

ICE BOARDING

Windsurfers were first invented in the mid-1970s, and it wasn't long before people were cutting across the chop at seriously high speed. It was only natural, then, for someone to look at the windsurfer and wonder, "What if the lake was frozen?" Enter ice boarding. Early boards were more than a little crude—people actually tried nailing a plywood deck onto a pair of downhill skis (which worked, albeit not at all well). The challenge became to create one that would behave on snow the same way that a windsurfing board does on water.

Everything changed in 1985 when Canada's own Charles Chepregi invented the Snowfer. The snowfer looks just like a regular windsurfer—it's just designed for winter. It uses a windsurfer sail, and the board edges on snow and ice the same way a windsurfer does on water. And the comparison ends right there, because a snowfer bests a windsurfer across, ahem, the board. For one thing, it's easier to use. Just step right on—you won't sink. Second, it's fast, way faster than its water-bound cousin. Speeds of up to 65 km/h are common, and beginners can expect to cruise at 50 km/h in even a moderate wind. But the best part is that a snowfer can be used in virtually any winter condition. It edges on black ice, carves lusciously through deep powder and deftly handles everything in between. All you need is a big open space—farmers' fields and frozen lakes are sure bets.

Lessons are an option, but anyone with windsurfing experience should feel right at home. Wear normal skiing clothes, along with elbow pads and whatever supplementary protection makes you comfortable. That said, the wipeouts aren't nearly as bad as you'd expect: snow provides a pretty soft landing, while if you hit ice, you just skid along until you stop. Go figure: helmets are strongly recommended.

www.snowfer.com (A)

