

Women's winters – warmer and more stylish

More women's products were on show at ispo than ever before - including better fitting lasts, and boots that are warmer. The day before the fair started the Volvo design conference concentrated on women's specific design as it is a growing part of the sports shoe and equipment market.

Women's feet get colder more quickly than men's. Ski boots are more and more technical, with warming systems receiving more comment and attention. Now you can buy ski boot warmers built into the boots, with remote control to adjust the heat (Thermic). Salomon has a special collection of ski wear and boots for women called 'women will'. Bindings are further forwards and heels raised slightly so women can get better control over ski tips with less leg muscle energy used. They are even fur-lined, too, like the ski helmets. Now fastenings are being looked at, the front buckle on many is further forward to have better control of the toe box area so that the foot can no longer slide forwards. Optically the plastic of ski boots is now emphasised with its natural translucence being made the most of in strong colours such as red, golden yellow or blue. Buckles are often in bright metallic aluminium or anodised in gold or bronze.

Snowboarding is not just a boy's sport any more—now there are decorated and pretty coloured bindings and lighter weight boots and boards for girls (Drake), and kids too. Recco is an avalanche rescue system integrated into clothes, and now also into the tongue of the new Vans snowboard boots—it is inert so lasts a lifetime. When someone gets lost under the snow, the searcher has a hand-held device which sends out radio waves, and the Recco module bounces back the signal to the hand-held device so the user can be located. This system is already in operation in most key resorts around the world.

 Salomon



And let us not forget the Après Ski collections – Moon boots are back again with rainbow 70s graphics (Tecnica) or pink white and silver (DC Shoes). Real fur is trendy; Harricana cuts up old fur coats in Canada and makes them into bags, boots and hats. And the imitation fur on the still immensely popular yeti and moon boots looks almost real. Real cow hair was used on polar expeditions long ago to keep feet warm, now Dolomite has recreated the old boots, for fashion.

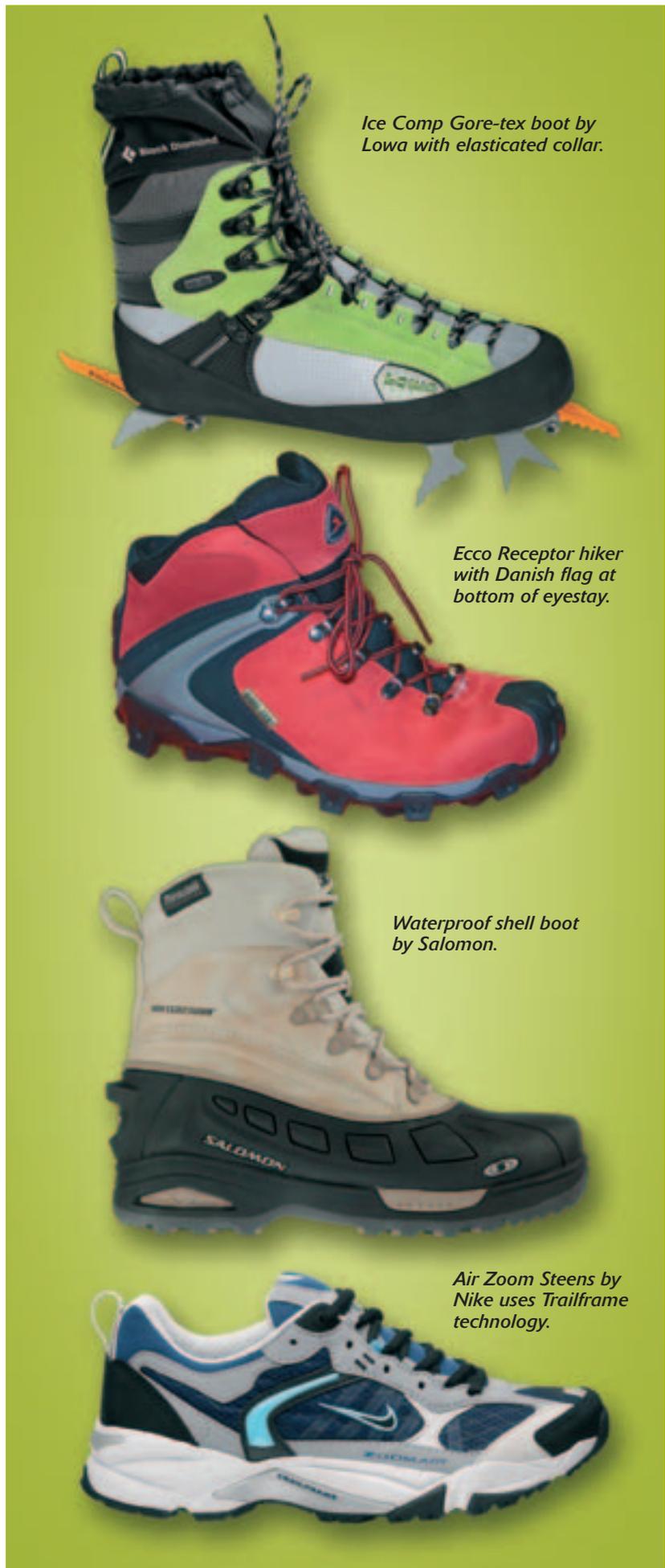
Merrell make men's and women's shoes that are similar in styling but different in construction. Its women's shoes have more shock absorption and a different last, holding the narrower ankle area better and with an improved closer fit across the instep. Icebug is introducing a woman specific last (and sole) for its Nordic walking and winter boots (with retractable spikes for icy ground). The heel is narrower and the instep shallower, but Swedish designer Eliza Törnkvist says that the toe box remains a little roomier specifically for the winter Scandinavian climate so that feet stay warm. Keeping feet dry in winter helps to keep them warm, membranes such as Gore-Tex are still going strong, but there is a return to the simpler styling of shell boots (Kamik) and also the look of shell boot styling with waterproof suppers (Salomon).

Sports footwear used to be just players' endorsements, but designers are now making their mark felt. Designer collections are everywhere: Stella McCartney's yoga range of clothes and shoes for adidas are soft, simple and reflect her own holistic lifestyle; US fashion designer Marc Jacobs has a special print line for Vans sneakers.

Nike showed new footwear technology at ispo for winter 2005. The visible Trail Frame technology is a moulded midsole which wraps around the outside of the sole for increased midsole torsion. The midsole is longer on the outside edge of the forefoot to help prevent the foot twisting on rough ground, while tapered forks at the heel dampen crash at heel strike, then stiffen when the weight shifts forwards again. This system has slightly different configurations for Nordic walking and trail running.

Spikes in the ice and snow are catching on, the new Nike Trail runners have hardened rubber spikes in the centre of the sole for better grip, and Ice-Bug has retractable metal spikes, while Lafuma's winter Ice Trek boots have tungsten carbide tips.

Ecco's new Receptor hiking boot has a Danish flag at the base of the tongue and a moulded stabiliser for lateral support. Bright red nubuck looks good. The Ecco Ultra X-treme Terrain has reflective dots at the back for night time visibility. The new Receptor trail running shoes have a lower line; smoother looking soles, for more close-to-ground stability – less danger of twisted ankles. Ecco is going to divide up the Ecco and Receptor brands soon, so as to keep them



Ice Comp Gore-tex boot by Lowa with elasticated collar.

Ecco Receptor hiker with Danish flag at bottom of eyestay.

Waterproof shell boot by Salomon.

Air Zoom Steens by Nike uses Trailframe technology.

separate, but use the technical information from the more sporty Receptor line to upgrade and modernise the street shoe Ecco collection.

Casual and sporty construction shoes – there were plenty of these at ispo. The Hi-Tec collection has technical lightweight (V-Lite) lace-up hiking boots with external stabilisers, inside zips and waterproof uppers, while the low level trainers in full grain leather have bound toplines and almost no padding – emulating trainers from the early 60s, just in brighter colours like red with green soles. Warm rich leathers are good for men's winter casuals, often on thinner gum rubber soles for plenty of grip.

Skate shoes have thinner soles and less tongue and collar padding. But they still need a selling point as the technology inside cannot be seen. Adio for example has nylon reinforcements hidden underneath the leather on the side of the foot, while Globe has more cushioning inside a simple looking rubber cupsole. Nation of Hoop from Munich has been a huge success with its simple designs and price around €80 retail, so all kids can play street basketball. They just have two basic designs with different material, colour ups and endorsements. They have won plenty of design awards.

Sporty kids

Kids are sporty and active too and need just as high quality equipment if they are doing the same sports activity as their parents. North Face's new shell boots in cute pink for girls have the same high spec as their mothers'.

Montrail's little girls rock climbing shoe (small sizes from 26-34) won the Volvo award as it has all the features of the adult climbing shoe including Gryptonite sticky rubber sole. These are serious climbing shoes (perfect for klatrevæg). The girl's shoes have printed flowers on the Velcro straps – the boy's version has flames. Kamik's shell boots are very strong in the smaller kids sector but once children get a bit bigger, they no longer want to look like their younger brothers and sisters. So, Kamik has made a very successful range of new boots that are not snowboarding boots but take styling elements from them. Style lines on the uppers are curved to emulate the lean forward of snow boots, but the boots are lighter, and fastening is an easy to get on and off touch-and-close. Snowboard-looking winter boots by Kamik are popular with boys who no longer want traditional shell boots in Canada when they get a bit bigger. These boots even look as though they are leaning forwards, like real snowboard boots, but come with easy Velcro fastening for boys in a hurry.

Up to now ispo has been very much a Munich-based show—but watch out, soon there will be ispo shows in other countries, including China and Russia. 



Carve V-Lite - Artisans by Hi Tec.

Nation of Hoop, German designed street basket shoes.

Merrel's kids range has expanded dramatically.

Grommet girls climbing shoe by Montail won the Volvo women's shoe award.