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A look at Alpine Touring Boots:

Like AT skis, we often get questions as to what the difference is between AT boots and Alpine boots. As with the skis, though they look alike at first, the differences are many. We'll walk you through them.

In our discussion of AT skis we mentioned that the forces on softer, backcountry snow are most often lower on the equipment. This allows the skis, boots and bindings to be made with either less, or less stiff, materials. This translates into benefits for the backcountry skier. Two immediately noticeable benefits are lighter weight and greater comfort.

Because you will be taking your ski setup into the backcountry under your own steam, you'll want to have it as light as possible while still hitting your ski performance expectations. With a lighter boot, you'll be more comfortable covering uphill terrain. You will also be more comfortable in the touring mode because the boots flex more easily. When you're skiing down in softer snow, you'll want a softer boot that will transfer the energy to your skis a little more subtly. This will lead to a more flowing ride. Having a softer boot on the uphill is also a great deal easier on the feet, legs and ankles.

So AT boots are lighter and less stiff (more comfortable). What else? There are a couple of other significant features. AT boots have a "walk" and a "ski" mode. The walk mode is accomplished by letting the boot pivot forward and back on the rivets that hold the cuff on. The cuff is sculpted a little differently than an alpine cuff in order to allow for more motion. A lever in the back of the cuff arrests the motion and gives a stable position for the ski mode. Most AT boots give the skier two options of set forward lean. On the other hand, Alpine boots have a fixed forward lean, which is fine for going downhill, but is darn painful when trying to extend your foot ahead of you while skinning up.

The last major feature of an AT boot that makes it different than an Alpine boot is its lug sole and the rocker, or longitudinal curve, of the boot sole. Since these boots tend to be used in the backcountry (more on that later), they need to have a sole that is suitable for walking on steep snow or rocks. And if you are going to walk in a boot, then it makes sense to curve the sole so that the walking motion is more natural. How "natural" does a person walking around in Alpine boots (with no rocker) look?

The sole and rocker have some effects beyond walking. These attributes affect the boot's interface with bindings. You cannot use an AT boot in an Alpine binding. With proper adjustment you can use an Alpine boot in an AT binding. Please see our section on AT bindings for more on this.

There are two things going on in skiing that blur the lines on AT boots. More and more people are skiing on-piste (in the resort) with AT gear. Some walk up, some are patrolmen and women who need them for their work, and some are folks that are just tired of the pain of Alpine boots. In addition, more difficult lines are being skied in true backcountry settings and more powerful AT boots are coming onto the market to meet this need. We now sell boots that are as stiff as some

Alpine boots and come with an interchangeable lug and Alpine sole. This allows the user to put them into either an AT or an Alpine binding as the need dictates. Remember, as power and stiffness goes up, weight goes up and comfort for touring goes down. As we say with so many of our products, the “best” one is not simply the most expensive or burly, but the one that fits your needs for the highest percentage of the time that you use it.

A word on fit: We advise folks that since the boots will most often be used in a backcountry situation, they should be sized a little roomier than one would fit an alpine boot. This can be adjusted to accommodate the actual use and performance level desired. An average fit (with a medium weight sock) would be with the toes just lightly touching the end of the liner.

The AT boots we have chosen will drive any of our skis well, but be aware that there are lightweight boots on the market that will not drive stiffer or wider skis adequately.

So dream big, but dream real and your feet will thank you!

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

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