

# SNOWBOARD CANADA **WOMEN'S** ANNUAL

**PREMIER  
ISSUE**

THE ONLY MAGAZINE  
DEDICATED TO WOMEN  
AND SNOWBOARDING

## LEADING LADIES

SHINING A SPOTLIGHT  
ON CANADA'S BEST

## video STARS

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH  
MISSCHIEF AND CHUNKYKNIT

## TWO TRIPS

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SHARPEN YOUR PIPE  
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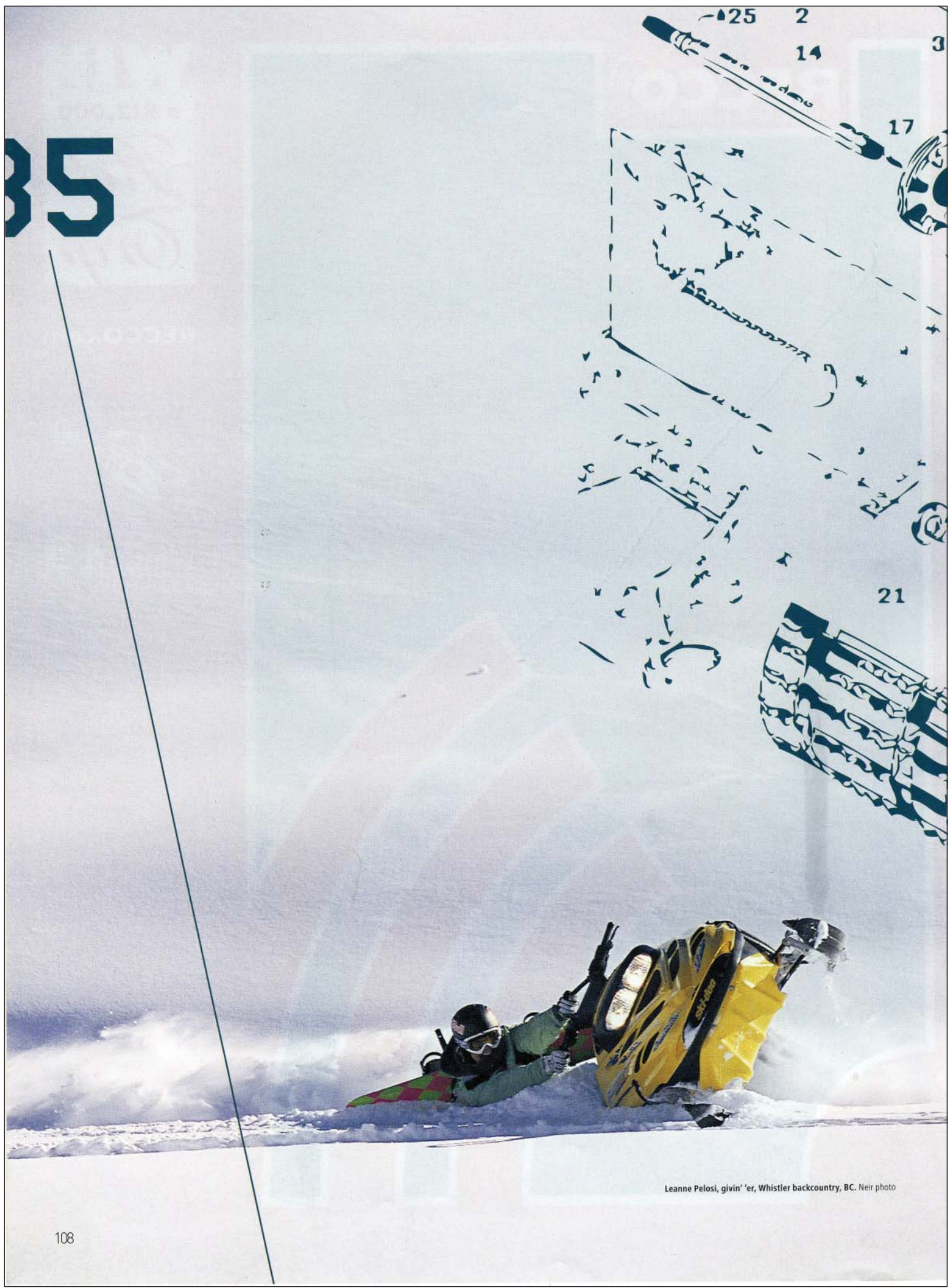
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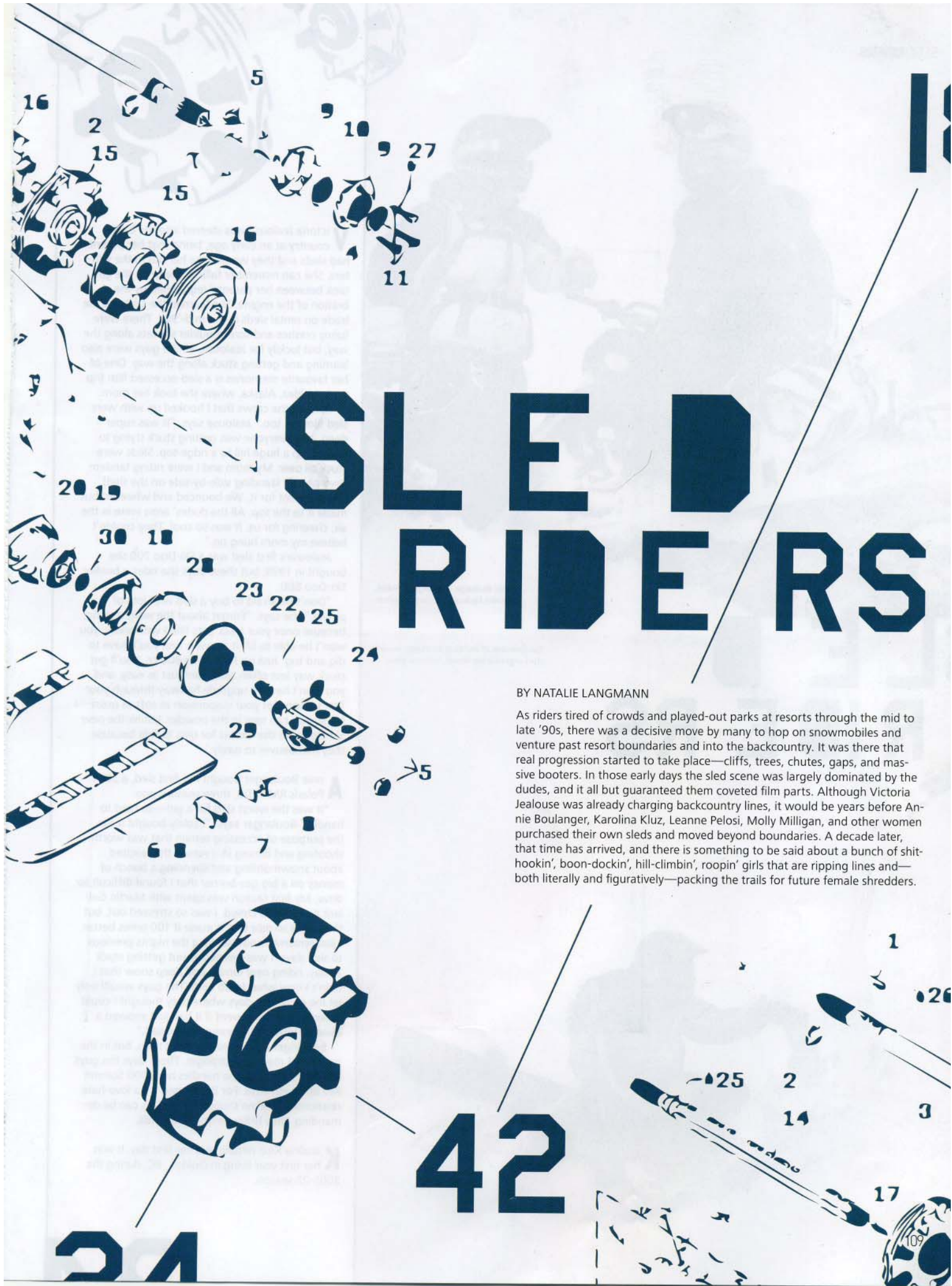


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Leanne Pelosi, givin' 'er, Whistler backcountry, BC. Neir photo



# SLED RIDERS

BY NATALIE LANGMANN

As riders tired of crowds and played-out parks at resorts through the mid to late '90s, there was a decisive move by many to hop on snowmobiles and venture past resort boundaries and into the backcountry. It was there that real progression started to take place—cliffs, trees, chutes, gaps, and massive booters. In those early days the sled scene was largely dominated by the dudes, and it all but guaranteed them coveted film parts. Although Victoria Jealous was already charging backcountry lines, it would be years before Annie Boulanger, Karolina Kluz, Leanne Pelosi, Molly Milligan, and other women purchased their own sleds and moved beyond boundaries. A decade later, that time has arrived, and there is something to be said about a bunch of shit-hookin', boon-dockin', hill-climbin', roopin' girls that are ripping lines and—both literally and figuratively—packing the trails for future female shredders.

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SLEDRIDERS



Annie Boulanger and Meghan Pishke, Whistler backcountry. Patterson photo

# SLEDRIDERS

The downside of sledding: Boulanger is really stuck—get out the shovel. Patterson photo



Victoria Jealouse was steered into the backcountry at an early age, being that her parents had sleds and they would take her out in the winters. She can remember falling asleep on the gas tank between her parents' legs, lulled by the vibration of the engine. She learned the tricks of the trade on rental sleds in the mid-'90s. There were funny crashes and sore shoulder sockets along the way, but luckily for Jealouse, all the guys were also learning and getting stuck along the way. One of her favourite memories is a sled-accessed film trip up to Valdez, Alaska, where she took her mom.

"One of the crews that I hooked up with were sled filming, too," Jealouse says. "It was super deep, and everyone was getting stuck trying to make it up a huge hill to a ridge top. Sleds were stuck all over. My mom and I were riding tandem [two people standing side-by-side on the sled], and we went for it. We bounced and wheeled but made it to the top. All the dudes' arms were in the air, cheering for us. It was so cool. They couldn't believe my mom hung on."

Jealouse's first sled was a Ski-Doo 700 she bought in 1999, but these days she rides a beefier Ski-Doo 800.

"Don't be afraid to buy a sled with lots of power," she says. "Forget about the weight thing, because once your track gets filled with snow, you won't be able to lift it anyway, and you'll have to dig and tug. Just go for 700 or 800 cc. You'll get stuck way less often, you learn just as easy, and you won't have to upgrade halfway through your first season. Set your suspension as soft as possible so you can turn in the powder. I think the new Ski-Doos are the easiest for girls to ride because they manoeuvre so easily."

Annie Boulanger bought her first sled, a 2001 Polaris RMK 700, three seasons ago.

"It was the worst sled for a girl—so hard to handle," Boulanger says. "I solely bought it for the purpose of accessing terrain that was worth shooting and filming in. I wasn't that excited about snowmobiling and spending a bunch of money on a big gas-burner that I found difficult to drive. My first season was spent with Martin Gallant and Ryan O'Dowd. I was so stressed out, but they were so nice that it made it 100 times better. I just remember not sleeping the nights previous to sled days. I was worried about getting stuck all day, riding new terrain and deep snow that I didn't know what to do with. The guys would only let me go on the days where they thought I could make it up. I never went if it had just snowed a bunch; I would stay home and be sad."

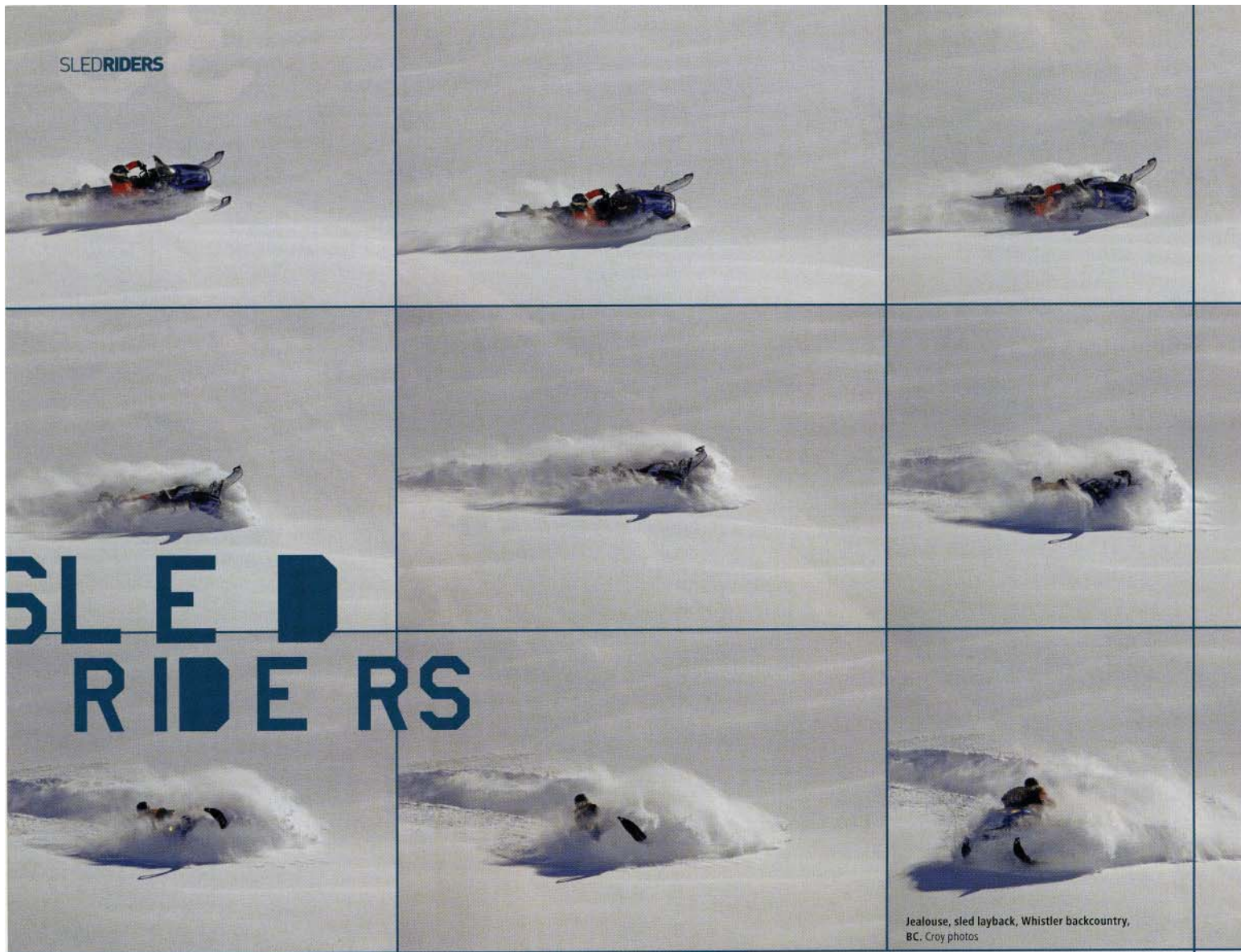
Boulanger didn't understand it then, but in the long run it made her stronger. These days the guys are taken aback as she handles her 2000 Summit Rev 800 with ease. For Boulanger, it's a love-hate relationship—even though some days can be demanding, they bring plenty of rewards.

Karolina Kluz remembers her first day. It was her first year living in Golden, BC, during the 2001-02 season.



You need a sled to access terrain like this. Victoria Jealous takes advantage of hers. Utah backcountry. Evans photo.





“It was probably my third day out in the backcountry, on a sled, and one of my buddies was nice enough to double me up,” she recalls. “Some of the boys fired up the sleds and went for a roop. I was given the OK to go for a ride on my own, and as I was climbing, I noticed that something smelt like it was burning, but I thought I was just being hypersensitive since I was already a little nervous about messing up. I avoided the smell and kept going. After I reached the top, I turned the sled around and prepared for the decent. As I was gaining speed down the slope, I went for the brakes but soon realized that they were no longer working. I tried to brake again to see if they would respond. They didn’t. I had no brakes. At that point I started to get really nervous, but I thought I should just get back to where the rest of the crew was parked so they could see what the trouble was. As I picked up speed again, I realized that the engine of the sled had died on me. After I got to the bottom of the last slope, I tried to start it again. Pull after pull, it seemed impossible. I started yelling for help, and my friends finally realized that I was having some trouble. The first thing I was told was, ‘Uh, Kluz, you left the emergency brake on.’ I will never forget those words. I felt like the biggest idiot because I didn’t even know that a snowmobile had an emergency brake.”

Turns out, Kluz wasn’t far from seizing the entire engine, but the initial burn and a few hundred dol-

lars out of her pocket to fix the sled did little to deter her. She worked two jobs, back to back, to save for her own, a 1999 Polaris 700 RMK. The crew Kluz was snowboarding with at the time was very film-oriented, and she wanted to get in on the action.

“It wasn’t the only reason why I bought a sled,” Kluz insists. “I wanted to see more for myself. I’m drawn to being out in the middle of nowhere on a peak. And if a cameraman is there, cool, but to be honest, the best days happen when no cameras are around. You don’t have to wait for anything or anyone; you only worry about safety, your shuttle partner, and what you want to ride next.”

Leanne Pelosi bought a 2002 Ski-Doo Summit 600 three seasons ago. At first, she would stay on track right behind the boys because she didn’t want to get stuck anywhere and have them dig her out. She held her own and made it to most of the spots they went to shred laps. At this point she wasn’t a pro and wasn’t quite at the filming and shooting level. Pelosi says she was going out in the backcountry more as a weekend warrior.

Although her Alberta boys initially introduced her to sledding, it was Pelosi’s move to Whistler that fully brought her into the backcountry world, where she ventured out with her boyfriend and his crew. If anything went wrong, he was always there to help. Once you’ve been helped on a sled, there

is an unwritten rule that you turn around and help the next generation.

One of Pelosi’s favourite stories involves Spencer O’Brien, who had recently won a brand-new Summit 600 at the U.S. Open. On O’Brien’s first day out, she rolled her machine into the ditch within 100 feet of the trail.

“She didn’t realize that the throttle was so powerful and that it’s not like driving a car,” Pelosi laughs. “We dug her out, but that is seriously not a big deal. I’ve had days where I go out and my friend’s pull cords break, sleds break down or overheat, and we have to leave the sleds up on the mountain. There are so many problems that can happen up there, so it’s good to be aware of some potential mechanical problems that may arise. It’s all trial and error, but make sure to keep your sled maintained regularly.”

Molly Milligan, fed up with trying to get shots up on Whistler and Blackcomb, bought a 2000 Summit 700 Highmark in the middle of the 2004-05 season. Without shopping around, she impulsively bought the first sled that ran well. Unfortunately, it rained all season and she only made it out once.

“Just because you can afford it, don’t buy the best out there for a first sled, because it’s going to go through a lot of shit as you learn,” Milligan advises. “Buy something that’s dependable, that’ll



get you up the hill, and that you aren't worried about scratching up a bit, or rolling, or running into a tree."

Milligan went up to Brandywine, BC, for her first time on a sled with a guy she worked with. He shuttled her up to spots where she could shred down. After a while he told her he wanted to shred a line, so he'd double her up and then she could take the sled and meet him at the bottom.

"Holy shit, that was scary," she remembers. "I was driving down a relatively steep slope for the first time and trying to steer the thing like I would a bicycle while realizing I wasn't going anywhere except down the fall line. I just kept going and going and going. By the time my friend got to me, the sled was very close to the point of no return."

Milligan's first time riding tandem was with Phil Tifo, who had no reservations about high-marking with her.

"That was so sick," she recalls. "I put all my trust in his abilities and leaned when he told me to. Learning to throw your weight around is probably the key element of powering a sled. Moving, transferring yourself from one side to another, or even using your arms to steer will get you anywhere you need to go."

**F**or Boulanger, Jealousie and Pelosi, an average day in the backcountry starts with preparations the night before. Phone calls are made and plans are set for the morning. Pelosi usually wakes up at 5:45 a.m. to check the weather. She has her sled oiled and gassed the night before but meets for coffee at the gas station by 6:30 a.m. Boulanger is up at 6 a.m., packing her lunch and gear. Jealousie jokes that plans from the night before usually change. Regardless, she throws her stuff into the van, hooks up her trailer with sleds, and drives to the meeting point. Now it's time to unload these heavy sleds. Boulanger recommends having a sled with reverse. Star of Peace Quinn once took a thick rope, tied it around her sled and then to a tree. She then drove forward with her truck, and the sled was yanked out the back. Whatever the method, finding one that works is key, as boys love to watch girls struggle unloading their sleds.

Once everything is unloaded and the parking lot bro-down dies off, they sled up for about an hour. Boulanger says it's a good idea to throw in a little extra time to account for someone getting stuck, and the shoveling and lifting that follows. Upon reaching the alpine, they search for features and stellar lines and frantically try to beat the other crews to the pickings. The cameras get set up, and riders hike, shovel, and build lips. Once the line is ready, the session begins—a cycle of hiking, eating shit a few times, and if they're lucky, stomping a trick and riding away stoked. After lunch, they are back on sleds, scoping for something else to ride or building a jump for the next day. This goes on until late afternoon, when it's time to pack up and sled for an hour back to the lot, load the sled, and make plans to be back early for the next day.

For Kluz, the routine is quite different. Sledding out in Golden does not require waking up at 5 a.m. "It's a lot mellower than Whistler or Mammoth because there is less traffic and there isn't 10 other crews trying to hit the same spot," she says. "Sledding and filming is so hit-and-miss because it all depends on the weather and if there's enough light. It's all about the clouds."

After Kluz hits snooze a few more times, she checks the Kicking Horse webcam located at the resort's alpine level of 8,033 feet. The cam gives a fairly accurate indication as to what's going on



Kluz, roopin'. Kirby photo



Kluz, stuck. Kirby photo

elsewhere up top. If the sky is clear, then clouds are sitting low in the valley, meaning sledding is a go. If not, it's a gamble to see if the clouds will break. Even if clouds are hovering, Kluz still likes to go. But before riding anything, Kluz will get into a position where she has perfect view of the line.

"I like to look at it from different angles, sit and stare at it, take my time," she says. "And then I close my eyes and picture what it would be like if I was riding it." Kluz says everything looks different from the bottom than from the top, therefore it's a good idea to look at terrain from both angles. She reads the snow, the slope, and also looks for a safety zone—a way out in case something goes wrong. She pays attention to details around her; a divot or bump in the snow that appears small may be huge on the other side.

"What appears as a roller may feel more like a drop when you hit it at high speed," Kluz says. "You also have to realize that once you drop into a steep line, you've committed. There is no stopping in the middle of a line, so you better have your shit together until it flattens out. There is a lot to analyze, but I think if you can picture yourself riding it, then you can. If you trust yourself, then you can trust your surroundings."

Boulanger modestly claims it took her two seasons to be able to read terrain, to judge if she could land or not. She spent so many days watching the guys ride and helping them build jumps often too big for her. She'd go back home and see those days as learning experiences.

"Watching people read the terrain and learning how to read it takes so long," Boulanger admits. "I'm learning now, and I'm starting to have so much fun, but it was hard for me at first to judge what I could ride and couldn't. Some of the guys have eight years experience on me, and they are guys, so I never knew if something was way out of my league or not."

Pelosi agrees, saying she'll go up with the guys, and if they're hitting something beyond her ability, she'll try to find something similar that she's comfortable with.

"It's really good for me to go up there with them, because usually they convince me to hit stuff that I'm scared of," Pelosi says.

"In order to step it up, a lot of things have to come together and run smoothly: weather, snow, snowmobiles, cameras, and our minds," Jealousie says. "There is so much to do to just get to the spot, so often it's hard to focus and step up and



Whistler's infamous S-Chute. Which is worse, going up or coming down?  
Croy photo

# SLEDRIDERS

ride hard when you're trying so hard for so long. But then you do have good days and great moments, and some days it's even easy."

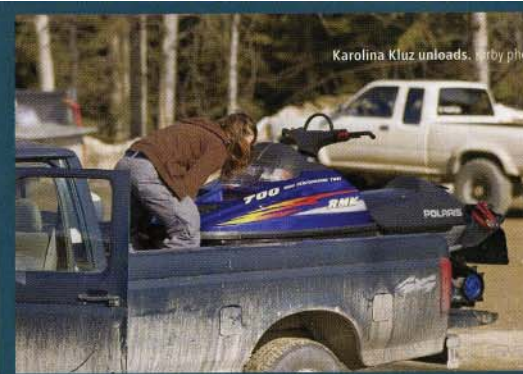
Over the 2005-06 season, Boulanger and Jealousie started working together to be more productive with filmers and photographers.

"We slowly became friends, hung out and had some laughs, but didn't talk about filming together," Boulanger says. "Then December came, and we both didn't have a crew. So I called her up and convinced her to come up a few times to see if it would work out. It was great. I love hanging out with Victoria, and I really respect her riding. I never

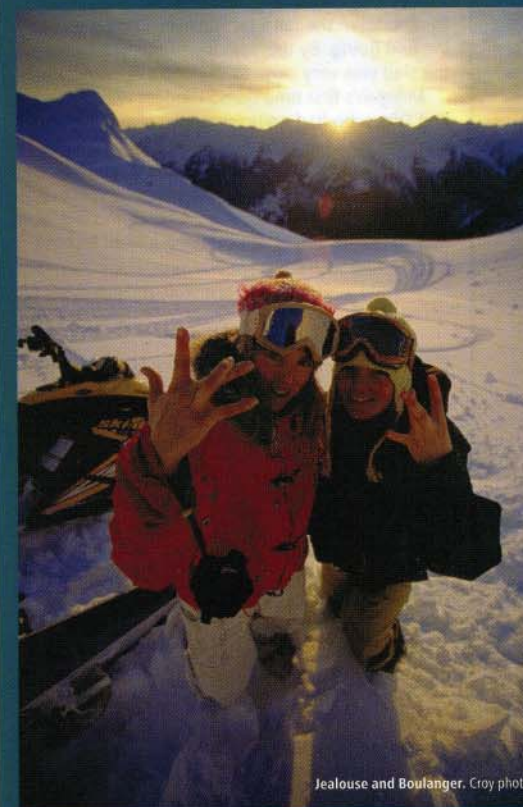
saw another girl ride backcountry before; I was amazed to see how easy and beautiful she makes everything look."

Jealousie also enjoys having a female counterpart in the backcountry.

"It's been really fun sledding and riding with Annie," Jealousie says. "She charges and works really hard. It's so cool to have a partner out there that is as into it as you are and likes to ride similar things. We've been learning from each other and encouraging each other when we get scared, frustrated or tired. It's really cool."



Karolina Kluz unloads. Kirby photo



Jealousie and Boulanger. Croy photo

## KAROLINA KLUZ'S SLED ADVICE

1. A 600 or 700 cc is plenty for us ladies. Don't go any bigger unless you already have the experience behind you.
2. Buy a sled that is reliable unless you know the mechanics of a snowmobile; otherwise, you could be dealing with a faulty sled.
3. Buying brand new is ridiculous unless you have \$13,000 to drop. A used sled performs just as well, if you find the right one. A brand-new slick machine is more of a boy thing. They buy them before they even try sledding... boys and their toys.
4. Spend time searching around. Start your search before the money is in the piggybank. You'll learn what kind of deals are out there and will have time to compare sleds. Do your homework, ladies.
5. Ask friends that know a thing or two about sleds to help you out. That's what I did. I had one of my friends come with me when I went to view sleds. Don't be afraid to ask; someone is bound to help you.
6. Don't buy a sled off of one your buddies who has already bagged the shit out of it.
7. Look for your sled in the city. It's better to buy a family-owned sled or one from a lady who's husband bought it for her so she could come along for the odd sled trip. Purchase a sled that has been driven less aggressively.

