

LEISURE & ARTS

Skiers Beware Riders of the Apocalypse

By ALEX KOZINSKI

Mark my words: 25 years or so from now your grandchild will climb on your knee and ask, "Hey, Grandpa (or Grandma), I heard that when you were a kid they used to saw snowboards in half and put one piece on each foot. Why'd they do that?" Stumped for an answer, you'll mumble something like, "It was a plot hatched by orthopedists."

Sound ridiculous? Don't be so sure. Children, unburdened by the prejudices and vanities of their elders, are voting with their feet and deserting skiing for snowboarding in droves. My sons skied for years, but now they're out snowboarding while their skis gather dust. Curious, I decided to give snowboarding a try, and that's the last my own skis saw the slopes.

Snowboards are here to stay and, like compact disks and touch-tone phones, they'll push out the outdated technology everyone thought was irreplaceable. Here are just a few reasons why:

1. Skiing is hard; snowboarding's easy. You can spend many years and the GNP of New Guinea on lessons and still be a mediocre skier, but you can become a darn good snowboarder in no time at all. Yes, that includes klutzniks; I should know.

2. Skiing mangles knees; snowboarding doesn't. Skiing is inherently dangerous because it requires you to strap each foot to a separate object. During a fall these objects often move in different directions, putting torque on the nearest joint—usually the knee. Quick-release bindings reduce the hazard, but highly debilitating, often permanent, knee injuries continue to be a major risk of skiing. Snowboarders (or, as they prefer to be called, "riders") seldom suffer such injuries because they keep both feet firmly attached to the same object. Riders do get injured from falls and collisions, but so do skiers. You can reduce such injuries by wearing a helmet and wrist guards, a wise move no matter how you propel yourself down the mountain. But no one has yet devised foolproof protection from the debilitating joint injuries caused by skiing.

3. Skiing is work; snowboarding's fun. Just watch any good skier and you'll see

his legs move as if they were disconnected from the rest of his body. This requires an immense amount of coordination and physical exertion; most skiers never get it right. Maneuvering a snowboard involves small shifts of body weight. This is not only more natural and graceful than skiing, it uses skills that can be practiced year-round in surfing, skateboarding, even bicycling.

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4. Skiers hate bad terrain; snowboarders don't care. Listen to skiers after a day on the slopes and you'll hear them complain about ice, moguls, granular snow, wet snow, etc. You seldom hear such com-

The Mobile Guide



Snowboarding

plaints from riders because snowboards are nearly as easy to use in bad conditions as in good. The only real complaint snowboarders have is about apres-ski whiners.

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5. Ski boots hurt; snowboard boots are comfy. Need I say more?

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6. Skiers look dweeby; snowboarders look cool. Most skiers look like overstuffed neon sausages or hearty Tyrolean yodelers who just rolled off the set of "Dumb and Dumber." The only ones on the slope who look like they're having a good time are the riders.

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7. Skiing is scary; snowboarding is exhilarating. Watch skiers as they approach a steep ledge. They hesitate, they survey the terrain, they pretend to be enjoying the view. What they're really doing is praying this isn't going to be the day they discover firsthand the miracle of arthroscopic surgery. Riders show no such hesitation because snowboards are designed to keep you in control no matter how steep, icy or mogully the descent. After less than a season on a snowboard, for example, I had no trouble handling any run on the back bowls at Vail.

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8. Ski equipment is a pain; snowboarding gear is a breeze. To go snowboarding

all you need is a snowboard, which you can sling over your shoulders as you head for the slopes. To go skiing, you have to walk from your car or condo in forward-leaning, rigid shell boots while juggling skis and poles. When you take a spill on the slope, all that equipment gets scattered about (a condition known derisively as a "yard sale"), and you then have to go chasing it, usually uphill. Your snowboard never leaves your feet, thank you.

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9. Skis clutter; snowboards are neat. An adult snowboard fits within the trunk of a Ford Taurus, and has a slim profile in a ski locker. Storing and transporting skis, poles and hard boots for a family of four is a job for Bekins.

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10. Skiers carry poles; snowboarders have free hands. One of the best things about snowboarding is that you don't always have your hands full. You can throw snowballs, take pictures, or just let your arms swing free. You don't carry poles in your daily life; why should you put up with them when you're having a good time?

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Skiers have learned to endure a lot of risks and inconveniences, but it all seems so pointless once you've streaked down the mountain on your Burton, without fear or pain, suspended almost weightless between snow and sky. It makes you laugh out loud and wonder, why do all these people split snowboards in half?

Skiing is history; snowboarding rules!

Mr. Kozinski is a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit.