

How to . . .

SCOTT PODMORE

Select best ski boots

SO YOU'VE hit the snow enough times to warrant an investment in some gear of your own and, of course, you quickly discover one of the most expensive items is a good pair of boots.

Not only will it smack you in the wallet (most brands cost more than \$300), but good-fitting boots are essential for enjoyable skiing or snowboarding, so tracking down the perfect pair is important.

But you're faced with endless choices and then there's the little issue of your budget. A good starting point would be to do a bit of background research through a place like Rhythm Snow Sports (www.rhythm.net.au) for an idea of what range of boots is available. But be warned: make the wrong decision and you could pay for it in more ways than one – and that includes wet feet, blisters, sore shins and friction in all the wrong places.

Snow fanatic Richard Neville should know all about it. The Victorian has fitted hundreds at the Snow Monkey store at Mt Hotham (www.snowmonkey.com.au) and other places. Having grown up on a farm, he says at the age of four his parents decided

“skiing was a good way of getting rid of me” and he soon found his ski legs at nearby Mt Buller. This led to work in resorts in the US and eventually the creation of Snow Monkey, a reputable snow and ski gear retailer.

“When looking at hardware (boots, skis, poles, boards and so on), you should definitely start with your boots,” Neville says. “Comfortable boots will make your snow holiday far more pleasurable. And make sure you get your boots from a retailer so that you can get them fitted correctly and have a reference point to go back to in case you need some adjustments. It also confirms your warranty.”

So what are the most important aspects to keep in mind? Neville says it's all about your feet.

“The correct length is critical,” he says. “While it may sound obvious, so many times people with wide feet are given a bigger boot. This causes problems straight away.”

Neville suggests foot beds, removable insoles that line and pad the foot.

“For the small additional cost, the difference is amazing. Foot beds (or



RIGHT FIT: Having boots fitted properly is the key to maximum ski enjoyment.

lack of foot beds) is a common error made,” he says. “Getting good, well-fitted foot beds in your boots will improve the comfort and performance of your boots.”

The snow lover also says socks are something often forgotten or overlooked when it comes to getting the right boot fit.

“Socks are so important for comfortable feet. A good sock – whether they be wool or hi-tech fabrics – is really important. I prefer wool as it is a natural fibre and the new socks on

the market now give great comfort and keep your feet warm,” he says.

Neville says there is no particular timeframe for when a person should upgrade their boots.

“Firstly, if the liner is very worn, you should look at replacing either the liner or the boot,” he says. “If the shell is damaged then the boots should be replaced. But boots are a very personal thing, so as long as you are comfortable in the boots and you are getting the performance you need, then the boots should be OK.”

Five tips to help with comfort

- Try before you buy. If you're keen to invest in a pair of ski boots, you should hire a pair and test them out. Find out whether you can hire the brand you're considering buying to see if they feel all right.
- Have your boots fitted correctly at a snow gear retailer.
- Buy foot beds (insoles) for your boots to help cushioning and stability. The minimal additional cost could make all the difference.
- Socks are important for comfortable feet. Check out woollen or natural fibres that keep your feet warm.
- Always transport your ski boots buckled. If you're heading to a local mountain, keep them secure in the car so

you're travelling by plane, use a boot bag you can carry on (and reduce your check-in luggage weight) or for seriously secure ski boot transportation, check out the Skboot bag (www.skboot.com), which features wheels and an extendable handle.