

GoFaster boot and binding system

With very few exceptions, the nordic ski world has not had many new products for the past twenty years. There have been many variations on current themes but not anything considered revolutionary; until now. Introducing the Go Faster boot and binding thrust system manufactured by ProSkate in Italy imported to the United States by Chi-town Sports.

When the clap style blade was introduced to speed skating world records fell faster than the opponents on the receiving end of a vintage Mike Tyson punch. By having the blade pivot beneath the toe, skaters were able to apply power much longer. They went faster and were more efficient. These same principles apply to any skating motion including nordic skis.



The GoFaster system was first introduced at the ISPO trade show held in Munich in February 2006. During the summer of 2007, Chi-Town began importing the GoFaster system and distributing them to a few lucky athletes and gear reviewers to gain some feedback and start creating a buzz. Fortunately for the masses, feedback was good and Chi-Town has started importing enough to give several retailers and ski centers a chance to show them to the public at large. Lucky for me I was able to get my hands on a set for review.

The Go Faster system was developed by Francesco Campardo, the owner of ProSkate. ProSkate has been designing and manufacturing race winning speed and inline skates for years and took this knowledge into the Nordic ski arena. ProSkate engineers started with a clean sheet of paper spending three years to develop a hybrid between a speed skate clap system and a nordic boot and binding. Everything is original and focused on Nordic skiing. The result of their effort is the Go Faster system.

ProSkate was not the first to attach a speed skate clap binding to a nordic ski. They are the first to design a purpose built clap style binding for nordic use. With a pure speed skate binding there is no simple way to separate the boot, binding and ski. The user must remove the boot from the foot in order to take off the ski. The GoFaster system uses a proprietary sole allowing the boot to remain on the foot in a more traditional manner.

In the US, the GoFaster system is being introduced through the racing market and is available through Chi-Town Sports and limited retailers. Contact Joe Gollinger at Chi-Town for more information or visit the website at www.morsnow.com.

Boots

The GoFaster boot is made in Italy on an Italian last. The sole is injection-molded polycarbonate and is extremely rigid in both torsion and flex. The sole wraps up the foot to cover the sides of the foot. The polycarbonate material thins becoming flexible where it stops just above the ankle. This wrap aids in keeping the boot rigid and also provides a large area for adhering the synthetic leather upper. A power strap attaches to the top of the polycarbonate material just above the ankle. A ratcheting buckle on the outside of the foot allows adjustments in 2 mm increments and can be actuated with gloves on.



The upper has an exterior synthetic layer sewn to an interior lacing and support system. The inner section is made from a neoprene style material which stretches to fit the foot and provides warmth. The instep and tongue are made from the same material with a .5 mm reinforced canvas stitched across the forefoot. The lacing system criss-crosses the instep with the reinforcement evenly distributing the lacing pressure. The laces are three-millimeter perlan cord run through webbing “eyelets.”



A speed pull lock is used to keep them snug. A zipper along the outer edge of the instep pulling the neoprene cover over the lacing system smoothing the look, adding support, warmth, and keeping the laces free of snow.

The same neoprene material comprises the cuff of the boot ending just above the ankle. The cuff is soft and there is no rigid support allowing full flex of the ankle. A power strap crosses the top of the forefoot and passes through a

ratcheting buckle and pulls the heel down and back into the heel cup.

The sole is one-piece injection molded and contains rigid tabs used to hold the boot to the binding. Inset to each of



these tabs are rubber anti-slip pads to aid walking when the skier is moving without the skis. These rubber pads are held in by screws and are replaceable should they wear. There is no flex in either torsion or fore and aft of the sole and it reminds me of a cycling shoe. The foot bed is thin, closed cell foam providing padding and insulation.

Binding

The binding is also injection molded from high impact resistance polycarbonate. The boot plate, the base plate and a return spring make up the three major pieces of the system.

The base plate in the review is held to the ski with five, 6 mm screws; one at the front, two just aft of the pivot, one each at the mid-foot and heel. The '08 uses 4 attachment screws and the weight has been reduced by 24 grams per binding.



The boot plate has a trapezoid shaped receiver for the toe tab of the boot and a square receiver for the heel. The rearmost edge of the square is a moveable slide capturing the heel tab of the boot.



This slide is coupled to a spring-loaded actuator used to retract the slide and release the boot from the binding. To enter the binding the toe tab is inserted into the trapezoid, which has good self-alignment properties, and the heel is pressed down and is locked into the binding. To release the boot a ski pole or finger presses the indent on top of the actuator and the heel can be lifted out.

The boot plate pivots around an 8 mm shoulder bolt. The pivot/hinge is beefy and provides most of the lateral rigidity of the GoFaster system. The boot plate has a heel tunnel which is tapered to reduce snow buildup and also covers a matched bump on the base plate for additional support when the heel is down. The pivot allows almost 45 degrees of boot movement.



An extension spring is secured to the base plate just ahead of the heel and attaches to the boot plate just behind the ball of the foot. The geometry of the anchor points has the most retraction distance and speed take place when the binding is at full extension and it slows as the binding closes. The action is fast and positive. The binding can be taken apart for cleaning or to replace any parts which become damaged.

Skiing the GoFaster System

One of the first things I noticed after taking the boots and bindings out of the box is the lightweight of the package. The boots, bindings and mounting hardware weight in at 1,500 grams. The GoFasters were mounted to a pair of 193 cm. Ski Trab Aero skate skis. Ready to ski the entire package weight just under 3 kilos.

The first snowfall of the year was 4 inches of light powder over not quite frozen ground. This condition can be skated with caution as too hard of a push compresses the snow allowing grass tops to grab the skis stopping them like a Navy fighter plane grabbing the cable for a carrier landing.

Because of the pivot and attachment system the skier on GoFasters sits almost an inch higher off the ski compared with a Solomon or Rottafella setup. The extra height and cuffless boot had me a bit nervous skiing for the first time in conditions almost guaranteeing a few ungraceful and abrupt trips to the ground. Essentially I was feeling the same sensations of impending doom as the first time I used rollerskis.

Hesitant at first and fearing a bout with instability I just double poled trying to get a feel for the system. The overriding feeling of dread went away after a few poling strokes. Right off I noticed a real sense of stability as I planted the poles and started to move. Next, the extra height kept my feet mostly out of the snow with less buildup and plowing then my neighbor Jeff (another ski junkie willing to brave the grass just for a fix) encountered. After 100 meters or so of DP, a few lighthearted alternate V2 strokes were

applied just testing the waters. With the ball of the foot pivot I expected a huge change in feel from the Solomon rig I had been using for years. Essentially, it felt very familiar. So far so good and I had yet to push into the grass so I stepped up the effort trying to find the level of effort which allowed skiing and avoided the grass.

With the even application of effort a light V2 worked the best. After 10 minutes I was dying to open it up and see how a race-level effort would feel. Bad idea as the first hard push stuffed the ski into the grass and stopped it cold. I stumbled and ran flailing like a large bird trying to gain flying speed although I was trying to slow down. During the flail, I was afraid of twisting an ankle. What I discovered was me running very surefooted with as good agility one can have with a 193 cm board attached to their leg. “&*\$@%,” I thought “these things are stable.” I abandon the idea of race efforts until there was a good, no grab, base and kept my easy V2. After three trips out and back of the runway (we were skiing a grass strip in Post Mills, Vermont) it dawned on me I had been chatting while spending no mental effort on my V2. In the past, when V2 skating I always felt rushed and not relaxed. Now, here I was in crappy conditions performing an action which normally makes me tense under the best conditions.

Examining the tracks revealed a long, straight and flat skate mark compared to the tracks left by other skiers. The first experience with the GoFasters was awesome making me enthusiastic about skiing in more realistic New England conditions.

The ski season of 07-08 has started in an incredible way. With the sudden arrival and abundance of snow it felt like I went to bed at Thanksgiving and awoke mid February. Late in November I skied the first couderoy and hills of the season at Garipey Field in Hanover, NH. The loop was a touch longer than 4 k and contains a good jag of short but steep hills and some nice flats for cruising.

The day was mid 20s with sun and little wind; the perfect winter day. I took it easy on the first downhill and onto the long flat after a sweeping left hand bend. Without any extra effort I stepped through the turn and broke into a cruising effort V2. 500 meters later is a short uphill and my first chance to climb on the GoFasters.

Here is where I noticed a different feel from a toe pivot system. The motion was similar to ankeling a bicycle pedal and felt more like I was rolling my foot over the length of the ski. The stroke was also a touch shorter than I was used to which made for a fast recovery of the ski.

The next section of trail is flat to slightly downhill so the speed is relatively high falling into the “should I pole or just skate” range. I decided to skate in a slight tuck before just letting the skis run in a full tuck while imagining myself a downhill racer. The skis felt solid and it was easy to keep them flat. When skiing across tracks left by other skiers my foot just rolled over the disturbances and there was a real feeling of stability.

The rest of the lap essentially cloverleafs a knoll on a golf course so the climbs have a slight twist both up and down before returning to the flats where I started. The downhills

were the second place I noticed an improvement from the toe pivot systems. The skis were super solid underfoot even when falling into tracks and berms left by snowplowing skiers. If there was ever a time to make me a believer in the lack of a cuff it was here on the downside of the hills. There was absolutely no problem with stability during high-speed turns in chopped snow.

Jump ahead 350 kms. skiing on the GoFasters. During this time I have skied in just about every condition a New England skier will encounter. Snow so cold (temps at dash 5F) and dry I was able to literally walk up medium steep hills as if I was classic skiing to skiing in a light shirt without gloves in 55 degree F temps. There was a day skiing in 4" of fresh wet snow on top of groomed to see if the bindings became packed full of snow. Some snow stuck but in no way impeded the action of the bindings. There was time spent skiing on refrozen mush where I was more of a slot car than skier as the skis found any groove and dropped in somewhat dictating where I went. A huge jump from the disconcerting conditions skiing on icy crap to a few days where I had transcended terrestrial bonds and spent a few hours in skier Nirvana (fast packed powder, bright sun and mid 20 temps with no obligations to cut the day short). I've sampled it all while skiing the GoFasters.

This time on snow has given me the opportunity to develop a few observations and opinions about the GoFaster boot and binding system. Essentially they ski similarly to a toe pivot system with two definite exceptions which are the superb stability and freedom of movement of your feet and ankles. They also feel slightly more efficient and I believe this stems from the stability so I was skiing in a more relaxed manner and was able to use the saved energy to propel myself forward. I also have a touch more glide while climbing and feel more efficient. The increase in climbing efficiency has been noted by skiers I have lent the system to for a demo ski.

I believe the stability comes from the pivot location being under the foot instead of in front of the foot. Sensory input from the foot is closer to the way we perceive it during everyday activity; from the balls of our feet. Pay attention to your feet the next time you walk or trot up a set of stairs. From where do you receive the input? While trail running your footwear does not have a rigid cuff for support. The shoes might be higher but there is nothing more than fabric adding lateral support. Most of the stability of walking on an uneven surface comes from allowing your foot to adapt to the ground. Ever try walking on uneven ground in a boot with a stiff sole and upper? Its hard to do since we have to adapt to new and unfamiliar input generated beyond our footprint.

The soft upper of the GoFaster boots also allows the ski to remain flatter for a longer period of time because the ankle has lateral flex. A flat ski is faster than one on edge. Coupled with the extra height of the binding, the inner support of the boot is strong enough to put the ski on edge when you want it to be there.

Will the GoFaster boot and binding take the average skier and give them World Cup speed? The short answer is no. Take two comparable skiers, one on GoFasters and the

other a toe pivot system with all else being equal and I firmly believe the GoFaster skier will consistently have quicker times.

One question I receive during my glowing reviews of the system is it can't all be this good. What's the downside? The biggest detraction of the GoFasters is I am very often stopped during my training and asked "What the hell are those?" so I spend a good portion of the training time talking about the GoFaster system. I've also had many people try on the boots and ski a few k. The biggest issue faced right now by GoFaster is the fit of the boot. The system functions beautifully. The boots are made on an Italian last (the last is the form or model of the foot the boots are constructed upon) which tends to be narrower than the typical American foot. This is the first year the GoFaster system is being imported and ProSkate is planning on manufacturing a wider boot in order to fit the American foot. If you like the fit of Italian cycling shoes (Sidi, Diadora) you will find the fit of the GoFasters to be good. If your cycling shoe is made on an American foot last (Shimano, Specialized) you might find the GoFasters to be a bit tight. ProSkate has informed me the sole of the boot can be molded by heating it with a hair dryer and opening up the shell a few millimeters to accommodate a wider foot. I have not yet tried this so cannot report on the viability of this modification. There are also plans to offer the boot in several widths during the upcoming seasons.

With the emergence of clap-skate style bindings on cross-country skis becoming more common this style of system is here to stay. To quote Joe Gollinger "The genie is out of the bottle. The GoFaster is a novel design not just another knock off of any current conventional boot and binding. We have positioned ourselves first in the marketplace as the first with this design. Everything about it is original."

GoFaster is a leader in the Nordic clap binding and I would recommend considering them if you are in the market for new boots and bindings or if you just enjoy being at the forefront of the sport. For more information about the GoFaster system visit the website at www.morsnow.com .