



The Ancient Skier

Summer 2015

A LOCAL SKI COMPANY ACHIEVES GLOBAL SUCCESS

Bill Kirschner and K2 . . . an American business legend

It was on Vashon Island in the late 1950s when a recreational skier named Bill Kirschner found some time in his small factory to fiddle with a new idea, fiberglass skis. More than 50 years later, K2 is one of the biggest ski makers on the planet. The K2 story has all the elements of an American business legend: modest beginnings, rapid expansion, and an excellent product with a global reputation.

As a family skier, Bill was working hard to outfit his family with good ski equipment. Bill had his share of skiing experiences on laminated wood skis with tips that could easily break in the heavy snows of the Pacific Northwest. He took notice of the successes of Head and Hart metal skis coming into the mainstream, but he felt they were too heavy. While Bill's company, Kirschner Manufacturing, successfully produced splints and animal cages utilizing reinforced plastic and fiberglass, they were always looking for new products to build.

In 1961, using Head and locally imported Krystal laminated skis as form patterns, Bill started making experimental fiberglass skis. "He'd build the skis, and we'd go up to Crystal Mountain and test them," his son Bruce later wrote. In the early years it was trial and error. Sometimes they would get in just one run and the tops would come off, but his skis were light and responsive, and, in three years, a consistent "wet wrap" process was developed in which fiberglass fabric was wrapped around a lightweight core of spruce wood and baked into shape.

A&T provides an early boost

After testing at Crystal Mountain and Sun Valley, Bill found he had a ski that worked well and he took his concept to John Woodward at Anderson & Thompson Ski Company (A&T) in Seattle. Woodward liked the idea, as the firm had recently transitioned from 25 years of ski making to ski importing.

A&T initially helped Bill get started by providing a loan for him to buy forms from the defunct Dynaglass fiberglass skis manufacturing plant owned by Dale Boison in Santa Monica, Calif.

Woodward then helped by advertising the K2 line of skis, starting in the A&T 1962-63 catalog. The "K2" name was derived from the two Kirschner brothers, Bill and Don, but with a realization that the connection with K2, the mountain, might help the branding.



As time went on, Don focused mostly on the existing Kirschner Industries and Bill led the ski company, while A&T continued to help Bill with advance purchases and the dedicated marketing support of A&T's Russ Butterfield.

The first ski, the Holiday, quickly became popular, being priced at \$80, which put it between Head skis at \$120 and Japan's \$50 wooden laminated skis. In 1964, 250 pairs of the new Holidays were delivered to A&T, and, in 1965, that rose to 1,600 pairs. The second model was the Competition, which initially featured a black top. Then came the green-topped Elite recreational model and the red XR-10 racing model, both released in 1967.

In 1968, Bill hired ex-racer and former U.S. Women's Ski Team coach Chuck Ferries to lead marketing and Art Molnar to spearhead research and development. Art had been the inventor of the first all plastic-fiberglass ski to reach the marketplace, the Toni Sailer ski.

Red, white and blue defined the brand

One year later, Bill hired Terry Heckler, owner of the Seattle-based Heckler Associates marketing firm. Heckler thought it would be important to differentiate the company from other ski manufacturers.

His ideas strayed from traditional methods of advertising that showcased famous skiers. Instead, he wanted to differentiate the K2 brand by immersing the K2 logo into a variety of symbolic settings people could relate to. He first unified the look of all the models by suggesting the red-white-and-blue colors be used on all skis, defining the brand for decades, and he refined the logo to give it the look that remains today.

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K2 SUCCESS *Continued from Page 1*

In 1968, the company put the red, white, and blue tops on a select line of racing skis that Chuck Ferries was able to get some of the best woman ski racers to try out. One of those was Marilyn Cochran, who, in 1969, became the first American ever to win a World Cup discipline title (GS), and the first to win on an American ski. The ski was an instant success, sales soared, and the bright colors on the new Competition model gave it visual flash, especially when it was next to Head's all-black metal ski.

More key people were brought into K2, including freestyle legend Bobbie Burns. Burns worked nights in the shop and came up with the way to affix the legendary red, white and blue colors on the bottom of the ski.

By the late 1970s, Ferries and Burns had left K2, but success followed them as Ferries went on to start Pre skis (manufactured at K2) and Burns launched "The Ski."

Remember "Chew K2"?

With the initial success of the red, white, and blue Competition model, Heckler continued to boost K2, using his creativity with his flair for the offbeat: an Uncle Sam poster that read, "K2 Wants You," a barn painted "Chew K2" for print advertising and drive-by promotion, a weathered rural K2 gasoline station with ski-shaped pumps, and a poster of apes around a giant ski tip, echoing "2001: A Space Odyssey." There was always some connection to the product, but, typically, it was delightfully weird.

Heckler and his firm went on to design logos and advertising for companies such as Starbucks and Panera Bread, among others.

Making fun has always been part of the K2 success story -- from the refreshingly different ads, posters and catalogues to van tours by top skiers with cameras in tow visiting resorts across the country. These journeys often were captured in the media as roving cocktail parties on snow. K2 also frequently gets credit for having hosted the world's first wet T-shirt contest.

Ownership changes began in 1969

In late 1969, K2 was sold to the Cummins Engine Company of Columbus, Ind., which had the resources to help fuel the growth in ski production. Three years later, K2 was bought back by a local firm, the Sitka Group, a private assemblage of Seattle investors that included Bill and son Bruce Kirschner. They, in turn, sold the company to Anthony Industries in 1985, just three years after Bill had retired.

Publicly traded Anthony Industries changed its name to K2 Inc. and held several other sporting good lines such as ProFlex mountain bikes and Stearns personal floatation devices.

The racing connection continued into the 1980s, with sponsorship of racer Spider Sabich and, later, the medal-

winning Mahre twins, Phil and Steve. Today, though, under different ownership, the company does not make any racing skis. But it added snowboards in 1987 and remains successful in that area.

Late in the 1980s, K2 took notice as some skiers turned away from the confines of ski areas looking to back-country mountains. This momentous shift in a skier's potential landscape was featured brilliantly in the 1989 Greg Stump film, "Blizzard of Aahhs." The movie's three main skiers were on K2s and each remained a household name in the ski community for the next 20 years.

An added market came in April 1989 when K2 acquired the Madshus ski company in Biri, Norway. Madshus is a 109-year-old Nordic ski manufacturer that continues to be a leader in its field.

Bode Miller steps aboard the K2 Four

A jump ahead on the alpine front came in November 1994 when K2 began marketing the K2 Four, the first ski offered with a deep sidecut that was targeted at all-mountain, expert-level skiers. Generally considered as the ski that launched the shaped ski revolution, the Four gained additional credibility through Bode Miller, who won the 1995 Junior National GS championships on a pair of these recreational skis. A year later, K2 became one of the first ski manufacturers to offer all of its models as shaped skis, making the sport easier for skiers of all levels.

By 1999, the company started shifting production to China, and, by 2001, most skis were being designed on Vashon Island but manufactured in China. And more significant changes were on the way:

- In late 2006, the company began the move of its global headquarters from Vashon Island to its current facility in the SODO district of Seattle.

- Well positioned as it was, the company was acquired in August 2007 by another publicly traded holding company, the Los Angeles-based Jarden Corporation, the largest hard-goods sporting equipment company in the world. Jarden not only owns K2, Volkl, Marker, Dalbello, and Marmot, but it also holds other popular non-ski companies such as Coleman, Sunbeam, and Mr. Coffee. Today, K2 Sports (as it is officially known) offers a number of other brands, as well, including Line and Ride snowboards and Atlas and Tubbs snowshoes.

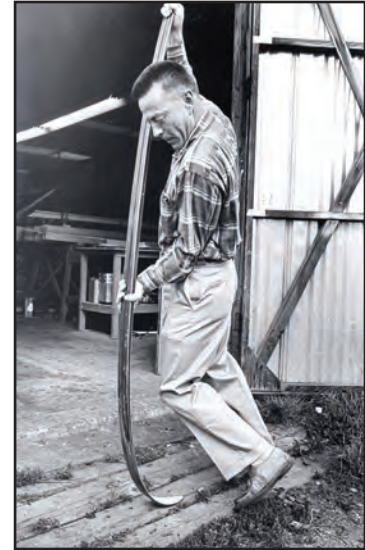
Through all the years of change, K2 continues to operate largely independent from its corporate cousins and remains based in Seattle with a solid Pacific Northwest following. None of us here in the region probably will be surprised if, in the near future, we see some quirky new K2 promotion being used to help sell a new K2 ski product.

~Kirby Gilbert





Another brilliant ad display by Terry Heckler from Ski Magazine (1973). Remember this gas station in Puyallup?



Bill Kirschner flexes an early model ski in 1965. (The photo of Bill on Page 1 is courtesy of K2 Sports.)

New Hi-Performance Skis at K2 Dealers Coast-to-Coast

competition
The Competition
This is the most advanced ski ever designed for the competition skier. It features a spruce core, epoxy and fiberglass reinforcement, and an ABS plastic top. The K-tex speed base provides excellent glide and control.

winter heat
Winter Heat
This ski is designed for the winter skier who wants a ski that is both comfortable and high performing. It features a spruce core, epoxy and fiberglass reinforcement, and an ABS plastic top. The K-tex speed base provides excellent glide and control.

three
Three
This is the most versatile ski ever designed. It features a spruce core, epoxy and fiberglass reinforcement, and an ABS plastic top. The K-tex speed base provides excellent glide and control.

bermuda shorts
Bermuda Shorts
This is the most fun ski ever designed. It features a spruce core, epoxy and fiberglass reinforcement, and an ABS plastic top. The K-tex speed base provides excellent glide and control.

Spider Sabich, Bruce Kirschner, Ed Norton and Wayne Wong lend their images to yet another 1970s Ski Magazine ad.

The welfare of the people is the highest law.

A 1972 Ski Magazine ad was shot on Seattle's 5th Avenue. Were the people skiers or professional models? Anyone know?

Marketing guru
Terry Heckler
boosted K2 sales
using his flair for
the offbeat with
quirky ads and
displays.

For The Breed Apart

Q. What should you expect for \$79.50?
A. The K-2 Holiday with more epoxy than any other ski! just \$79.50

A&T
A & T SKI COMPANY
1725 WESTLAKE AVENUE NO., SEATTLE

\$79.50 in the 1960s. What should you expect for that price today? Maybe a pair of ski goggles?

REMEMBERING

Martha Cram 1928 - 2015

Martha was born and raised in Seattle. She attended Garfield High School, Helen Bush School, Smith College and was graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in Art History and a minor in Architecture. Martha began skiing at an early age and progressed to competently ski the Mountaineers' Meany Lodge and its "Meany Lane" with a 20 mph rope tow and a 35-degree incline on the upper third of the slope. There, her ski tracks crossed those of Bob Cram, who became her husband four years later in 1952.

She and Bob were Professional Ski Instructors of America alpine instructors and taught skiing for many years with several ski schools. Skiing wasn't the only sport she participated in; others were golf (she once had a hole-in-one!), tennis, biking, sailing, and family camping.

Martha was able to be a homemaker throughout her life, which enabled her to follow her passion in the world of fabrics as an artist. She wove, knitted, crocheted and designed garments, scarves and blankets. She also inaugurated craft programs for the Four Winds and Nor'wester Camps in Washington's San Juan Islands.

She was a life member of both the Seattle Tennis and The Mountaineers clubs, and she also belonged to the Seattle Weavers Guild and Ryther Child Center.

Martha is survived by her husband, Bob, and children Doug, Robin, and Sara and their families, including five grandchildren.

PLAN NOW FOR SUN VALLEY 2016

Start making your plans now for the 33rd Annual Sun Valley Reunion, Jan. 16 - 23, 2016. The 5-out-of-6-day lift ticket pass for Baldy will be \$255 for all ages (just \$6 more than the last reunion) and you can add \$55 to that for 6 out of 7 days. The 5-out-of-6-day lift pass for Dollar will be \$110 for all ages. These rates will be available only to Ancient Skiers.

EMERITUS ANCIENT SKIER LIST EXPANDS AS YEARS GO BY

When you reach your 90th birthday let us know and you'll be added to the list below and receive an Emeritus Certificate to display, proudly proving you have reached this lofty viewpoint of your skiing life.

Nelson Bennett	Chuck & Ruth Lowrey	Bob & Flo Scarff
Bill & Mary Black	Eileen McCoskrie	Lois Simonson
Herschel Cox	Ralph McKiernan	Bob & Kathryn Smith
Paul & Betty Crews	Dee & Colleen Molenaar	Harold Stack
George Dondero	Marsh Perrow	Wally & Pris Stevenson
Beverly Funk	John Peterson	Jim & Huong Whitman
Evie Kappler	Kjell Qvale	John Woodward
Ole & Laila Lie	Lonnie Robinson	

RALPH FEDERSPIEL SHARES A SCARY/LUCKY MOMENT

Sometime about 1953 I bought a pair of stiff racing skis, Dynamics, from an old Austrian named Otto Laufler, I was a teenager. One day my right ski dug into the side of a hard packed mogul and I thought I would have a spiral fracture. Instead the ski broke through and I could not believe I was uninjured.

Bill McNabb 1925 - 2015

Ancient Skier Bill McNabb passed away June 15, 2015. Bill was born in Michigan in 1925 and served in WWII as a Marine in the South Pacific. After the war, he went on to college and graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in engineering.

Bill married Sallie Bosch in 1950 and moved to Seattle in 1955, where he began his long career as a manufacturer's representative to Boeing. Bill and Sallie became proud parents of eight children.

Skiing was Bill's family passion and he contributed his time and energy to the world of ski racing and his children. He found great pleasure working at ski races throughout the Pacific Northwest. As a parent or volunteer race official, he spent many years on the sides of ski courses - rain or shine, in deep snow or on icy hard pack. Off the slopes, he contributed immensely to both the Pacific Northwest Ski Education Foundation and the Pacific Northwest Ski Association, serving terms as president of both organizations. He was an international race official, past president of the Crystal Mountain Alpine Club, and inductee into the Crystal Mountain Founders Club. In 2008, he was inducted into the Pacific Northwest Ski Hall of Fame.

Sallie McNabb passed away in 1995, and, in 1998, Bill married Catherine Neely. He skied until he was 87 years old. Bill is survived by his wife Catherine; his children and grandchildren: Bernie Rush (Scott), Sunny and Aimee, Patti McNabb, Marti Bryce (John), Nancy Richards (Stoney), Johnny and Jamie, Mac McNabb (Suzy), Bill (Leah), Danny, Stuart (Chloe), and Scotty, Greg McNabb (Lisa), McKenna, Keith and Duncan, Peter McNabb, Drew McNabb, Paul McNabb (Natalie), Amanda and Beau; and his great granddaughter, Clara Skye McNabb.

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