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FEEL THE GAS-POWERED LOVE: CAN'T WE FIND COMMON GROUND WHEN IT COMES TO REDNECK FUN?

■ Slednecks vs. Lungbusters

Is it cool to access your backcountry powder via snowmobile? We asked our readers and they were split right down the middle. So we put the question to earn-your-turns purist Casey Flynn and gas-powered realist Dana Allen for the ultimate backcountry cage match.

two legs

Backcountry skiing is about more than turns. When I strap on my skis and skins, I'm out for a taste of the wild. For the thumping of snow clumps off tree branches. For the swish of my skis en route to remote powder stashes. I'm here to commune with the mountains.

Then my reverie is shattered as an unholy clamor rips up out of the depths of the forest like a swarm of powder-thirsty weed whackers. A parade of smoke-spewing sledheads scream by on their hasty way to satisfaction, tracks spraying chunks of oil-stained snow. Gas fumes mingle with the scent of pine and spruce. Do these clowns really need to show off the size of their engines everywhere?

I am in praise of slowness. I'm not talking about, "Whoa, we live in a digital age, dude, I need to unplug," kind of slowing down. I'm talking about the kind of slowness that keeps you alive. The pace of legs over snow favors observation of weather and snowpack conditions, stability and avalanche hazard. Sliding foot by foot up a mountain valley gives you time to compute what the mountains want to tell you. How are you going to catch that "whumph" when you're hauling two-stroke ass toward your next run?

Winter in the high country is raw. Layering up while the sky pukes around me, miles from the trailhead—that's real. I've got to rely on my brain, my body and what's in my pack to keep myself upright and breathing. When I'm leaning into

whipping winds on a ridge top, blowing snow crackling against my goggles, I know I'm alive. I'm surviving and thriving. Getting freshies is icing on the cake.

With interstate highways and high-speed quads raiding the mountains, we need some terrain that stays sacred, that doesn't get tracked out within an hour of dawn. Touring gear gets lighter, more durable and more intuitive every year. But human-powered access can only take us so far and so fast. There are places vehicles shouldn't go, where we can soak up the holy in the form of face shots and healthy lungs.

Boulder-based freelancer, Casey Flynn ponders the meaning of life with the help of deep powder and clean rock lines, which he claims is easier done without the hubbub of the combustion engine.

two stroke

Let's get one thing straight—I am not a card-carrying member of the Snowmobilers of America Club (which as far as I know doesn't exist). I'm a skier. And like every other skier I know, I live to ski fresh pow.

I moved out West from the Ice Coast to do it. I got fatter skis so it would be more fun. I took avalanche safety courses. I learned about how the snowpack should be analyzed and respected. I spent hours researching backcountry gear just to spend more time skiing freshies.

And then I bought a sled. Gone were the hours I spent slogging along flat approaches, replaced with the thrill of whipping past aspen groves, navigating long sidehills and getting face shots on the sled. Drudgery was replaced by recreation—and, come on, isn't that the point

of skiing in the first place? If you want exercise, can't you find it anywhere?

For those of you thinking 'But what about moments of quiet contemplation?' I find that there's plenty of that on the skin track up. And since I can't bring my sled into designated Wilderness areas, there will forever be bastions of silent meditation.

"How about the environmental impact?" you might ask. Valid question. When I bought LaFawnduh, my sweet mid-90s two-stroke powder maven, I had moments where I wondered the same thing. But consider this—my daily commute was a 5-minute bike ride. My lawn at 9,000 feet needed a trim once a month and was more putting green than driving range. My apartment was festooned with CFLs and I paid exorbitant prices for local eggs. I cut my carbon footprint where I could through conscious choices and practices. If you're a skier who's not eating only local, organic food to fuel your skiing and instead scarf down GMO-laden over-fertilized swill, your impact is right up there with mine.

So the next time you see a sled at the trailhead with a pair of fat boards strapped on back, don't think "greedy emission-spewing powder-hog," think "efficient backcountry enthusiast." Smile. Give 'em a wave. And then offer to trade post-skiing beers for a tow out to the start of your skintrack. You won't regret it. No one ever does.

Dana Allen attended Middlebury College in Vermont before moving to Crested Butte, Colorado to obtain his Master of Arts in burrito-rolling and dirt-baggery. Currently back in Vermont, and sled-less, he misses the heady bouquet of two-stroke smoke in the pre-dawn light of a backcountry trailhead parking lot.

READER RESPONSE FROM THE WEB

Because in the world of anonymous online comments everyone has a say.

"Only if they stay in designated areas and don't cross over ridges into no snowmobile zones like they currently do in parts of Colorado. Plenty of space, but they should follow the rules."

—Peter Jones

Get ready for our next question, dear readers: **hire a guide or go it solo, how do you hit the hills?** Let us know and butt heads at **ElevationOutdoors.com**

