With thoughts of skiing and the Winter Olympics not far off, Kay Turtle reflects on some of the gloves currently available.

...and we shall have snow



Taubert's Free Ride Lady Pro snowboard gloves are designed specifically for women.

A cold wind doth blow, and we shall have snow and what will poor 'fingers' do then, poor things... a poem learned as a child in which I have substituted fingers for 'robin' seems a good way to begin a feature on the latest in winter, ski and snowboard gloves for winter. Having fingered my way through the ranges earlier this year, I have discovered that fingers need not freeze, no matter how cold or wet they get, provided the right gloves have been chosen for the sport involved.

Primaloft is an insulation material for glove fillings lighter than down from US manufacturer, Albany International, which keeps fingers warm even in the most extreme conditions. Already supplying some fifty glove manufacturers around the world, it is making a concerted stab at the European sportswear market, aiming to increase that number now that the company has added a new plant for Primaloft to its Italian factory near Venice. A saving on import duties and shipping costs should help to keep prices stable if not reduce them.

Traditional base

Many glove manufacturers in Europe look back on a long tradition in textiles and glove making, and from its early beginnings in Bohemia to the present day facilities in Bavaria, Taubert Textile GmbH is just one such company. By keeping its fingers on the pulse of sports development and creating new gloves as new sports and sports textiles appeared, Taubert is up-front on glove technology. Its Boarder Cross Key glove is not only equipped with the s-key system which can be programmed to open turnstiles on the pistes, but now, with the integrated chip, can be loaded via

the Internet opening turnstiles for up to four persons at a time. While over 500 ski regions world wide are linked to the electronic ski pass system (s-key), at the moment there are only a handful of sites in Austria which are able to accept Internet bookings on www.s-key.com, but it's certainly the way forward.

For the first time Taubert has developed snowboard gloves designed specifically for women which incorporate a special protection system. Until recently such protection restricted comfort in wear, but the Free Ride Lady Pro has a shorter splint than the male versions and an additional shock absorbing system (EVA) which forms itself somewhat to the shape of the hand. Finger tips and palms are Kevlar protected, a snowcuff is attached to the wider wrist band which can be pulled tight and fixed to keep out all snow and wet.

In a special ice climbing glove the company uses DuPont Cordura for firmness without rigidity and Schoeller KeproTec for those parts which come under particular stress. Linings are in Gore-Tex Direct Grip, the inside of the palm is covered in kid for more comfort and the outer side of the index finger is covered in a terry fabric for wiping goggles in difficult situations.

Mountain biking specials

Including no less than six new gloves for mountain bikers in its latest sports gloves ranges is Swedish manufacturer Hestra. Hestra began making gloves for lumberjacks back in the 1930s in leather, reinforced with rivets. While leather - still reinforced, but not with rivets - remains a favourite, times, procedures and demands have changed dramatically. The latest ranges are specifically designed for skiing, cross country, snowboarding, skating, climbing and hang gliding as well as mountain biking, in top technical materials. Hestra is one of the few companies which produces an integrated s-key in the junior lines in an Oxford fabric with Gore-Tex inserts and grip-enhancing Toughtek 6000 palm. The eight junior models also include one with a detachable inner glove, and another with two zips for easy handling

Whether for freestyle, freeride, backcountry or alpine, Reusch has the right gloves for every ride. Its high-tech line features tried and tested Ortho-Tec - a flexible protective splint which runs along the back of the hand to protect wrists from hyperextension and fractures - this can be removed if not required. The splint has been specifically developed with assistance from orthopaedic surgeons to reduce injuries in snowboarding. This glove comes with integrated s-key, and has a removable inner glove in Gore Windstopper.

Two newcomers of special note are "Razor", a boarder cross style, a slimmer glove with a sure-grip palm which comes in eye-catching colours, and "Carbon Boarder" which features outer covers of hard plastic for protection. For the womens styles, Primaloft is used for a new snowboard mitten which comes in a variety of feminine optics. Styles for the youngest enthusiasts depict stick men doing flips and spins. Functional garments for snowboarders are included by Reusch for the first time in its extended apparel range to include two jackets and one pair of trousers in a unisex image in monochrome red, orange, beige and khaki.

Its womens ski gloves are particularly fashionable, tailored with snug wrists, and include some extravagant highlights such as a turquoise and lilac coloured reptile look, and another with a colourful plush cuff. These come with fleecy, warm linings and/or Primaloft insulation.



Snowboard Rubbertek Junior by Hestra with detachable inner gloves.

Living up to its name the "Jurassic" style racing glove from Reusch, a glove for competitive pool use, features transparent, variously coloured appliques in blocks and claw-shaped raised areas on the fingertips giving them a dragon-like look.

Based in the lee of Germany's highest mountain, Zugspitze, Ziener of Oberammergau has glove testing facilities literally on its doorstep. The company caters to the extreme winter sports persons as well as fair-weather outdoor enthusiasts. Using ComforTemp, an insulation system based on phase-change technology fabrics from Schoeller, in its glove ranges, hands are warmed while standing around or riding lifts and do not overheat on exertion. Safety is an important feature and an ergonomically preformed rail with three-point fixation stabilises the wrist. A flexi-zone on the back of the hand, the easy-to-use fixing system ensuring high comfort and the reloadable chip s-key system are additional technical features.

Apart from those features the womens ranges benefit by Primaloft filling or Gore - Tex soft linings in attractive, fashionable, but functional, gloves and mittens for the slopes. The kids' ranges have special snow cuffs which can be easily pulled tight to keep out snow. Animal motifs enliven the youngest mitten styles while the Juniors go for block colour diagonals which naturally team with Ziener's kids clothing ranges, and some styles include the s-key system. The catalogue identifies simply and clearly the technical features used, describes their benefits and uses while showing the colourways available in such a way that both retailer and customer can quickly come to grips with the right product and team it through clothing and accessories if required.

Anti-loss factor

A novel, but also extremely useful, idea from Roeckl Sports gloves is the wrist loop - Keep-on-Hands. Worn around the wrist it ensures that gloves cannot just be dropped and lost. Also under the Keep-on-Hands label, many styles have a special rubber wiper on the index finger for wiping goggles. The s-key from Gore styles can be loaded via the Internet and WAP mobile phone system doing away with unnecessary queuing at ticket desks and turnstiles.

Catching the attention are Roeckl's snowboard gloves in animal look. Printed calfskin in zebra stripes or a brown bear look in cowhide are used in technically thought through gloves with preformed fingers tipped with Rubbertex which is also used on the sides for optimum grip. Gore-Tex inserts make them absolutely watertight while retaining good breathing properties - here again the wrist loop is specified.

For a new line in carving gloves Roeckl uses Outlast phase-change material which reacts to body temperature rising and falling during action and non-action phases, spreading the warmth around when and where it is needed. A new development here is also the sliding patch, an inner-hand hugging gel-cushion which protects against injury. The glove can be tightened with one hand through the Pull & Fit system, and the powder cuff keeps wrists dry.

Realising that not all winter sports enthusiasts are on the ski slopes Roeckl has introduced a new winter bike glove which has been developed to reduce the pressure and vibration stresses on the carpus (wrist) and hand edges which happen when two or three fingers are on the brake levers. A silicon gel is used for a thick cushion on the ergonomically designed inner hand which helps counteract vibration. A neoprene cuff helps regulate heat, hidden elastane on the outer hand is treated to withstand the influences of the weather, and light reflectors are an added safety feature.

Some of the most vibrant looking snowboard gloves come from Italian manufacturer Level spa. Its 'Freeride' and 'Under' lines have been extended and technically updated with silicone printed palms. Its womens' lines have been boosted to nine styles, all in Outlast phase change fabrics, constructed for the slimmer anatomy of women's hands. This company has used the technical advantages of ski gloves and fused these with the special design, materials and technical know-how necessary for snowboard gloves.

Education = Profit

Materials now in use for wintersports gloves are as technically state-of-the-art as any of the hardware products, and their advantages must be made known to the buyer by the retailer as well as the manufacturer. There is still much to be done to this end in the way of information spread via the media and at point of sales, which in itself means training of sales staff. Educating consumers may be a slow process but it is one which will, in the end, pay dividends.



Roeckl's new winter bike glove eases pressure on the wrist thanks to a cushioning silicon gel.