

LIFTS 2015:

BUILDING ON THE RISE

New installations highlight the importance of customer convenience.

BY RICK KAHL

Resorts have become increasingly discerning about their investments in lifts—which, along with snowmaking, comprise the essential elements of a ski and snowboard resort. So a jump to 23 new lifts, from last year's all-time low of 16, is a positive sign.

Comfort and convenience were clearly the focus this past year with three gondola/chondola installs, a robust number for any year. These lifts provide an obvious service to guests. So do bubble chairs, which are also becoming popular.

THINKING BIG

Among the year's new lifts, the gondola at Lutsen and the hybrid gondola/six-pack at Sugar Mountain, N.C., are most notable. Neither area would have been considered "big enough" to install a gondola in the past. But both will make use of the lifts year-round, and that's the key. The Sugar lift, strictly a six-pack this

year, will add gondolas in the future. Lutsen's 8-passenger gondola has an initial capacity of 1,000, but can handle 2,400.

Bubble lifts comprised almost 10 percent of this year's installations. The upscale Hermitage installed a Doppelmayr bubble with heated seats. "It's a beautiful lift," says Doppelmayr VP F. Scott Pierpont. "All-black terminals with smoke-glass bubbles." Sunshine Village installed Canada's first detachable quad with heated seats and bubbles (orange ones), another Doppelmayr.

Convenience takes other forms, too. Leitner-Poma's detachable High Alpine quad at Snowmass has a new alignment that provides easier access at the base, and to the prized Hanging Valley terrain from the top. Squaw Valley's new Siberia six-pack, a Poma, replaces an aging quad on a signature peak.

Three new lifts—two of them six-packs installed at Vail Resorts areas—

came with Chairkit loading conveyors. And three fixed-grip quads, two of them older lifts, added loading conveyors as well. There are now 44 such conveyances in use across North America, Chairkit's Marc Wood reports.

Of course, not all areas are looking for, or need, high capacity. Skytrac's two new installations employ the company's standard, economical designs. But in each case—at Arizona Snowbowl and Pomerelle, Idaho—these are the first new lifts in 25 to 30 years. That makes them upgrades in their own ways.

CONVEYORS

The conveyor business remained steady. "We still see a lot of beginner hill work, and people are still building tubing hills, for sure," says Pete Kavanagh of Star Lifts.

Magic Carpet and Star Lifts both installed several longer lifts of 500 to 600 feet. "The longer carpets are working

NEW LIFTS BY REGION

Region	New VTFH	Surface	Gondolas/			Total
			Chairs	Trams	Funiculars	
East	9,461	-	3	1	-	4
Midwest	1,644	-	1	1	-	2
Mountain	33,037	-	12	1	-	13
Pacific	2,196	-	1	-	-	1
Canada	2,557	-	3	-	-	3
TOTALS	48,895	-	20	3	-	23

LIFT COMPARISON WITH PRECEDING YEARS

Region	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
East	8	5	9	7	7	9	6	2	5	4
Midwest	1	0	2	0	2	3	5	4	2	2
Mountain	11	22	11	4	5	7	10	9	5	13
Pacific	5	6	5	3	3	4	2	4	2	1
Canada	6	8	11	7	6	6	7	7	2	3
TOTALS	31	41	38	21	23	29	30	26	16	23

NEW LIFTS BY MANUFACTURER

Region	New VTFH	Surface	Gondolas/			Total
			Chairs	Trams	Funiculars	
Doppelmayr	32,018	-	10	3	-	13
Leitner-Poma	14,937	-	8	-	-	8
Skytrac	1,940	-	2	-	-	2
TOTALS	48,895	-	20	3	-	23

VTFH (000) COMPARISON WITH PRECEDING YEARS

Region	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
East	11,533	7,610	15,436	5,801	9,497	17,927	2,859	2,247	11,285	9,461
Midwest	638	0	1,228	0	1,855	1,474	5,181	3,917	1,713	1,644
Mountain	29,785	39,455	22,994	6,719	15,665	14,934	20,744	16,990	16,143	33,037
Pacific	9,998	16,718	5,209	960	4,707	7,259	4,079	8,248	2,599	2,196
Canada	11,767	21,610	11,777	12,601	11,242	7,629	4,649	17,094	1,417	2,557
TOTALS	63,721	85,393	56,644	26,081	42,966	49,223	37,512	48,496	33,157	48,895

Note: VTFH measures the number of riders who can be transported 1,000 vertical feet in one hour. It is derived by multiplying the vertical rise in feet by the lift capacity per hour and dividing by 1,000.

EAST									
Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
NORTH CAROLINA									
Sugar Mountain	Gondola-Det.	Doppelmayr	500	5058	1133	2518	2080	1000	2853
VERMONT									
Hermitage	6C-Det. Bubble	Doppelmayr	700	5450	1181	2725	2725	1000	3218
Okemo	4C	Leitner-Poma	200	2774	454	2400	2400	450	1090
Sugarbush	4C	Doppelmayr	323	3759	1242	1852	1852	485	2300
MIDWEST									
Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
MINNESOTA									
Lutsen Mountains	Gondola-Det.	Doppelmayr	500	4866	308	2400	1050	1000	739-
WISCONSIN									
Devil's Head	4C	Doppelmayr	137	2598	497	1820	1820	400	905
MOUNTAIN									
Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
ARIZONA									
Arizona Snowbowl	4C	Skytrac	200	2915	775	1500	1500	450	1163
COLORADO									
Powderhorn	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	700	6128	1612	2400	2400	1000	3869
Purgatory	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	700	4985	1484	2200	2200	1000	3265
Loveland	3C	Leitner-Poma	250	3085	764	1800	1800	500	1375
Snowmass	4C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	600	5256	1509	1800	1800	1000	2716
Vail	6C-Det.	Doppelmayr	859	6640	1466	3600	3600	1000	5278
IDAHO									
Pomerelle	3C	Skytrac	200	2921	598	1300	1300	450	777
NEW MEXICO									
Sipapu	4C	Leitner-Poma	100	1309	369	369	1600	400	136
UTAH									
Park City	Gondola-Det.	Doppelmayr	690	7767	1686	1500	1500	1000	2529
Park City	6C-Det.	Doppelmayr	700	4438	1216	3400	3400	1000	4134
Solitude	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr	600	5080	1337	1800	1800	1000	2407
WYOMING									
Jackson Hole	4C-Det.	Doppelmayr	600	4069	1722	2223	2223	1000	3828
Snow King	4C	Doppelmayr	300	3016	867	1799	1799	450	1560
PACIFIC									
Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
CALIFORNIA									
Squaw Valley	6C-Det.	Leitner-Poma	500	3898	915	2400	2400	1000	2196
CANADA									
Location	Type	Manufacturer	Installed HP	Length	Vert.	Design Cap.	Initial Cap.	Speed	VTFH
ALBERTA									
Sunshine Village	4C-Det. Bubble	Doppelmayr	449	4397	1297	1200	1200	1000	1556
ONTARIO									
Boler Mountain	4C	Leitner-Poma	75	728	121	2400	2400	453	290
Mont Cascades	4C	Doppelmayr	148	2290	392	1813	1813	450	711

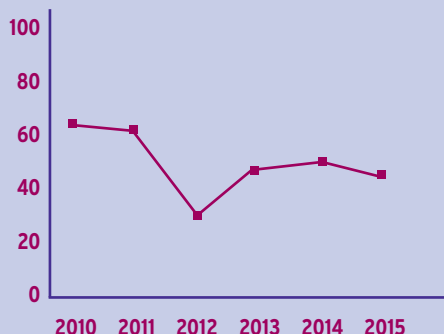
TOWS: ROPE, HANDLE, WIRE ROPE

Harusch	5
Multi Skillift	2
Star Lifts	3
TOTAL	10

CONVEYORS

Chairkit	5
Magic Carpet	13
Sereno	3
Star Lifts	20
TOTAL	41

SIX-YEAR CHART OF CONVEYOR INSTALLATIONS



very well,” says Magic Carpet chief Dave Kelly. “We’re seeing requests for lengths up to 800 to 1000 feet. There’s no technical reason not to do it.”

If there’s a replacement cycle for conveyors, it’s a long one. Magic Carpet began installing conveyors in 1992, and hasn’t yet seen a call for replacements.

RETROFITS REMAIN STRONG

All three of the aerial lift companies are pursuing upgrade and retrofits. A prime example: Okemo’s Quantum quad. The resort added bubbles to the lift—“that’s the first time that’s been done,” says Leitner-Poma’s Rick Spear—and redid the base terminal to make it look brand-new. “Skiers love bubbles,” he adds. “We expect to do more of those.”

Otherwise, most upgrades involve technology and electronics. Pierpont notes that resorts are often replacing drives and upgrading terminals.

Of course, refurbishing is Skytrac’s stock in trade. “Mostly, we’re solving issues by adding capacity, and updating older equipment that’s becoming unreliable,” says Carl Skylling. Pine Knob is a good example, he says. Skytrac just rebuilt a return terminal for a Riblet; it redid the drive terminal a few years ago.

Still, he reminds that at some point, updates become uneconomical. “The cost of continuing to run a 50-year-old lift is higher than for a 30-year-old lift,” he says.

BEYOND THE USUAL

Even with the new and rebuilding business, lift manufacturers are looking for projects beyond winter, and beyond resorts. Doppelmayr is currently building at the Oakland Zoo, slated to open in late spring.

Conveyor manufacturers are also looking to expand. “We see opportunities at water parks, aerial courses, entertainment centers, and bike parks,” says Kelly.

Kavanagh notes that Sun Kid is getting inquiries from golf courses in Europe, on hilly courses, as well as “people-moving in general at a variety of resort types.” And it has developed a separate division to design and build summer attractions.

But let’s keep it real. “We’re searching for business outside the industry, but skiing will remain our core business,” says Spear. Sounds about right to us. ■



BUILT FOR COMFORT ... Top Row: Snowmass' new High Alpine detachable quad replaces an older one, but on a new alignment. Right: Powderhorn's Flat Top Flyer is the resort's first high-speed ride. Both from Leitner-Poma.

... BUILT FOR SPEED. Second row: Park City's 8-passenger Quicksilver gondola, left, connects Park City base with Canyons side of the newly combined resorts, with an angle station at the apex. Right: Top terminal of Vail's new Avanti express six-pack, which replaces a quad. Both built by Doppelmayr.

Third row: Pomerelle installed a new SkyTrac triple, left, its first all-new lift in more than 25 years. At right: 550-foot, 50 hp Magic Carpet can move 2,000 people an hour at Beech Mountain, N.C.

At right: Wachusett Mountain, Mass., installed this covered Sun Kid conveyor from Star Lifts.

