

# In Pursuit of Powder

Splitboards evolve to match the interest of backcountry riders

As the hunger for fresh tracks and finding that perfect line increases, backcountry riding has become less of an avenue only pursued by an adventurous few to an experience sought out by the everyday rider. Paralleling the technological evolution of avalanche safety equipment—beacons, probes, airbag packs—that provides riders with the necessary equipment to stay as safe as possible while exploring off-piste terrain, the evolution of the splitboard is drawing more and more riders out of bounds and into the backcountry.

From its beginnings in the early 1990s, the splitboard has evolved from a series of rough, experimental prototypes to a bona-fide technological art, making backcountry riding easier and more accessible to riders of a variety of skill levels. Accordingly, the number of brands both specializing in and offering splitboards has increased to not only meet consumer demand, but to offer more options for riders in pursuit of off-piste powder.

One such brand making its Snow Show debut this year, Whistler-based **Prior**, got its start in north Vancouver, manufacturing alpine race and freeride boards before getting into the splitboard game in 1997. Prior's sales and marketing manager, **Gus Cormack**, explains how a crude splitboard prototype evolved into a product that the brand now specializes in: "In 1997, Prior cut a freeride board in half and attached **Voile's** splitboard

*"Sales of splitboards doubled last season, and there is every indication that splitboard sales will double again this season."*

—Kelly Davis, SIA

hardware for a local rider. The lack of performance of a board cut in half pushed Prior to look at ways of manufacturing a splitboard that had better performance, and by 1999, Prior released their first high-performance splitboard."

Since its leap into the splitboard realm, Prior has created eight different models available in both fiberglass and carbon constructions and in a range of sizes, which Cormack says reflects the growth in consumer demand: "The sport has seen a rapid growth, which has translated into greater demand for splitboards along with greater demands for a variety of splitboard shapes: Women's specific, twin tip, and super directional powder shapes have all seen increased demand in recent times."

That increased demand has been so significant that SIA has begun measuring split-

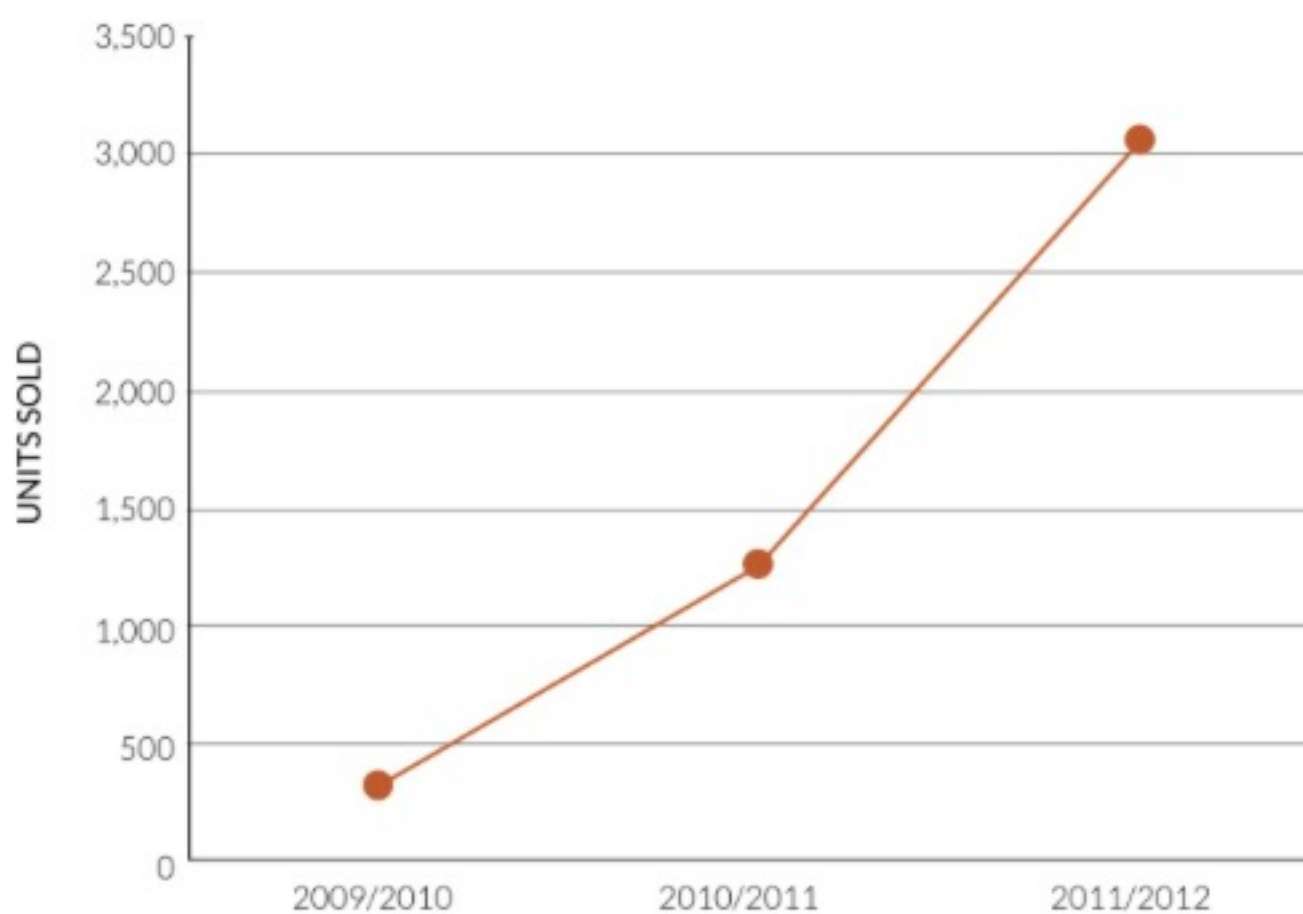


▲ Gnu Women's B-Pro Splits



▲ K2 Kwicker BC Binding

Splitboard Unit Sales Trends



▲ Venture Zelix Splitboard