

# Cool Running

BY DAVE HOWELLS

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRIAN C. GREEN

While snowshoeing has been around for centuries, it is most recently that its fitness benefits have come to the fore. And as some elite athletes have found, snowshoe running is a great way to supplement their training in the off-season.

**S**nowshoeing is the fastest-growing winter activity in North America, with 5.5 million participants in the United States. Many who once found themselves inside on long winter days now strap on a pair of snowshoes and hit the trails. Snowshoeing has many applications: backcountry travel, recreational hiking, and snowshoe running. Each has its own footprint, but snowshoe running has recently outpaced the other forms of recreation.

Peter Reid, three-time Ironman World Champion and 10-time Ironman winner, has joined the ranks of triathlon greats. Since becoming part of the tri race scene he has been an unstoppable force. Now retired from the professional circuit, Reid describes how he discovered snowshoe running: “Last winter my girlfriend was guiding the Yeti training runs on Thursday nights, so I joined her a few times. It was a lot easier than I thought, and it was a great way to complement my running.”

“Sometimes we need to recharge with other sports,” says Reid, “because all year it is constant repetition of the same exercises and drills. For me it was good to have a change in scenery and get out on the snow.”

Reid is not the only one to discover the benefits of cross-training with snowshoes. Andreas Hestler has been doing damage on the Mountain Bike World Cup cross-country circuit since

he first entered the sport in 1993. With a storied list of wins and podiums in Canada Cup Races, NORBAs, World Championships, World Cups, as well as an appearance in the 1996 Olympics, Hestler is one of the most experienced and talented racers to ever compete for Canada. “Coming from a cycling background, I am looking to do the least amount of damage to my body during the off-season,” says Hestler. “My first impression of snowshoeing was how forgiving the soft snow was.”

Kiara Bassaro agrees. “Snow running is great cross-training for cycling. The ascents are perfect for cycling muscles, and when you float downhill in soft powder the impact is low. It’s also a great cardio workout.”

The professional mountain biker and Olympian has proved herself on the World Cup circuit with numerous top-10 finishes. Bassaro took to the snow-covered trails for the first time last winter and enjoyed it so much that she signed up for the 10-kilometre Yeti Snowshoe Race at Mount Washington and Whistler.

“A cross-training application should round out your program providing you with a mental break from your main focus—for me, that is cycling,” explains Hestler. “I would snowshoe once, sometimes twice, a week, which provided me with a mental rest while still getting a great workout in. Our local mountains have hilly terrain, making it a very specific workout, which focused on lower body power, lots of leg, cardio,

and core, which contributes to my overall fitness during the off-season.”

Reid saw the immediate benefits as well. “Snowshoe running was a great way to continue working my running muscles in a completely different way—it was awesome,” he said. “I had a ton of fun while getting a great cardio workout in.”

Sure, it’s easy for great athletes to strap on a pair of snowshoes and have some fun, but can anyone do it? The answer is in the design.

Every sport has a breakthrough, a turning point in the direction of its growth. In 1990 Perry Klebahn developed a revolutionary new snowshoe as his thesis project for his graduate engineering degree from Stanford University’s product design program. He was granted the first patent in over 40 years for a new snowshoe. His innovations included the dual crampon design and spring-loaded suspension. These innovations helped revolutionize the sport of snowshoeing. These efficient, lighter, compact snowshoes have become increasingly popular throughout the world because of their improved performance.

But the innovation did not end there. All outdoor equipment has changed and developed with the introduction of technology and rigorous research; snowshoeing is no different. Just as a running shoe needs to fit and feel comfortable, the Atlas running-specific snowshoe must as well. Some of the >>



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Hestler's workout incorporates lower-body power, cardio, and core.

modern-day design features are a lightweight aluminum frame, reinforced fabric decking, a spring-loaded suspension, consistent stable flotation, articulation control, and an efficient crampon design, all providing high-performance snowshoe running. The Atlas Run weighs in at just over one pound a shoe. The idea of running is so thoroughly part of the design that the "wrapp binding system" that secures one's foot to the snowshoe is designed for a running shoe, not a hiking boot.

"I think anyone, not just top athletes, can benefit from snow running," says Bassaro. "You can choose your pace, it works all the muscles in your body, and it is a great opportunity to get outside in the winter. I think there is a strong tendency to move workouts indoors, especially in Canada. It doesn't require extraordinary skill or equipment, so it is accessible to a wide range of people."

The specific benefits associated with snowshoe running are still unknown, but studies have been done on resistance training and the benefits associated with adding load to a workout. The immediate benefits are well known to all the top snowshoe racers currently competing on the Yeti Race Series. "Added resistance compliments off-season cross-training with the results contributing to power, strength, and endurance." If you are looking to lay down a solid foundation during the winter, snowshoeing is the answer.

Snowshoe running definitely inspires real enthusiasm. "I am excited about snowshoeing this winter!" says Bassaro.

"This winter I am hoping to lead some Yeti group runs with my girlfriend and do some of the Yeti snowshoe races," says Reid.

At the end of the day, week, or season, we can't always be results focused. Any workout program can become regimented with results trickling down your brow and legs tight fighting the clock. One thing is certain, snowshoe running offers an escape to the outdoors with your friends on a beautiful winter day. Hestler said it best: "For me it's all about what puts a grin on my face. I bought a pair of Atlas snowshoes and a headlamp, and I can't wait to go for a shoe. Running the trails with some of my friends—that's for me this winter season!" ■