



Natasha Zurek drops in on an ice-wave during the filming of Warren Miller's latest movie, *Impact*.

## Where's the Impact?

Warren Miller's newest film is tried and true.

Every year for the last five decades, the new Warren Miller film marks the semi-official beginning of the pre-season. It's tradition. It gets us checking the snow reports and web-cams and dreaming of deep, fluffy powder days. We go out and buy gear. We fondle our season pass. We wait impatiently for the snow to fly.

It's tradition to drink beer, get rowdy and go see the new film with a huge group of buddies you haven't talked to since the parking lot tailgate party that closed out the season last year (another tradition). And these days, tradition is the only thing that saves Warren Miller.

This year's film, *Impact* is better than last year's film. It's good. Not great. Fun. Not heart-pounding. The soundtrack has everything from Coldplay to Billy Idol and it's damn good. The film itself focuses less on the athletes chumming around and more on what they can do on the slopes. It keeps you entertained, if not riveted, for about an hour. Unfortunately, it's 90 minutes long and the last 30 minutes features ski superstar Glen Plake in a weenie bikini water skiing (YUCK!) and a lot of other yawn-worthy water footage.

One very cool thing about *Impact* is that Miller chose to shoot about half the footage at ski areas in the U.S. including Snowmass (Colorado), Park City (Utah), Big Sky (Montana) and Steamboat Springs (Colorado). It's a welcome reminder that you don't have to be on a heli-adventure in the peaks of Alaska to find epic lines. After watching film after film created by the younger generation of extreme filmmakers with way too much bratty bro bra, the mature, professional attitude of the athletes in *Impact* was a breath of fresh air. They keep the focus on the turns not the toasts.

But it's becoming painfully obvious that Warren Miller and his crew haven't spent much time on the hill lately. In one of his narrations he goes on and on about how skiers and snowboarders are getting along great these days, how we're all just out there for the love of the mountains and the snow. Um, conflict between user groups was so '90s.

His paternalistic attitude toward the women

in the film detracts as well. For example, he includes a spoof on *Charlie's Angels*. If the women were actually treated like the incredible athletes they are (we're talking Olympic gold medalists here), it would be funny. But throughout *Impact* Miller throws in comments when talking about the women in the film such as "Where she leads the men want to follow." They're annoying, not funny, and underscore that this film is put together by someone from an entirely different generation than most of the people watching it. Nonetheless, Miller gives women the opportunity to represent by including amazing female athletes in his films, something today's young directors still frequently fail to do.

And the most memorable and funny part of the film come when Miller takes a crew of skiers and snowboarders to Bulgaria where they hook up with Kalina Nikolova Simeonova, a Bulgarian native turned Vail ski instructor. She narrates this section with a thoughtfulness and intelligence that is rare in extreme sports films.

Freeskiers are almost completely left out of *Impact*, another glaring sign that Miller is totally out of touch. You could attribute their absence to the fact that *Impact* focuses more on big mountain backcountry than crazy park stunts. But he teases us with a few lame rail slides and nothing more.

The only stomach-churning moment in the film comes when skiers and snowboarders launch a sickeningly huge step-up gap jump. As younger companies including TGR and Oregon-based moviemakers Rage Films and Ambush TV push ski and snowboard films to the limits, Warren Miller continues to play it safe with the tried and true: big slopes, big names and sweet lines.

He has the money to take his crews all over the world and produce films with cinematic quality that rival the best in Hollywood. See *Impact* because it's tradition, because the peaks of the Cascades are dusted with snow and because you need a fix — not because you're looking for a film to get your adrenaline pumping.

*Impact* plays Oct. 28 at the McDonald. **EW**

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