

# Carrie Johnson

Girly Guts

Text and photo by Becky Lomax

In her first classic telemark race—a World Cup event, no less—only one month after friends suckered her onto a pair of telemark skis, Carrie Johnson finished dead last. “There I was in my first speed suit,” laughs Johnson, “Wrapping my arm around the first gate and racking up 18 penalties.”

Now one of three women on the national telemark “A” team, that race is history. After snowboarding in Big Air and extreme contests—qualifying for the Valdez Worlds one year—she swapped her snowboard for a pair of 200cm freeheel sticks with leather boots out of curiosity. One month later after forerunning one giant slalom, with bib stuffed in her pocket rather than worn for course inspection and clueless about required boot space on turns, she entered her first race. “It was ridiculous. I had no idea what I was doing,” she recalls. “But I’m too much of a tough guy to back out.”

Graduating to shorter skis and plastic boots the following winter, she raced toward placement on the 2003 U.S. Telemark Team. Now in her fifth year on the team, she trains at Big Mountain, Montana and competes on the World Cup circuit in North America and Europe. In a class of women who define grit, she eats gut-busting classic courses for breakfast—gates, lung-heaving skate climbs, and jumps.

On a national team with no funding machine, Johnson coaches herself with the support of other telemark racers. She constructs her own training program, often egged on by her boyfriend, an ex-navy SEAL. Using the same gumption that prompted her to enter her first race, she raises money for her competitive travel, waxes her own boards and garners her own sponsorships.

At 33 years old, Johnson says she’s in the best shape of her life. She’s lugged a Pulaski through some of the west’s bigger burns on a summer hotshot fire crew. This past summer, she trained as a smoke jumper, hauling a 110-pound pack—90% of her body weight—three miles in 90 minutes and digging trench lines for 16-hour stints broken only by four-hour rests. While injury sidelined her from completing jump school, she pushed through rehab to hop back on skis this winter and plans to hit smoke jump training again in May.

What’s the appeal to smoke jumping and telemark racing? Johnson laughs, “You’re with the biggest group of badassess out there.”

