

Forget the snowboard -grab a bike

Saturday, March 19, 2011

By **Debbie Olsen**, For The Calgary Herald

As we peddled our rented snowbikes to the top edge of the practice ski run at Big White Ski Resort, it was easy to imagine how the first snowboarders likely felt when they brought their new contraptions onto a ski run. People were staring. And who could blame them? It's not every day you see a bike with a ski blade in place of a front tire.

Snowbiking is a brand new winter sport and at this moment, one of the few places in North America where you can experience it is at Kelowna's Big White Ski Resort. The snowbike was the brainchild of Kyle Reeves, a construction worker and avid cyclist from Vancouver Island. He and his childhood friend Jason Scoffings created a kit that consists of a snow blade for the front tire and a rubber track system around the rear wheel. The kit converts ordinary mountain bikes into all-terrain machines capable of blasting through otherwise unridable surfaces such as snow and sand.

For avid mountain bikers who have traditionally put their bikes in storage when the snows begin to fly, the snowbike provides an opportunity to cycle year-round. "It only takes about half an hour to convert the average mountain bike into a snow bike," says Ed Kruger of Monashee Adventure Tours in Kelowna, the only distributor and the only tour operator for Ktrak Cycle in Western Canada. "When you put on the ski, you lose the front brake, but you still have loads of braking ability from the back, so you can easily control the snowbike as you ride it down the mountain." With Kruger's repeated assurances that I was unlikely to hurt myself, I hopped on the snowbike and headed down the ski run.

Within seconds, my kids had passed me and were popping wheelies and "getting air." They had gone down the hill twice in the time it took me to cautiously do one run. Riding back up the hill was a lot more difficult than coming down it, so the ski lift proved useful.

Big White is the only ski resort in Canada that allows snowbikes onto its slopes and then only under the careful supervision of Monashee Adventure Tours. When you consider the fact that less than three decades ago, snowboarding was banned from most North American ski resorts, there may be some hope for this new sport. Its creators and lone western distributor are certainly hoping.

Debbie Olsen is an Alberta-based freelance writer and the mother of four children.

If You Go

- **Snowbiking:** Big White is the only place in Canada where you can enjoy a snowbiking tour. Tours can be booked through the on-site activities desk or directly with Monashee Adventure Tours and cost \$80 per person. (www.monasheeadventuretours.com). Monashee Adventure Tours summer bike trip was selected by National Geographic Adventure Magazine as one of the 25 best new tours in the world for 2010. For more information on the snowbike conversion kit, visit: www.ktrakcycle.com. A complete conversion kit for one mountain bike costs \$529 US.

- **Accommodations:** Big White is British Columbia's second-largest ski resort and features ski-in/ ski out accommodations for up to 17,000 guests. It is located 56 kilometres southeast of Kelowna, so staying on-site is the way to go. Big White Central Reservations can book accommodations, lift tickets, airport transfers and flights. One night of lodging with a lift ticket starts at \$85 per person per night. For reservations or information, visit: www.bigwhite.com or phone 800-663-2772. A one-day lift ticket will cost \$71. Multi-day tickets and packages reduce the price.

- WestJet deal: Show guest services your WestJet boarding pass and they will give you a free lift ticket on the day you fly into Kelowna.

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