

Ski Biking for Amputees



*David Eynon at Sölden with his instructor, Chris Livett
Photo by Brendan West*

From the Alps to a Mountain Near You

by Jeffrey J. Cain, MD, and Brendan West

For former Royal Artillery Gunner David Eynon, the Austrian mountains are a long way from Iraq. Less than two years after losing his leg above the knee in the war, David is about to make his first-ever run on a ski bike in Sölden, Austria, as part of the British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association (BLESMA) annual Skibob Week. He may be nervous now, but by the end of the week he will descend confidently from the top of the mountain.

The ski bike (skibob in Europe) is a fun and exciting way for amputees and able-bodied people alike to hit the slopes and is now available for adaptive ski programs in the U.S. Ski bikes are like mountain bikes with skis instead of wheels. Ski bikers wear ski boots and short skis that provide multiple points of contact with the snow. The low center of gravity and three-point stance make ski biking particularly stable and easy to learn, while (almost) eliminating falls. Most first-timers can ski intermediate runs comfortably on their first day!

Used recreationally for decades by able-bodied riders in Europe, the ski bike even has its own FISB (Federation Internationale de Skibob) race circuit! Because the forces of skiing are transferred through the bike rather than a prosthesis, BLESMA has found it the ideal adaptive ski device for amputees, virtually eliminating pain and sores on residual limbs. Above- and below-knee amputees alike will participate in the 18th annual BLESMA ski bike rehabilitation event this spring. Up to 30 amputees and instructors will gather in Sölden, Austria,



Photo by Lou Cesa

finishing the week with medals awarded for proficiency from bronze for beginners to gold for experts.

Here in the U.S., not all ski areas allow the ski bike for able-bodied riders, but it is very popular with adaptive ski programs for adaptive athletes with a variety of disabilities. Amputee skiers looking for instruction or wanting to use their own ski bike as an adaptive device should contact the ski area before arriving, as some areas require special permission for use. Adaptive ski bike instruction can be found at all of the major adaptive ski programs in Colorado and is taught nationally to adaptive instructors by Disabled Sports USA (DS/USA) at Ski Spectacular, their annual adaptive ski instructors conference.

You can learn more about ski biking in the U.S. at the American Ski-Bike Association Web site, where their adaptive section includes a guide for introducing your local mountain to the ski bike as an adaptive device.

By the end of the week, David is exhausted and proud of what he has achieved. Ski biking has given him back the freedom to access the mountains and

has even enabled him to challenge the skill levels of his able-bodied skier friends. It has taken him down slopes that he might never have thought possible only a week ago; it has even challenged ideas of what else he can accomplish in life.

Interested in joining David in the mountains on a ski bike? Come on up and join the fun! ■

Ski Biker Resources

American Ski-Bike Association

www.ski-bike.org

British Limbless Ex-Service Men's Association

www.blesma.org

National Sports Center for the Disabled

www.nscd.org

Vail Adaptive Ski School

vail.snow.com/winter/ss.adaptive.asp

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