

# Snow queens are minding their Qs

*Women's ski clinics are thriving. Rachael Oakes-Ash joins the sisterhood*

**M**Y HIPS are made for child bearing, which is why I ski funny and probably why you don't see too many pregnant women whizzing down a mountain.

It's all in the Q angle, which is technical speak for wide load, or so my ski instructor tells me.

It's Women's Week at Mt Hotham and Falls Creek and true to my all-or-nothing form, I'm taking part in both, though, thankfully, one week precedes the other as even my wide load won't reach across both mountains.

If you have ever skied with a bloke, then Women's Week makes sense.

Men throw themselves with brute force down a mountain, driven by some competitive urge.

Women over-think it, worrying about how we look as we make our turn, whether we switched off the iron, whether our butt looks big in these ski pants.

On average, skiing is a male sport. You have only to visit Hotham's General Store Pub after 10pm to realise this.

Women's ski weeks have evolved as most chicks on sticks find themselves hitting an intermediate rut and not advancing further.

A lifetime of male ski instructors and male partners screaming at us to get down the hill has turned us off.

Group ski instruction tends to work with the male philosophy and forget about the positive stroking we women need to obtain our goals.

"That's it darling, you can do it. Looking

fabulous. Bravo" works far better than "Move that butt. Hurry up. Haven't you got it yet?"

Enter Lisa Kilpatrick and her band of female ski instructors here to take 28 women out of their comfort zone on to the next level.

Thanks to some embellishment on my feedback form about my skiing history I find myself in the top group, and surrounded by five women over 40 in helmets.

I would never have dreamed of voluntarily acquiring a helmet, but the desire to fit in sees me rushing into rentals for a hard hat in fetching red.

The day starts at 10am with two hours of instruction, then lunch on the mountain and two more hours, including video analysis.

I feel like a world champion until I see the playback and notice that Q angle again.

When I grew up, skiing was only for the rich kids at school who returned each September term with tanned faces, panda white eyes and the glow of the entitled.

There is more than just the entitled among this group. There are single working mothers taking a break with women they've never met, best female friends catching up from interstate, a new divorcee gaining her balance — and all with a common focus, to get down the mountain with style.

There is no style without diamonds and while I talk carats Lisa is talking double.

She talks pitch, gradient and how to bend the knees and I am soon to learn Double Diamonds are far from a girl's best friend.

To make it down in one piece would have been a miracle three days ago, but it is do

riquer come lunch time.

I spend my nights celebrating my new-found ski prowess by shaking those ski legs turned dance legs on General Store tables.

The test comes for me on my last day, when I am invited to spend the afternoon skiing with Winter Olympian Marcus Lovett.

He has brought two mates along for company, Brett and Howie, and the gender ski-off begins.

I am soon to learn what off piste means as Marcus and his men lead me astray and into trees that I am sure shouldn't be there.

True to form, they race down the hill hardly taking a breath to note my graceful technique as I carve up the slope.

Then comes the infamous Mary's Slide. If

it were a waterfall it would be Niagara — a wall of solid snow.

All my skills from the week are called on, I visualise myself skiing perfectly, map out my route in my head, close my eyes and see the movie before making my first turn, just as Lisa had said.

I feel my whole downhill foot, put chin out and down over the bottom ski, rise up ... my upper body is a core of steel.

I can almost hear my fellow females cheering me on and the crowd roars as I make it to the bottom. The men? They're way behind me, checking out my Q angle, of which I am now mighty proud.

Oh, OK. The Olympian made it down before me, but I never said he won a medal.



Fall girls women's ski program at Falls Creek.

## traveller's checks

### Local destinations:

Women's Ski Weeks are held at Mt Hotham and Falls Creek Thredbo and Perisher run events, too.

[www.fallscreek.com.au](http://www.fallscreek.com.au)

[www.mthotham.com.au](http://www.mthotham.com.au)

[www.thredbo.com.au](http://www.thredbo.com.au)

[www.perisherblue.com.au](http://www.perisherblue.com.au)

### Farther afield:

With the ski season on the home straight, you could consider going north to get your Q-angle sorted.

Try Whistler Blackcomb in British Columbia,

[www.whistlerblackcomb.com](http://www.whistlerblackcomb.com)

Steamboat in Colorado,

[www.steamboat.com](http://www.steamboat.com)

Vail, [www.vail.com](http://www.vail.com) or Fernie

Alpine Ski Resort in Canada,

[www.skifernie.com](http://www.skifernie.com)