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MOUNTAIN SAFETY EQUIPMENT FW16/17 : TREND REPORT

It's a pretty safe bet to say that most people who like the mountains, love the white gold as well, especially when it's fresh, fluffy and untouched... And while avalanche trainings are crucial to help you avoid peril and provide vital advantages when you're out there, nothing can ever guarantee avoiding sketchy situations. The best option is to prepare your customer as well as you possibly can and ensure the best chances for survival.

By Anna Langer.

Besides properly educating oneself on what's going on in the backcountry and where the major risks are hiding, riders need to ensure that everyone in their group is tooled up in order to search, and to be searchable should the shit hit the fan.

This is the main drive behind Recco's "Be Searchable" campaign that aims to dramatically decrease the burial time - one of the most crucial factors in surviving an avalanche. A growing number of brands and over 800 resorts and mountain rescue organizations worldwide are partnering with Recco, adding reflectors to their gear with corresponding detectors to increase avalanche safety. They are even working on detectors and apps for drones that are able to search even the most remote terrain without much difficulty. Next summer their first helicopter Search and Rescue detector, the SAR1 will launch, enabling the search of a square kilometre of terrain in three to four minutes.

Searching with a transceiver for a companion also wearing one is still the first and most effective measure, but there isn't always someone with such a device on hand. Many tend not to pack all the right gear when chasing freshies just off the side of the piste - statistics from ANENA cited by Recco even states that alarmingly 50% of burial victims off-piste do not wear transceivers at all. Which is still far too high, considering that there has been tremendous innovation in the last few decades, that not only make being found much easier, but also the process of searching and finding someone. Whereas before these devices were extremely costly, there price has come down - a factor that not all consumers are aware of.

Most state of the art devices use three antennas as well as acoustic and visual aids on digital displays to make operating in emergency situations as easy as possible. Automatic switch back to sending mode in case of an avalanche during search is included in many models as well, such as the Ortovox 3+ that combines smart antenna technology, real-time display, flagging function and much more into a mid-price device that works on just one battery. Mammut's Barryvox also combines a digital and analog device with three antennas for quick,

easy and intuitive operation when you don't have a second to waste. Pieps now have digital displays with visual aids in all models.

But no matter how fast you can be found, you'd preferably not get buried at all - enter airbag backpacks. There are slightly different systems on offer from different brands. The Arc'teryx Voltair Avalanche Airbag can be deployed multiple times and also taken on aeroplanes thanks to its rechargeable battery - an industry first. Black Diamond's JetForce balloon is a little bigger with 200 litres and takes 3.5 seconds to expand around the neck and towards the sides, and is not compromised by the low temperatures, thanks to cold-resistant electronics from Pieps. Ortovox have dropped electronics completely for their new Avabag, making it "the lightest and smallest airbag system in the world," and less prone to corrosion, dirt and icing up.

Mammut have updated their whole line of avalanche airbags, both backpacks and the inflating system, eliminating all kinks and makes wearing them even more comfortable. The brand says there is now "virtually no excuse left to not take this part of your personal safety equipment on any trip off-piste."

With their new P.RIDE, airbag trailblazers ABS take functionality to the next level. Enabling radio connection between up to 10 partners, every group member can not only inflate their own airbag, but also that of another active rider, who may not see what's building up behind them. Their new wings that inflate on the sides of the pack, ensure a "beneficial horizontal position, minimizing injury risk," and have a 30% bigger effective surface for even more float.

For anyone who prefers to fly downhill with minimum weight, Dakine's Poacher Vest offer storage for all backcountry essentials without the bulk of a proper backpack. And through their cooperation with Mammut and the RAS, the Removable Airbag System, you can add life-saving airbag "wings" to the vest as well.

Enjoy the mountain and be safe out there!