

Snowboarding At It's Best

Snowboarding by itself is a fun and safe sport which is basically a cross between skiing and skateboarding. Using a single large snowboard, enthusiasts rush down slopes through the snow. The feel and balance is quite different from regular skiing since navigation through the snow is achieved on only a single board, and unlike skateboarding, snowboarders let gravity do all the work of propulsion for them as they slide down the slopes.

Naturally, once snowboarding caught on in popularity, it was only a matter of time before the most highly skilled practitioners decided to tackle harder and harder slopes, finding ones with more dangerous terrain, or natural formations that allowed for stunts like turnpipes in skateboarding.

Thus was born extreme snowboarding. Extreme snowboarding involves extremely tough slopes set at 45 degree angles or less, making runs down these slopes extremely fast and difficult to control. Unlike gentle civilian snowboarding slopes, extreme slopes will also usually have outcroppings of rock jutting out from the snow as part of the challenge.

This is not a fact to be taken lightly, and not a sport to be taken by amateurs. Given the speeds at which an extreme snowboarder can go, even a casual splash on the slope can lead to broken limbs or a broken neck from impact with the snow alone. When you factor in the presence of actual rock formations, you can see how this sport is one that is not undertaken lightly.

Extreme snowboarder slopes actually don't have any of the usual conveniences of a civilian ski or snowboard slope. There are no trams for uphill transport, no waystations for shelter and relaxation. It is wilderness all the way. More often than not, during extreme snowboard competitions, the boarders actually ride airlifts to get to the top of the course.

Like some extreme sports, snowboarding enthusiasts have even merged their styles with that of other extreme sports. For example, some snowboarders actually pack parachute gliders on their backs. These extreme sportsmen take a snowboard and do a run all the way down a slope which ends at a sheer-drop cliff, and once they fly off the cliff, trigger the chutes and hang glide all the rest of the way down the mountainside. If that isn't an adrenaline rush, I don't know what is!

Some of the more popular and challenging snowboard slopes are located in New Zealand and Alaska. In the Alaskan slopes, there are 4000 foot vertical run areas with gullies, ditches, and wind lips, as well as trees to contend with on the slope. There is also an area with natural half-pipe formations and rolls

where freestyle exhibitions similar to that done for skateboarding can be performed.

The New Zealand slopes are more challenging for those who enjoy absolute speed runs. With one of the steepest and sharpest slopes around, navigating the New Zealand snowboarding slopes requires perfect balance and control to keep from spilling.

Given the risks of snowboarding, every professional competing extreme snowboarder is required to learn first aid specializing in cold weather injury treatment, as well as survival, search, and rescue techniques for winter and mountainous terrain. On their runs, they are also required to bring avalanche transceivers for emergency pickups in case of an avalanche or if they go off course and get lost.

Like most extreme sports, extreme snowboarding is most definitely not for the weak or the faint of heart. But for those who are up to the challenge, it offers one of the most exciting blood rushes around.