbally guide blind skiers. Ben prefers a “grid” system. The width of the slope is divided into imaginary

sections, with 0 being the far left edge, 10 the far right, and 5 the middle. Ben listens as the guide, skiing behind, continuously calls out location. If he hears “two” or “eight,” he knows he is getting close to the edge, and turns the other way. A series of “left, right” commands also directs Ben around other skiers or obstacles.

Meanwhile, Ben and his father invented a set of helmets with two-way radios to help them communicate. Ben listens through receivers in his helmet as his father, skiing nearby, transmits directions to guide him down the mountain. Now Ben freely zips down even the most challenging slopes.

When asked what he likes most about skiing, Ben echoes the sentiments of other disabled skiers: “The freedom,” he says. ■

Dig Deeper

READING COMPREHENSION

1 How does Ben Vercellone ski?

- (A) with a bamboo pole
- (B) with voice commands
- (C) with a mono-ski
- (D) with a bi-ski

2 What is an outrigger?

- (A) a ski lodge
- (B) someone who works as a guide
- (C) a crutch-like device with a ski
- (D) a disabled skier

3 In addition to adaptive equipment, what else does Isabel Bohn say disabled teens need to ski?

- (A) a can-do attitude
- (B) sympathy from others
- (C) fear of new experiences
- (D) self-pity

Write Now!

Ben says that what he likes most about skiing is “the freedom.” What do you think he means by that? Write a paragraph explaining your answer. Then write an essay about something you’ve experienced that made you feel a sense of “freedom.”