

Product Review

Colltex Extreme Skins

By Sylvain Hebert

In 1968, Colltex became the first to introduce adhesive for skins. This forever changed the product as the mechanical attachment was abandoning in favour of the chemical adhesive. Colltex has used mohair ever since, a weave produced from the hair of mountain goats and laminated with a polyester reinforced cotton backing.

Colltex is now aggressively pursuing the North American market after fading from view for quite a few years. Its glue formulation (always a difficult black art to master) didn't work as well and coupled with an almost non-existent marketing strategy, the Colltex brand faded to cede its place to companies like Black Diamond and G3.

It is now back with a variety of products ranging from ultra light skins for ski mountaineering competitions to purely synthetic fabric, mixed and 100% mohair. For this review, I used the Colltex extreme, 100% mohair, with the cam lock fixing system.

When I worked at Rogers Pass in the mid-eighties, I used Colltex skins and I liked the simplicity of the design. There was a simple loop at the tip and nothing at the tail, although some came with a tail clip. With a little bit of maintenance the skins maintained their usefulness until the mohair wore out, which happened especially when used in hard conditions in the spring.

The new 100 mm Extreme skins took me about an hour to put together, assembling the wire tips and cutting the skins to size using the Colltex cutting tool. I then put them to the test in a wide range of temperatures, with my latest adventure taking me to an alpine ridge in windy and cold conditions (in the Selkirks of course). There, I had some difficulty in separating the skins, which were folded individually without the protective backing provided by the company. The fact that the skins didn't have a non-glued middle strip made it almost impossible to separate the glued sides from each other. I struggled, finding very little purchase with the small wire tip and inadvertently

pulling on the cam lock tailpiece, leaving very little room on the plastic tab to readjust it again. A frustrating experience compounded by the fact that the skins didn't stick that well in the cold temperature. As we all know, most skins need to be managed in the cold, but I found that the glue didn't stick well enough for me at the -10 °C range and that slivers of snow eventually found their way between the skis and skins.

The skins are a bit lighter than the similar 100 mm style from Black Diamond. The glide is as good as it gets and the climbing performance was excellent. Some people think that mohair doesn't grip as well as nylon but a recent study by the SLF (the Swiss Federal Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research) found the opposite. According to their results, the

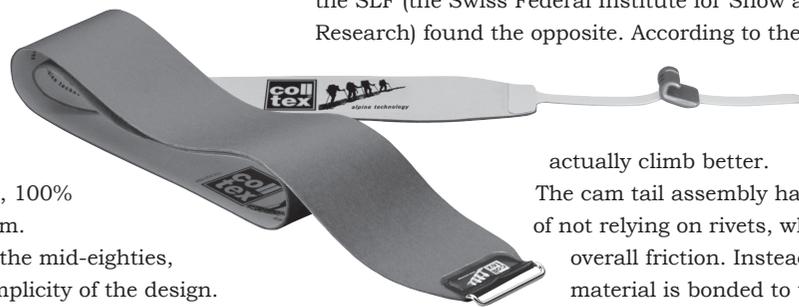
SLF concluded that mohair skins

actually climb better.

The cam tail assembly has the advantage of not relying on rivets, which decreases overall friction. Instead, the assembly material is bonded to the back of the skin. It seems sturdy and built to last

but proved a bit too finicky for my taste. After all, competitive ski touring at Rogers Pass does not allow for any precious seconds wasted on adjusting tail clips. I still prefer the option of no attachment at the tail, or the simple stretchy plastic clip attachment that other companies provide.

To conclude, the Colltex Extreme skins are light, with a proven fabric that is easy to manage and come with the excellent reputation of an established company. The glue performs well in warmer temperatures, but its performance suffers when the conditions become harsher. The tail clip assembly did not garner extra points from this reviewer. But some of you may enjoy the reliability and sturdiness of this Swiss product. Take a look at them before you invest in a new pair, you may decide that the loop and cam lock system works well enough for you.



New for 2008 - Ct 40 glue

Through intensive research and development, Colltex has a new application process and a new adhesive for its climbing skins they're calling Ct 40. Slated for introduction at this year's trade fairs, Ct 40 is made from inorganic compounds and will be a patented material.

Colltex says Ct 40:

- is lightweight
- good for temperatures between +50C and -50C
- doesn't absorb water
- has new pressure sensitive technology (the more pressure the better it sticks)
- releases much easier off your base when you need it to
- lasts much longer than traditional glue
- less prone to contamination

The name of the glue—Ct 40—comes from the company's name and the number of years they've been making skins for backcountry skiing.

Mary Clayton