



MOON BOOTS FROM VENICE

 RAINER HUPE

ALBERTO ZANATTA, head of the Italian ski gear company
Tecnica, has successfully revamped his ski production
process. And now the company's other brands will benefit from
Zanatta's experience.





PHOTO_TECNICA

The moonwalkers' footwear inspired Giancarlo Zanetta to create Tecnica's first international hit: Moon Boots. Photo: Giancarlo's son Alberto.

Tecnica CEO Alberto Zanatta goes into raptures whenever the conversation turns to skiing. He offers a vivid description of the joys of off-trail skiing in his favorite spot, Cortina d'Ampezzo in the Dolomites: "Downhill skiing off the beaten track is not for the fainthearted." At length, he pulls out his smartphone to show photos of friends during heliskiing, at the summit between the clouds. "I don't worry about the weather; whenever I have time in winter, I head for the slopes," says Zanatta with a laugh.

His passion probably has something to do with the fact that "our products are so good," as he puts it. He does say this with an ironic smile, and yet there is purpose behind the smile. Be-

cause the 42-year-old is CEO of the Tecnica Group, based in Treviso, Italy, thirty minutes away from Venice by car.

At first glance, however, you might well mistake him for one of his own employees in the functional building that serves as company headquarters. Lanky, with three-day stubble and dressed in jeans and a polo shirt, Zanatta fits perfectly in this down-to-earth work climate. His office is as unadorned as the rest of the building: glass partitions provide a view into adjacent rooms; a pair of old leather boots rests on a shelf; brand new skis stand in a corner. Conversations with his employees are always relaxed, almost chummy. A telephone call with "Reini," the Austrian Slalom World Cup champion Reinfried Herbst, to discuss

preparations for the upcoming season sounds more like shop talk between two ski enthusiasts enjoying the après-ski at the hotel bar.

Nothing about his demeanor or appearance would indicate that Zanatta heads a company with revenue of around 410 million euros and a good 1,500 employees, producing prestigious brands including Tecnica, Nordica, and Dolomite for ski boots and Blizzard for skis. Not to forget the iconic Moon Boot. And last but certainly not least, Lowa for hiking boots and roller blades for inline skates.

In recent years, Tecnica brands have set new standards in winter sports. A Blizzard has been named Ski of the Year twice in a row at ISPO, Munich's international sports trade fair. Tecnica ski boots were honored as well. And Zanatta is promising new developments for the coming season, too.

The more challenging the ski run, the more fun it is, says Alberto Zanatta. And he doesn't need sunny skies to enjoy winter sports.



PHOTO: BLIZZARD

Blizzard is launching completely redesigned skis. Tecnica's CEO promises, "They turn very easily with a minimum of pressure." As a result, these "rockers" not only place less stress on the knee, but also provide greater stability than the previous favorite, Carver. As Zanatta puts it: "Just as in automotive construction, we adopt technical innovations from racing for use with standard models, which in turn adds to the enjoyment experienced by the average skier."

The Italian firm also offers creature comforts for winter sports enthusiasts wearing Tecnica ski boots. A technique pioneered by Lowa (which no longer produces ski boots), was further refined for Tecnica's use: pumping air into the boot. Lowa guided air into the inner shoe. As a result, pressure was applied directly to the foot. This could impair blood circulation, leading to cold feet. Tecnica took the initial idea one step further, so that air is now pumped into the area between the outer shell and the inner shoe. This enhances comfort and improves insulation—meaning no more cold feet.

Out-of-the-ordinary innovations are a tradition at Tecnica. The company—which started out in 1960 as a manufacturer of work shoes—gained world fame with an unusually distinctive invention. In the summer of 1969, Alberto Zanatta's father, who at the age of 72 still periodically visits company headquarters, was in the USA, where he watched spellbound the moon landing. The astronauts' footwear made quite an impression on Giancarlo Zanatta, inspiring him to design the Moon Boot. These unique boots, still in production with over 20 million pairs sold, remain part of the essential winter wardrobe of many a VIP, and it is hard to picture a ski resort without them.

Ski boots remain the core business, but over the years the company's other brands have been successfully integrated under the Tecnica name. The newest member to join the family was the beleaguered Austrian ski manufacturer Blizzard in 2006. Quite a few skeptics were critical of the deal. After all, winter sports are an "ice-cold business."

In recent years, ski sales in Germany have fallen by half, because an increasing →

number of amateur athletes choose to rent skis rather than purchase them. Other companies had already stretched themselves too thin through the acquisition of ski manufacturers. So Tecnica was an absolute latecomer—and attempting the impossible. Moreover, as Alberto Zanatta points out: “We’re a smaller firm than the others, and we are the only remaining family-run company in the ski industry.” But who knows? Perhaps that is what makes the difference.

In any event, the balance sheet is looking good. Over the past four years, Blizzard’s revenue has doubled, this past season the

brand won two World Cups with Viktoria Rebensburg in the Ladies’ Giant Slalom and Reinfried Herbst in the Men’s Slalom. Plus two gold medals. “We’re proving that even if we are the last to enter this market and with little prior experience, we are perfectly capable of achieving good results, whether on the sports or the economic front,” says Zanatta.

And what is behind his unusual success? Zanatta doesn’t hesitate: “Quality and flexibility.” The company is very product-oriented, “perhaps even too much so on occasion.” The top priority is the best quality possible, the best performance, the greatest →

In recent years, the CEO of the only family-run firm in the winter sports industry has been setting new standards with his company’s products.

TECNICA GROUP S.P.A.

Tecnica Group S.p.A.

(2010 figures)

Sales: 410 million euros

Employees: 1,500

Plants: 4

Headquarters: Treviso

(Veneto region), Italy

Project objective in working with

Porsche Consulting:

This sporting goods maker is active in a sector with demand levels that show strong seasonal fluctuation. The objective of its project with Porsche Consulting was therefore to speed up response times for the production of high-performance skis. Highly flexible processes in organization and production were introduced in order to ease bottlenecks in development and production.

Methodology:

Quick Response Manufacturing (QRM) was introduced as a key strategy. This approach has proven itself in sectors that feature high fluctuations in demand plus complex product mixes, such as the fashion industry. The main principle of QRM is to reduce throughput times. In production, this is achieved by developing a suitable infrastructure that controls the process via the pull principle at linked pairs of production islands. In technical terms, consultants speak of the POLCA system (Paired-cell Overlapping Loops of Cards with Authorization). POLCA cards authorize the start of production: Each island receives a priority list of customer jobs and only starts production when it gets authorization from the preceding and following islands via these cards. Excess production can be thereby largely eliminated.

Project results:

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|------------------------------|-----|
| Reduction in throughput time | 53% |
| Reduction in inventory | 49% |
| Reduction in surface area | 38% |





SLALOM WORLD CUP WINNER REINFRIED HERBST: “YOU’VE GOT TO RISK EVERYTHING”

On the search for superior materials and the battle for victory by competitive skiers.

Of course he wants to keep winning races and move to the top of the world rankings. But he especially wants to defend his title. “The Slalom World Cup is the main goal I’m working toward right now,” says Reinfried Herbst, a world-class competitive skier from Innsbruck, Austria. And he has to work very hard, because talent alone is far from enough these days. Materials are playing an ever greater role, and even champions like Herbst have to do more and more tests to find the right set-up. “You can be in super shape, have your

best day, and the best snow—but if some little detail isn’t right then you won’t finish in second or third place anymore, but in tenth,” he says. “The only acceptable places are the ones at the top—the ‘podium places’—which is why “there’s a very thin line between being a hero and a dunce.”

There are many reasons for this. There have been dramatic changes to the types of snow, for example. It’s much more common these days for snow to be made artificially. Greater

temperature ranges and faster shifts in temperature also play a role. And there are many more people at the highest level contending for the titles. As Herbst notes, “It’s become extremely crowded at the top.”

At the same time, there is much more pressure these days, because the media only focuses on the top three finishers. That means a greater mental burden, because you have to learn to deal with failure and put it out of your mind. The top skiers also have performance-based contracts, so there are major financial consequences as well. In order not to lose, he says, “You’ve got to ignore everything and just concentrate on your performance.”

The repercussions are clear. On the one hand, preparation for the season and the races is becoming ever more professional, with everyone engaging in an intensive search for the best materials and the perfect set-up. At the same time, however, the skiers are also prepared to take considerably greater risks, which means a higher danger of injury. As Herbst says, “Today you’ve got to risk everything!”

comfort. “We want customers to believe in our quality rather than running after the latest fashion,” Zanatta explains. Over the long term, that is the road to success, and a family-run company offers the best conditions to ensure its attainment. Nonetheless, flexibility remains a significant challenge. This is because on the one hand, the Blizzard range offers around 800 ski models with a total of 8,000 different parts. On the other hand, production fluctuates greatly from season to season, with models being manufactured up to a year before the start of the season. This creates great risk. One incorrect market forecast can spell financial disaster.

Because Zanatta is also so open to new approaches in production, he got in touch with Porsche Consulting Italia. The consultants designed a special lean production model for the Blizzard ski production site in Mitter-

sill, Austria. This model was based on Quick Response Manufacturing (QRM), originally used in the fashion industry. In this model, the production process is organized into cells, each of which is assigned specific production orders. Moreover, the equipment was rearranged. There is now a precisely defined flow between the cells, which ensures stable production and avoids surplus production during the various stages. Among the many improvements, one in particular stands out: the average production time needed for one order has been reduced by more than half. “This has enabled us to react to the market much sooner and to significantly reduce our risk,” says Ivano Spadetto, Tecnica’s technical director.

Thus, this Italian family-run company is a pioneer in the ski industry, and it has created ideal conditions for manufacturing top-quality Blizzard skis. Because “innovative products are

the result of innovative processes,” says Luca Chiasserini, Senior Consultant at Porsche Consulting. However, the model is also exemplary for other industries that must be able to react quickly to changes in their markets, industries for whom the conventional lean production model is ill-suited. Josef Nierling, Principal of Porsche Consulting: “Flexibility is one of the most important qualities a company brings to global competition.”

Yet Alberto Zanatta sees the key advantage for Blizzard as lying beyond economic figures: “We’ve changed our managers’ overall approach and demonstrated that we can make modifications in order to respond more quickly to customer demand.” And that is why he is already busy planning the next projects: “We want to make good use of this experience; we want the whole company to catch it, like a virus.” ←

Freeskiers in slow motion: Throughout the flight phase, the athlete tucks in his body—and doesn’t relax until shortly before landing. This ensures a secure position, even in gusty wind conditions. Freeskiers consider potential jumps, downhill skiing, and rocks in the terrain during the ride to the top in the ski lift.

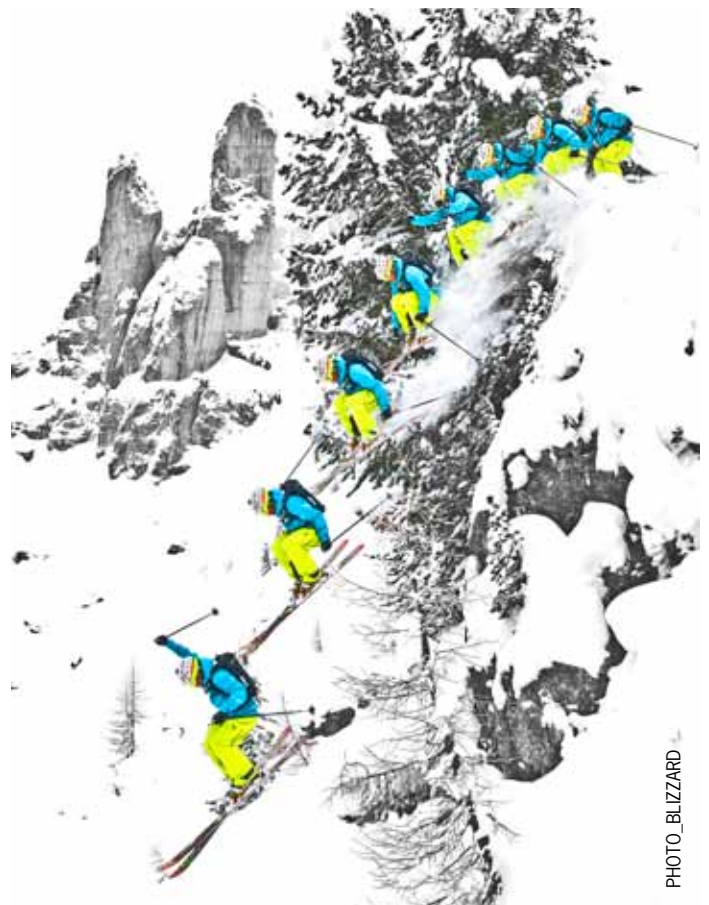


PHOTO: BLIZZARD