

# It's quite a steep learning curve

**T**RACEY, keep your knees together!' bellows Rico, my French ski instructor. My legs collapse within seconds and I land sideways like a drunken penguin. As a first attempt at monoskiing, the afternoon doesn't bode well.

Like neon ski suits and fur snoods, monoskiing is the latest throwback from the 1980s to arrive on the slopes this season.

The sport was invented in the 1950s by a creative chap called Dennis Phillips on the US Pacific Northwest after he adapted a waterski with a pair of old-school bear-trap bindings. It was a precursor to snowboarding but instead of standing sideways with feet astride the board, your feet are together on a single fat ski facing forward. The ski poles (apparently) help with balance and steering.

After a brief flirtation with popularity in the 1980s, the sport retreated into the shadows of snowboarding but it has gained a small but dedicated following in recent years and now has its own festival, the Mondial de Monoski, which takes place in Le Pleyne on March 10-12 (monoski-france.com).

To see if I can master the style, I'm in Val Thorens in the French Alps, recently named best ski resort in the World Ski Awards for the third year running. The resort sits at 2,300m, making it the highest in Europe.

Along with Courchevel and Méribel, it makes up the legendary Trois Vallées – 600km of linked pistes forming the largest ski area in the world. Renowned for its fantastic skiing, awesome après and top-notch hotels, chalets and restaurants, Val Thorens is also the place to try the more niche activities such as the Tyrolienne, a 1,300m-long zip wire; wingjump, an



**Tracey Davies attempts to master monoski in the world's best ski resort**



**Alpine dining:** The view from Fahrenheit Seven's terrace

inflatable cape to help skiers fly down the slopes; and my nemesis, monoskiing.

I'm staying at Fahrenheit Seven, a new slope-side 107-room hotel with a retro 1970s vibe. It pitches itself as a playground for local and international snow lovers, but can it help with my salopettes that won't fasten? It turns out it can. The hotel's ski boutique rents out top-label ski gear from £7 a day, which saves me from mooning on the slopes from my funny little monoski.

Rico, with his tanned face, single gold

earring and bright turquoise ski gear is the epitome of the 1980s ski instructor. He glides over and pulls me upright – no mean feat thanks to my six foot frame. Following his tracks, I use my poles to drag myself towards the lip of the piste. Having both feet strapped together on the ski feels unnatural and, despite the poles, it's tricky to keep my balance. As soon as a boarder whizzes past, I'm thrown off kilter, poles flailing and I crumple into the snow again.

Rico explains that there's a



**Winner: Tracey manages to stay upright**



**Retro:** A room in the Fahrenheit Seven hotel



**Post-ski tipples:** Warm up in the hotel bar



**Doubles from £200 per night, fahrenheitseven.com. Return to Geneva from £112, swiss.com. Monoski lessons at École Ski Cool start from £42 per hour, ski-cool.com. Valthorens.com**

steep learning curve with monoskiing but unlike boarding, where you spend the first few days on your bum, good skiers can generally master it in a morning.

However, I'm no Chemmy Alcott on two skis, let alone one. 'A little speed makes it easier to do the turns,' says Rico, twisting his snake hips. 'And once you get the hang of it, it's like perfect parallel skiing.'

With Rico's encouragement, I finally manage to stand up for more than five seconds and slowly, ungracefully ski down the first slope.

Speed really is the key to this, so if I were braver, I like to think I'd be swinging my hips like Ricky Martin down the slopes of Val Thorens. Maybe next year.

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