

Lifts 2005— Nothing to Brag About

Despite a good season in skier visits, ski areas across North America opted to spend their money elsewhere, leaving lift construction at an all-time low.

by Jennifer Rowan

The annual lift construction survey has been lovingly and carefully watched over by David Rowan, Nils Ericksen and many before them in the 44 years it has existed. So, when the job became mine this year, I dutifully turned to our back issues and poured over the historical data so that I was armed to tackle this year's analysis. When this year's figures were compiled and the charts were made, I thought there had to be a mistake. As near as I could figure, it was the worst lift construction year on record.

That's right, folks, only 33 new lifts were installed in North America in 2005, the same paltry number as in 2002. But add this year's total VTFH of 56,463 into the equation, and we hit our record low. The previous lowest VTFH was 56,646 in 2003. (Note: VTFH measures the number of skiers who can be transported 1,000 feet vertically in one hour. It is arrived at by multiplying the vertical rise

in feet by the capacity in people-per-hour and divided by 1,000.)

Let's first take into consideration that the U.S. logged its fourth best season ever with 56.4 million visits in 2004/05. Granted, the folks in the Pacific Northwest had one of their worst seasons ever, but everyone else fared pretty well.

So, what happened? After studying the trends, speaking with several experts and analyzing the data, we have come up with the following: we have no clue. Perhaps ski areas are spending their money elsewhere. Were the pleas from the snowmaking and grooming departments finally heard? Are those new ticketing systems and learning centers a ski area's way of saying, "The customer needs more than great lifts?" If so, then the news is not all that bad. Clearly resorts are as committed as ever to providing the best experience possible and we are quite sure that that still includes

lifts...just not for this year.

In the East, eight lifts were installed, as opposed to nine lifts the year before. Over the past ten years, the region has averaged 10.4 lifts per year, making the eight a low number indeed. The bright spots were the installations of two quads as part of an expansion at Wisp in Maryland; and Vermont's Burke Mountain and Stowe each upgraded with a detachable.

The Mountain region logged 17 new lifts, which is right where its 10-year average is. So, not a bad year (in 2003 there were only 4!), but an average year. The big news in the Rockies was at Snowmass—a pulsed gondola and a 6-pack, both from Leitner-Poma, made their debuts this season. And a new private area in Montana comes on line this season: Spanish Peaks, located next door to Big Sky and the Yellowstone Club. The area is part of an upscale real estate development that will offer home buyers

New Lifts by Region

Region	New VTFH	Surface	Chairs	Gondolas/ Trams		Total
East	9,831	-	8	-	-	8
Mountain	35,849	2	14	1	1	17
Pacific	4,250	-	3	-	-	3
Canada	6,533	-	5	-	-	5
Totals	56,463	2	30	1	1	33

Lift Comparison with Preceding Years

Region	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
East	11	12	10	13	6	12	10	13	9	8
Midwest	1	10	3	4	2	0	2	4	2	0
Mountain	24	24	21	25	11	14	5	4	25	17
Pacific	10	9	17	10	10	2	6	3	8	3
Canada	7	6	13	11	21	9	10	11	10	5
Totals	53	61	64	63	50	37	33	35	54	33

New Lifts by Manufacturer

Manufacturer	Surface	Chair	Gondolas/ Trams		Total Lifts	Total VTFH
Doppelmayr CTEC	2	20	-	-	22	28,803
Leitner-Poma	-	10	1	1	11	27,660
Totals	2	30	1	1	33	56,463

VTFH (000) Comparison with Preceding Years

Region	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
East	15,890	32,123	19,453	33,695	11,358	16,881	14,891	12,431	11,065	9,831
Midwest	95	5,929	2,185	4,373	1,070	0	1,744	3,120	1,130	0
Mountain	59,195	71,199	69,922	52,591	21,999	25,625	12,906	13,376	25,870	35,849
Pacific	28,549	22,088	46,357	17,952	28,521	4,091	11,296	6,425	15,860	4,250
Canada	16,444	15,232	28,265	22,142	32,424	18,042	26,244	21,294	11,675	6,533
Totals	120,173	146,571	166,182	130,753	95,372	64,639	67,081	56,646	65,600	56,463

East

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed			Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH*
			HP	Length	Vert.				
MARYLAND									
Wisp	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	125	2041	320	2400	1800	375	768
Wisp	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	200	2263	455	2200	1800	375	1001
MASSACHUSETTS									
Ski Butternut	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	125	2078	416	1800	1800	400	749
NEW YORK									
Windham Mountain	3C	Doppelmayr CTEC	30	457	50	1200	1200	350	60
VERMONT									
Bolton Valley	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	200	4389	955	1400	1400	450	1337
Burke Mountain	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	400	3807	563	2400	1800	1000	1351
Quechee	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	200	2630	597	1800	1200	450	1075
Stowe Mountain	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	700	5889	1454	2400	1800	1100	3490

Mountain

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed			Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH*
			HP	Length	Vert.				
COLORADO									
Aspen Highlands	3C	Leitner-Poma	300	3683	1708	1085	1085	500	1853
Beaver Creek	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	700	5633	1,524	2600	2400	1000	3962
Breckenridge	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	400	2714	939	1800	600	1000	1690
Crested Butte	4C	Leitner-Poma	150	1741	469	1800	1200	450	844
Snowmass	6C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	1200	10074	2174	3000	3000	1050	6522
Snowmass	Pulsed Gondola	Leitner-Poma	150	1088	160	530	530	1000	85
Winter Park	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	1000	6913	1771	3200	2600	1000	5667
IDAHO									
Tamarack	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	700	5417	1,625	2400	1800	1000	3900
Tamarack	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	75	2405	331	2400	1800	500	794
MONTANA									
Spanish Peaks ¹	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	400	4145	715	1600	600	886	1144
Spanish Peaks	3C	Doppelmayr CTEC	125	2638	538	1200	600	500	646
Spanish Peaks	3C	Doppelmayr CTEC	40	1691	136	1200	600	500	163
Spanish Peaks	Platter	Doppelmayr CTEC	15	768	25	121	121	450	3
Spanish Peaks	Platter	Doppelmayr CTEC	15	1250	50	129	129	450	6
NEW MEXICO									
Ski Santa Fe	3C	Leitner-Poma	500	5746	1525	1800	1550	500	2745
UTAH									
Deer Valley	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	700	4995	1,752	2400	2400	1000	4205
Solitude Mountain	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	250	3379	675	2400	2400	425	1620

Pacific

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed			Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH*
			HP	Length	Vert.				
CALIFORNIA									
Alpine Meadows	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	400	3464	943	2000	2000	1000	1886
Kirkwood	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	400	2767	480	2400	2400	1000	1152
Sugar Bowl	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr CTEC	400	2014	505	2400	1992	1000	1212
WASHINGTON									
City of Spokane ²	Pulsed Gondola	Doppelmayr CTEC	200	1120	104	630	530	600	66

Canada

Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed			Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH*
			HP	Length	Vert.				
BRITISH COLUMBIA									
Silver Star	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	500	4055	1177	2400	1842	1000	2825
ONTARIO									
Blue Mountain	4C	Leitner-Poma	81	1309	245	2400	2400	394	588
Hidden Valley	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	100	1221	279	1600	1600	453	446
QUEBEC									
Mont Cascade	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	150	2260	417	2000	2000	453	834
Ski Bromont	4C	Doppelmayr CTEC	300	5167	920	2000	2000	453	1840

* Calculations based on design capacity

1 - New Area

2 - Not included in totals

a backyard that will include a detachable quad, two triples and two platter lifts, all from Doppelmayr/CTEC.

As we mentioned, the Pacific region, namely the Pacific Northwest, suffered through one of the worst snow years on record. As a result, only three new lifts were installed, all of which are in northern California, where the snow did fly. Included in our charts to the left, but not included in our totals, is the only other gondola for 2005: the city of Spokane is sporting a new pulsed gondola from Doppelmayr/CTEC.

Moving north, Canada hit an all-time low with only five lifts. Maybe it was the weather out in B.C. and Alberta. Surely, there will be brighter times on the horizon with the Winter Olympics heading to Vancouver in 2010.

The Manufacturer Story

With the acquisition of Partek by Doppelmayr/CTEC, there are only two lift players left on the field. Does this hurt the industry? Doppelmayr/CTEC's Jan Leonard doesn't think so. "There just isn't enough business to support three or four manufacturers. Gone are the days of 70 to 75 lifts per year. I think we will be looking at 50 to 55 as a good year."

While Doppelmayr/CTEC installed twice as many lifts as Leitner-Poma, 22 versus 11, the companies were almost dead even on VTFH with Doppelmayr/CTEC accounting for 28,803 versus Leitner-Poma's 27,660.

One thing both companies agree on is the fact that lead times are growing, making it harder to fill late or last-minute orders. "Lifts keep getting bigger and order dates keep getting later," reports Leitner-Poma's Rick Spear. Diesel engines, gear boxes, steel in general, are all requiring more time to acquire. Throw in a generally longer permitting process, which accounted for several lifts being delayed this past year, and we see that the old way of doing business will have to change. Instead of ringing out the register at the end of the season to see what improvements can be made, ski areas will need to make these decisions earlier in the year and plan for them.

Surface Lifts

Despite the woes of their air-bound cousins, surface lifts are still going strong, especially in the conveyor category. A total of 80 conveyor lifts were



This detachable quad from Doppelmayr/CTEC was installed at Beaver Creek. The new lift will cut the ride time up to Larkspur Bowl from 11 minutes to 5 1/2.



For its new Super Gauge Express, Winter Park has purchased enough clean, renewable wind energy to run this Leitner-Poma detachable quad for the season.



Mansfield Ski Club in Ontario installed the longest Magic Carpet last summer—a whopping 800 feet. The Carpet will move 1,500 people per hour at full capacity.



The convenience of a rope tow is illustrated by its ease of transportation. Here, a snowmobile trailer will deliver the new lift to Beaver Camp, N.Y.

installed, which beats out last year's record of 77. Areas both large and small are turning to conveyor lifts to get both beginners and tubers up the hill—some areas are even mixing both tubers and beginners on the same conveyor, reports Magic Carpet's Jennifer Kelly. Thanks to the ability of a conveyor lift to transport a person every 4.5 feet as opposed to every 20 feet on a tow, areas are finding these machines ideal for moving large numbers of people.

In the handle- and rope-tow arena, only 12 lifts were installed, as opposed to last year's 22, perhaps because most areas are opting for conveyor technology instead. Still, as an inexpensive way to get people up the hill or access new terrain, these surface lifts still have a role.

Dividing the Pie

In looking at who installed lifts this year, a pleasant surprise surfaces—a couple of newcomers. Tamarack in Idaho, which installed four lifts last year, accounted for two quads this year, one a detachable.

And, as mentioned earlier, Spanish Peaks comes on line with five new lifts. Together they account for 21 percent of the new lifts and over 12 percent of the VTFH.

Aggressive expansions and renovations at Stowe, Wisp, and Snowmass also account for a large number of the installed lifts. In fact, of the larger companies, Aspen Skiing Company brings home the VTFH prize with 8,460, largely due to its Snowmass project. Second in VTFH, at 6,255, is Intrawest with two installations, one at Winter Park and one at Blue Mountain in Ontario. The Winter

Park installation is notable because of its use of wind power. Third in VTFH, coming in at 5,652, was Vail, with lifts put in at Beaver Creek and Breckenridge.

So, there you have it—the worst year on record, and without a defining reason, like war, global warming or a plague. Still, remember, we only report brand-new lifts here. Areas are still installing plenty of used lifts (see page 52) that are new to their customers. In addition, suppliers are bullish about 2006 and report that early indicators show a rebound. And solid early season snows have set the stage. ❧

Tows: Rope, Handle, Wire Rope*

Harusch	4	Star Lifts**	2
Multi Skilift	6	TOTAL	12

**Includes Borer, Brückschlögl and O'Connor.

Conveyors*

Kaser Skicarpet NA 23	Star Lifts	43
Magic Carpet	TOTAL	80

*Not included in lift statistics.

