



Have a white hot field day

Looking for some ski-field action? **Rachael Oakes Ash** reports on the new and alluring attractions of Australasia's winter resorts

THERE'S big news on the slopes of Australia and New Zealand for the coming season from upgraded snowmaking to new lodges, and everyone is pumped for a bumper winter.

The biggest is Coronet Peaks' \$NZ30 million new base lodge 25 minutes from Queenstown with an Aspen-inspired VIP Peak Club for cashed-up members only.

Early snow falls in both Australia and New Zealand are a good indicator so far that we won't be skiing on rocks.

Queenstown received 11m in two days last week and Australian resorts have welcomed the lower temperatures to get the snow guns blasting.

So what is hot and what's not for the ski fields of Australasia in 2008?

What's hot

OFF-PISTE: Treble Cone opens the doors on its inaugural TC Freeski Camp for 13- to 17-year-olds wanting to make use of TC's famous big-mountain off-piste skiing. This week-long camp includes intensive coaching with like-minded free skiers, conveniently offered during the July school holidays. www.treblecone.com

The boutique ski-in, ski-out resort of Charlotte Pass in New South Wales is offering guided back-country treks for confident and adventurous skiers and boarders looking for untracked steep and deep powder in tree-lined chutes and open bowls.

www.charlottepass.com.au

MAN-MADE SNOW: Everyone's upped the ante on snow-making over the past few years with Perisher Blue forking out a mammoth \$9.75 million to upgrade their automated snow guns



RUN and jump ... winter has turned on great skiing conditions in Australia and New Zealand.



WIN WIN

KEEP snug this winter in fashionable footwear from UGG Australia. UGG Australia uses only the best quality sheepskin, deflecting moisture, allowing air to circulate and keeping feet dry. ETC is giving you the chance to win one of two pairs of Classic Short UGGs in sand colour, each valued at \$229.95. To enter, simply email your name, address, postcode and contact number plus

your shoe size to competitions@thecouriermail.com.au with UGG in the subject line.

Competition closes midnight Sunday 08/06/08 and drawn Tuesday 10/06/08. Only Queensland residents and ONE entry per email address will be accepted. Winners will be notified by mail. Prize value is \$459.90. This information is being collected by Queensland Newspapers for the purpose of this promotion only.

NEW CHAIRLIFTS: New chairlifts mean less time spent queuing and more time on the snow. Mt Buller (www.mtbuller.com.au) introduces the wholly green-powered Holden Chairlift Express, a six-seater, super-charged lift to help beginners access Bourke Street terrain.

Family-friendly, Australian-owned, Cardrona Ski Resort (www.cardrona.com) an hour from Queenstown, has installed a high-speed detachable quad chair for its Captain's Basin area. The new lift cuts the journey time from nine minutes to 3½ minutes from base to peak.

CROSS-TASMAN FLIGHTS: Air New Zealand (www.airnewzealand.com.au) has expanded its direct flights from Australia's east coast to Queenstown. In a bid to lure the lucrative Australian ski market (800,000 take to the snow annually and some 50,000 travel to New Zealand) across the Tasman, the airline has announced nine direct flights to Queenstown per week from Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne for the peak ski months of July and August.

FESTIVALS: Hotham launches its week-long Apres Festival from August 9 for wine-tasting, parties, fashion parades, bands and more. www.hotham.com.au

Perisher Blue's Coca-Cola Wild Winter Weekend is back again on August 1-3. This staple on the calendar of mayhem serves up the Big Air Leap for Loot and the action-packed Boarder/Skier Cross. www.perisherblue.com.au

Queenstown's American Express Winterfestival from June 27-July 6 is bigger than ever. Air New Zealand is hosting a Festival in the Sky flight from Sydney to Queenstown with comedians, bands and madness plus 20 per cent off lift passes at Coronet Peak and an extra 10kg ski gear baggage allowance. www.winterfestival.co.nz

to 184 this season, beating Thredbo's impressive 155. Victoria's Hotham has installed environmentally efficient snow-making on to Heavenly Valley, Falls Creek has added more to Wombat's Ramble and Mt Buller has enhanced the beginner area for the Holden Chairlift.

Not to be outdone, New Zealand's Coronet Peak has dedicated a slice of the resort's \$NZ30million upgrade to snowmaking with some 200 automated snow guns.

HELICOPTERS: The Invincibles private ski field is accessible only by helicopter. New this season is a two-day, one-night Invincibles heli-ski package with Southern Lakes Heli Ski (www.southernlakeshelsinki.co.nz). The adventurous take to the skies for three heli-ski runs each day in a private charter then unlimited access to the Invincibles rope-tow back-country terrain, stay overnight in the basic hut and do it all again the next day. Only you and your fellow heli skiers will be on the mountain.

Mt Potts, near Christchurch, has traded in its snowcat for rotor motion launching the southern hemisphere's only "Helipark". The theory is simple: hand over \$NZ200 for a flight to the top of the 380ha ungroomed back-country. Then ski or ride down.

What's not hot

CANCELLED FLIGHTS:

Qantaslink have cancelled its service to Mt Hotham's airport, eliminating Australia's only domestic direct snow flights. Visitors to Hotham can still use Albury, but that's not the point.

LIFT PASS COSTS: The Australian Alpine Club's international price survey reveals Australia's ski resorts as the most expensive lift passes in the world — \$98 for a lift ticket at Perisher Blue and only a dollar less at Thredbo for half the terrain. The Kiwis fare better, with Treble Cone's \$NZ99 (\$A81) the most expensive.