

Women ski pros are *true divas*

By Ann Larson

Six Snowmass female ski pros wait on top of Aspen Mountain's North American trail during the Aspen World Synchro Championships at the beginning of April. At the appointed time, the synchro team known as the Snowmass Divas start their descent down the hill to the sound of music.

Turning in unison, they perform a series of figures, creating patterns like a dance. A very fast dance on the snow where one mistake can spell disaster.

Shapes such as diamonds or boxes appear and disappear as the skiers weave back and forth in harmony, matching in speed and style. In the chain saw, they cross behind each other at high speed with only inches to spare.

It takes intense concentration and complete trust in their teammates.

At the end of two days and many runs, the results are calculated and the Snowmass Divas synchro team consisting of Karina Alder, Kelly Beirsto, Maca Carluccio, Jacqui Horton, Jenny MacArthur, Nicole Marx and Nico Rienaecker win first place for women's teams and second overall. Their sister team, the Aspen Divas, finish second for women's teams and fourth overall. The top team is the Aspen Demo Team with six men and one woman.

Synchro competitions offer ski school instructors from all over the world a chance to compete in a team sport, showing off their individual skills and ability to work as a team.

In 1998, the Aspen Divas was started to create a team for women only. Villager Kelly Beirsto competed against the Divas that first year on the Mammoth Broad Squad team from Mammoth Lakes ski area in California. They finished third for women behind the Aspen Divas.

The following year, she began teaching in Snowmass and joined the Aspen Divas as an alternate. With a B.A. in education, Kelly loves that her classroom is on the slopes. She has taught in five different countries: U.S., Australia, Argentina, Chile and her homeland of Canada. Often teaching two ski seasons each year, she has 39 seasons of instructing under her belt.

Beirsto demonstrates the high level of professionalism that the Divas possess. Just as in the world at large – which is still a man's world – they have had to try harder and train harder to be taken seriously.

"The training commitment is huge. We often train six days per week getting to the lift at 8 a.m. and working until someone has a lesson and then again going up on the last ride of the day and training until 5:30 p.m. with our coach Stephanie Brown," said Kiwi Robynne Ross of the Aspen Divas.

Like Beirsto, she racks up the seasons between Aspen and her home country, where she is an examiner for the New Zealand Ski Instructors Alliance. In February, she teamed up with Beirsto to com-

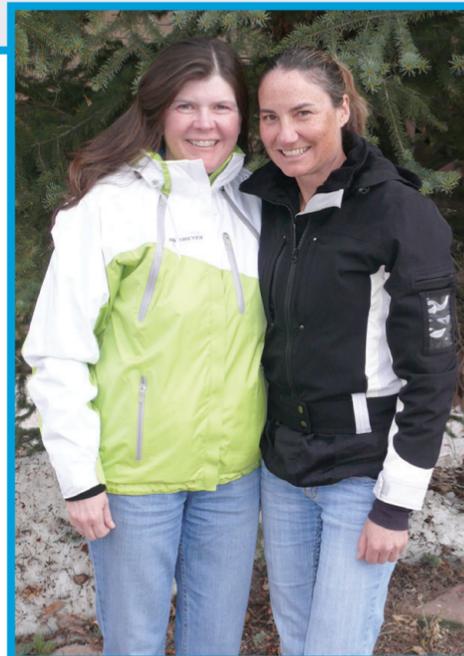


MARK BORDERICK/SPECIAL TO THE SUN

Snowmass Divas from bottom to top: Kelly Beirsto, Karina Alder, Jenny MacArthur, Nico Rienaecker, Jacqui Horton and Maca Carluccio.

ANN LARSON/SNOWMASS SUN

Divas Kelly Beirsto and Robynne Ross.



pete in the Synchro Ski Carving Championship held at Suicide Six ski area in Woodstock, Vt. to celebrate its 75th anniversary. They tied for third place.

In March, they competed in the National Powder 8 Championships in Aspen and came in second after the Aspen Diva Team of Megan Harvey and Cindy Leuchtenberg.

for those of us who participated. The Birkman gives you a look at your self, who you are, what your needs are and how you react under stress. It has been a very insightful tool first to recognize yourself and then to help you manage these things in your life," said Beirsto, who admits that the Divas have helped her overcome her shyness.

"Skiing with the Divas has improved my confidence a lot. I now also manage the team and put on events. The Divas have helped me believe in myself and made me feel that I had something to contribute," she said.

Over the past decade, the Divas have influenced scores of women ski instructors. The program has become so popular that this year the team was split into the Aspen and Snowmass Divas.

Another member of the Snowmass Divas is Nico Rienaecker of Germany, who has been a ski instructor for 15 years, including five for Skico. She has a Masters degree in sport science.

Like so many of the other Divas, who learned to be good skiers by skiing with men, she has found the joy of skiing with women.

"I realized that it's a lot of fun to ski with the other women on the team. We push each other. There's no bitching going on. They are very supportive. We don't need men to take care of us. We've earned the respect of the men," she said.

Rienaecker works as a Skico pro in their Challenge Aspen program along with another Diva, Nicole Marx, who grew up in Buffalo. Her dad was a ski patroller at a nearby ski area.

"I grew up in the ski patrol room with all the men and after watching 'Aspen Extreme,' I couldn't wait to be a ski bum there. Now I enjoy skiing with women," she said.

After earning her B.A. in Environmental Studies and Landscape Design, she made the move here last year and began do landscape design with her skis. Recruited by Nico, she started training with the Divas this year and became an alternate.

At the last minute due to the injury of a teammate, she ended up competing in the Aspen World Synchro Championships in the figure that got the highest score for that pass.

Beirsto has watched Marx improve over the year.

"It was important that we could trust her," she said, for even though the maneuvers look beautiful they can be dangerous.

One of the goals of the Divas is to raise the standard of women's skiing in the ski school," said the Snowmass Divas' coach Stephanie Brown.

It seems that they have truly succeeded.

MORE THAN JUST SKIING

Training with the Divas not only makes the team members better skiers, but it helps them grow as women.

Three years ago, the Divas held life coaching courses for the team with Kathryn Mayer of New York using the Birkman assessment tool.

"It's been a wonderful growing process

For more information about the Divas, check their Web site at www.aspenteam-diva.com.