

## Escape skiing

## Snow queens

Val Thorens in the French Alps has a new ski school for girls by girls, writes Ellie Ross



Piste of the action: Chloé Ferri, Ellie Ross and Julia Lejoille prepare for a Girlschool ski lesson with the 'basic position' (inset)

**C**REAKING across a snowy backdrop, all wobbly knees and sticking-out backside, there is nothing ladylike about my skiing.

It's the same story whenever I hit the slopes and end up chasing after my brothers, who shoot a constant trail of powder into my face.

So I headed to Val Thorens in the French Alps to improve my technique – and pick up some speed – at Girlschool, which specialises in teaching women and children to ski.

At 2,300m, this French resort is the highest in Europe, with doorstep skiing and snow more or less guaranteed from November to May.

This year, it retained its title as World's Best Ski Resort – and with more than 600km of pistes, a £16million lift investment and an increasing selection of ski schools, it's a well-deserved accolade.

New this season, Girlschool was set up by friends Chloé Ferri and Julia Lejoille, who have 25 years tuition experience between them.

'Parents usually prefer women to look after their children and many women like to learn with a female instructor,' says Ferri as I click into my skis. As we sit on a chairlift, Ferri points out some of the differences between male and female skiers.

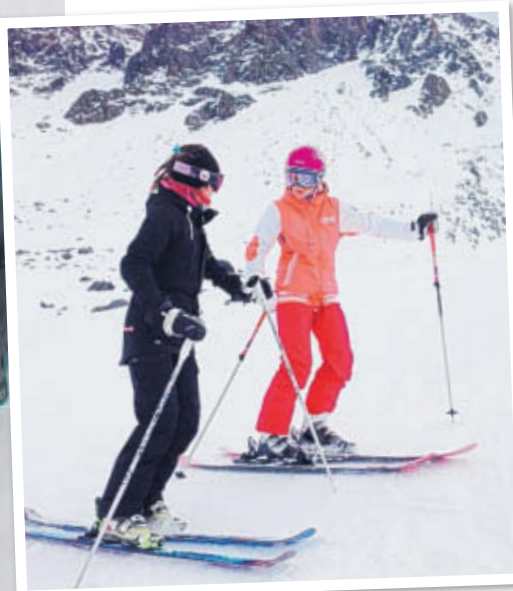
'See how quick he's going?' she asks as a man whizzes beneath our feet, hacking up the piste. 'Men are competitive and go fast but some don't always have good technique or control and that can be dangerous. Most women ski within their ability,' she adds, 'and add speed later. They like to ski well and encourage each other in group situations.'

Ferri's opinions may sound sexist to some but they are well founded. The Warren Smith Ski Academy has found that 70 per cent of women are cautious or nervous and take their time to get their technique precise.

Out of the 30 per cent of more adventurous women, only ten per cent overtake men on the slopes. And while men can get by on strength, it's important for women to use skis that are the right weight for them.

I've hired female-specific skis from Intersport, which are lighter and softer than men's, making them easier for me to turn (plus, they are pink, the perfect complement to my raspberry-hued salopettes).

We glide off the lift and start with a



warm-up, where Ferri first watches me then demonstrates how to perfect the 'basic position'.

Snaking downhill on a gentle piste, I concentrate on keeping my weight forward, knees bent, skis slightly apart – and my hips in.

I've noticed a nagging ache in my lower back that Ferri says is due to me adopting 'the woman's position' – sticking out my bum à la

Kardashian.

Correcting the pose instantly relieves the pain and gives me more balance.

We start smoothing out my turns and Ferri keeps asking how I am and cheerfully shouting praise with each improved manoeuvre.

She is clearly tuned in to what I need, which is a few stops, gentle encouragement and steering towards the uncrowded slopes. Then she

utters the words I was dreading: 'Let's go faster.' With skiing – just as with riding a bike – you need a certain amount of speed to balance. It also helps with mastering key techniques such as carving.

Ferri gets me to stick my poles under my armpits and tuck into the racing position.

'You need to be like an egg with legs,' she says. 'Let your skis slide.'

I point my skis downhill, hold my breath and push off.

With Ferri at my side, I have an extra boost of confidence as

I race downhill with the fresh Alpine wind whipping my face. Skidding to a stop at the bottom, I give a triumphant whoop.

With a few more lessons, it won't be long before I'll be the one kicking up powder in my brothers' faces.

## TRY IT FOR YOURSELF

**GIRLSCHOOL** (girlschool.fr) offers customised ski and snowboard lessons from £40 per hour.  
**CRYSTAL SKI HOLIDAYS** (crystalski.co.uk) offers a week's stay at the three-star Odalys Tourotel Apartments from £320 per person, including flights and transfers

## GET TOGGED UP FOR THE SLOPES



**Merino socks**  
£39.99,  
cepsports.co.uk



**The North Face Men's Streif Jacket** £230,  
cotswoldoutdoor.com



**Anon WM1 Goggle** £175,  
anonoptics.com



**Quebec Insulated Pants**  
£175, uk.oakley.com



**Spectre Gloves** £35,  
burton.com



**Police sunglasses** £130,  
opticalexpress.co.uk



**Vans Mountain Edition** £70,  
vans.co.uk



World's best slopes: Chloe and Ellie (inset) and a view of Val Thorens at night

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