

Atomic Backland Ski Touring Boots – Review

Meet the new Sheriff. His name is Atomic Backland, riding through town with both barrels blazing.

Atomic's first real venture into the soul of the modern AT ski touring market is the Backland series of boots, four models. The flagship models being the Backland Carbon (stiffer tongue, heavier and firmer liner, carbon infused Grilamid lower and a stiff carbon cuff) and Backland Carbon Light (softer tongue, lighter liner, Grilamid only lower).

These boots are not a half baked product foisted upon us by a mainstream alpine company trying horn in on the now popular ski touring "AT" marketplace. Quite the opposite, the Backland series are a state-of-art product with the best design, technology and materials down to the last detail.

One of the more unique aspects of the Backland series is called MemoryFit. Both the shell and liner are heat moldable, creating a nearly custom fit for each individual. Lou has covered this process in previous posts (see link below) but suffice it to say, with the proper padding in place (toe caps, ankle pads, other specific trouble spots) it's quite possible you can walk out of the store and into the backcountry with little or no boot fitting mods needed from that point on.

Equally impressive is the weight or lack thereof for these boots. The Carbon comes in at right around 5 pounds a pair, with the Carbon Light at approx 4.5lbs/pr. The obvious competitors in this weight and performance class are the Dynafit TLT6 Performance and the Scarpa F1 Evo. At this point, like any other ski boots, it comes down to personal preference and fit, though with MemoryFit Atomic might have created a whole new consideration to take into account. That being that nearly anyone can get a fit.

I feel the Backland series covers a broad spectrum of AT skiing. If uphill fitness at the ski area is your thing then these are right up your alley. Citizens class skimo racing? Then ready, set, go. Endurance events such as Pierra Menta or Elk Mt. Grand Traverse? Bring it on.

What about me? I like to skin up and ski classic descents. Perfect boot for that as well. The only categories not covered by the Backland boot models are the extreme ends of the spectrum, such as the dedicated ski mo racer willing to spend any amount to get down to the weightless racing machine, or the freeride huckmeister looking to drop that rad backcountry line at the highest speed, with the least amount of turns and biggest air possible, completed with a bump run.

For this review, I skied the Backland Carbon for two days on our local peaks, along with a short tour and some uphill fitness at the areas, coupled with various resort runs at our resorts here in the As-



**Elk Mountains, Colorado,
Atomic Backland ski touring boots.**

pen area. The Backland Carbon sets a high bar for a lightweight, high performance touring boot. On the uphill I kept thinking these feel as much like a running shoe as a ski boot, what with a stride that resembles a natural walking motion. Like brand X, the tongue is removable for the up or can be swapped out for the softer tongue from the Carbon Light model if preferred.

Honestly, I find the whole tongue off-and-on thing a pain in the butt and just leave it in the entire time. That said, I did play with having the Backland top buckle loosely buckled and the power strap loosely strapped vs. the top buckle open, held by the catch and the power strap loosely strapped. In either case, the Backland Carbon affords an incredible range of motion though even more so with the top buckle open. So much so that on technical, steep, side-hill terrain having the top buckle loosely buckled provides a feeling of a bit more security. Another seemingly small but real factor in the uphill performance of the Backland is the high quality, near frictionless bushing and fitting securing the upper cuff to the lower. Noticeable. (Note that the cuff pivot is a threaded user-replaceable fastener system.)

My very first turns on the Backland were off a major peak, on skis I had never skied before. I thought, "This could be interesting." The first few turns had a bit of wind effected snow, not ideal. Thankfully, what moments before were bedroom slippers on the way up immediately transformed into real ski boots on the down. My concerns of possibly being all over the place and out of control were replaced by the realization that I was in command. I was fully supported, able to steer my skis at will and make all of the subtle adjustments needed for effective skiing. Those first turns gave way to powder and I let the foot puppies run free. The Backlands were right there as the speed increased and I drove harder into the front of the boots. Lateral support was there as well, as I tipped and angulated.

The following day was powder heaven. Hidden stashes of north facing powder in the alpine. With the knowledge gained from the previous day I was able to up the performance using more of the lateral power and nuances of the Backland.

After my days in the backcountry combined with resort runs, I've now got an in-depth feel for the strengths and weaknesses of this boot. It is stiffer laterally than the forward flex. The rearward support, while more substantial than the forward flex, is not intended for Marcel Hirscher. In turn, it comes as no surprise that while capable of being driven from the front of the boot, the Backland Carbon performs best when skied with a more neutral stance (as is common with many of today's lighter ski touring boots). Fore/aft movement can be used to its advantage but is best served subtle.

Considering above, two suggestions: I would like to see Atomic offer a third tongue that is yet stiffer still and include a rear spoiler that can be attached in combination with the power strap via the existing hole where the power strap currently screws in.

Let's talk liners. Prior to this review, I had never used one of the thinner liners typical of the Backland or other brand models. Since the Intuition PowerWrap liner was sold, I've put them in every boot I have owned. I expected the thinner liner to be much colder but was pleasantly surprised to feel my feet generating heat whenever I moved. I suspect part of this can be attributed to the Backland "breathable" liner dispersing moisture better and staying drier than any liner I have used in the past. They also dry out much faster at the end of the day than any liner I have used previous. This is no doubt in part due to various areas of the liner being permeable. The liner is also designed to be hand

washable to further reduce the funk factor so commonly associated with at least my boots, or so I've been told. (In truth, you can wash any boot liner, with care, by hand.)

So, the question: Will I swap this liner? Perhaps, but I was impressed how well these worked. After the Memory-fit process they're perfectly integrated with the shell. Again, I found them warm, comfortable, and of course light enough themselves to keep overall weight down. Suggestion from myself and others with Backland experience, give the stock liners a good chance before going to the effort and expense of swapping.

Sizing the Backland series throws a bit of a wrinkle into the fabric. Typically I am in either a 25.5 or 26 depending on the manufacturer and model. In the case of another popular brand I use a 27 to accommodate the Intuition liner. Regardless, all of my boots fall into a BSL range of 294mm-299mm. In the case of the Backland I still use a 25.5 which is consistent with my other Atomic boot, but the BSL is an astounding 278mm. That's the correct size, but I never thought I would see the day I was in that short of boot.

Atomic claims the interior dimensions of the Backland are essentially the same as all of their other boots but it's the outside dimensions that are substantially different. Coupled with MemoryFit, this allows for an exact fit which clearly contributes to the performance and low weight of the boot. I also noticed how nimble the boot was when scrambling across a narrow rocky ridge, clearly due to the shorter BSL and lower weight.

The one issue I'm facing, regarding sole length, is that none of the bindings on any of my current skis adjust short enough to accommodate the Backland. Even if they did, I would be standing in an entirely different place on the ski which could alter the skis performance. Am I forced to remount the bindings putting another set of holes in an otherwise perfectly good pair of skis, assuming the new holes won't be too close to the old ones to allow for the remount? Or, is this the opportunity to get that new pair of skis I have been lusting over that will match up perfectly to the Backland?

Yep, Atomic is in town. Backland. Low weight, superior walking efficiency, skiing performance and affordable price. Backland ski touring boots will go to fully available retail this coming fall.

[See our other extensive Backland boot coverage.](#)

(Guest blogger Bob Perlmutter and his wife Sue live in the Roaring Fork Valley of Colorado, where Bob manages Aspen Mountain Powder Tours, a snowcat skiing operation. Bob has sought adventure skiing over the past thirty years, in the nearby Elk Mountains as well as locales around the world. He has owned 42 pairs of Intuition Power Wrap liners.)

Literatur

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