



women ♀ in snowsports

NATIVES REPORTER
EMMA MORRIS DISPELS
THE RUMOURS THAT THE
SNOWSPORTS INDUSTRY
IS DOMINATED BY MEN,
AND INTERVIEWS FOUR
WOMEN AT THE TOP
OF THEIR GAME...

When I was growing up, my best friend and I both had big career plans; I wanted to be a jockey, she wanted to be a teacher. As we approach our somewhat late, ahem, twenties, she's worked hard, qualified and is a very successful primary school teacher, and I work in the Snowsports Industry. So where did it all go wrong for me?

I'd argue that it didn't. We all want to work in something that we love and I'm lucky enough to do so (with the bonus that it's a good talking point at dinner parties!).

But I have realised that that the snowsports industry is mainly dominated by men. Ask most people who their hero in snowsports is and they'll probably give you the name of a man, like Glen Plake, Seth Morrison or Shaun White.

But the truth is that many women have been successful in our industry, and are increasingly so. For those of you who are reading this and dreaming of a career in the industry, you'll be pleased to learn that the boys had better watch out...it's a new day!

The heroes are now heroines and names like Kelly Clark, Tara Dakides and Erin Valverde are the increasingly Top Trumps. It may have taken 69 issues of White Lines to put the first woman on the cover, but here at Tribe, it's already two out of three!

This article introduces four women who live and breathe the snowsports industry and how they came to be there. If you'd like to start a career in snowsports today, then you can apply for jobs online now at www.natives.co.uk.



Lesley McKenna

Age: 32
Country of residence: Born in Inverness, roots in Aviemore, at home all over the world
Profession/Job title: Professional Snowboarder
Discipline: Half pipe, free ride and slopestyle

No. of years on snow: 29

Achievements: Represented GB at the Winter Olympics; First ever Brit to win any snowsport World Cup event as well as numerous podium finishes, and...British Ski GS Champion in 1994!

You're obviously hugely successful now, but how did you get started in snowsports? My whole family skied when I was young. I went a lot with my grandparents, then I joined the Cairngorm Ski club and loved going skiing with good friends from there.

Did you feel that it was harder for you as a woman to get noticed and find a sponsor? I think it was harder to be accepted as a professional but not necessarily harder to get noticed. I think that women are becoming more involved and would certainly hope that they are as well respected within the industry as men are.

Are there extra strains on having a relationship when you have a successful career in the industry? It is hard as you are always on the road. It is such a way of life though that if I was not constantly on the road now it would seem weird. You get used to it though and you can fit in a relationship around all the travelling.

What one thing do you never leave the house without when you're on your way up the mountain? My mouth guard. I broke my jaw a few years ago and I don't like riding without one now.

What is the best and worst thing about your job? The best thing is being able to snowboard and travel to some of the most beautiful places in the world and meet lots of really interesting people. The worst thing is living out of a bag.
You have achieved so much for women in snowsports, what's next for Lesley McKenna? I am into herbal medicine and maybe would like to do more there, but for now I am still riding and charging hard. I had a good season last year and was 8th in the World Champs pipe, so there's still life in the legs yet!



Karen Broom Smith

Age: 42
Country of residence: UK and France
Profession/Job title: Co-owner of the chalet operator Purple Ski
Discipline: Skier
No. of years on snow: 6

What was special for you about the first time that you stepped on snow? I just loved the physical challenge of trying something new, loved being outdoors, going fast.

How long have you been running your own chalets and what does it involve? I fell in

love with (and married) the owner of the business! Michael has been running the business for 16 years now; I joined him six years ago. We now have five luxury chalets, and around 28 staff. We do everything ourselves, he does the sales, marketing, IT and associated admin and I do all the operational stuff; recruiting, training, monitoring, liaising with owners, suppliers, maintenance and repairs, vehicles etc.

You have a family, do you think that it is possible to raise a family and have a successful career in snowsports? I guess so...for me it's an ideal way to raise a family. I get to spend lots of time with my baby Max; it's such a beautiful place for him to grow up and hopefully he will get to love the mountains and become a brilliant skier or snowboarder.

What advice would you give to any girls who would be interested in snowsports as a career? Just to think it through and understand what it is that appeals to you about it first. I can't talk for snowsports as a whole, there are so many different aspects, but my sector is very competitive. It's not easy to make money and you have to be prepared to work extremely hard or have a real "edge" to be successful. There are huge fringe benefits though!

What is the best thing about your job and what is the worst? The best is the personal freedom I have to do what I want to, how I want to and in general, when! The worst is that it can be all-consuming and really hard to get away from work.

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