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### **A look at Alpine Touring bindings:**

There are a number of AT binding options available and valid reasons for choosing any of them. We'll give you the best reasons for buying each model that we carry.

The most popular is the Fritschi system which has toe and heel release, is a step-in, will accommodate either AT or Alpine boots, and does not require the user to get out of the binding when changing modes from uphill to downhill (or vice-versa). Because this system is so like an Alpine binding, it is easier for most people who started on Alpine skis and bindings to relate to.

Fritschi offers a couple of options. You can choose a binding that is lighter and more touring oriented (the Express), or a heavy-duty binding that comes with ski brakes and is stout enough for use on groomed snow (the Freeride). The Freeride is a bit heavier and more expensive.

There are two excellent alternatives available to the Fritschi, and they are functionally quite different. The Dynafit system is significantly lighter. Oddly enough, it has a better track record in durability (at least in our shop's experience). Many of the Canadian hut guides use them because of their reliability and lightweight. They often do 4,000 to 6,000 vertical feet a day throughout the winter when they are with clients... a pretty strong endorsement! There are a few things to be aware of with the Dynafit bindings. They require a boot that is compatible with the binding, and to transition from downhill to uphill, it is necessary to release from the binding and then reattach the toe. This is a little more problematic for people who don't use them very often. The toe of the boot is held to the binding by stepping into the toe mechanism, which closes crab-claw-like pinchers into small metal holes. This does take a bit of practice and is particularly tough in soft snow. One final thing: the toe piece can ice up in wet snow in such a way that prevents the "crab claws" from closing on the boot. As long as you know to clean the ice out in those situations it is not a large problem, but it can be very frustrating to the uninitiated. Put this in your column of "get familiar with your gear" before you go deep into the field.

Another excellent choice is a Silvretta binding called the Pure. This binding is between the Fritschi and the Dynafit in weight and offers the ability to use the binding with not only AT boots but some mountaineering boots as well. This is a particular bonus for people who like to backcountry ski and winter climb. Bear in mind that the release is extremely unreliable with any welted non-ski boot.

While all of the bindings mentioned are DIN standard, AT binding release is not as sophisticated or reliable as Alpine binding release. It is important to ski more conservatively in the backcountry for this reason, as well as the fact that you are a lot farther from medical assistance.

These are the major options and can cover just about any backcountry challenge that a skier (or climber) can throw at them!

Call us for personal assistance! (970) 925-2849

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