Gear Review: C&A Pro XCS Crossover Ski

Not all mountain sledders have the luxury of living in the mountains. A solid chunk (perhaps even the majority?) of mountain riders live east of the Rockies. And sledders that work and live in the flatlands are going to ride at home too because, well, it's convenient and because it's fun to get out for a rip, even when you're not surrounded by peaks.

So let's say that you're looking into an aftermarket ski, and you need something that fits the bill for riding a healthy mix of both mountains and on trail. Or maybe you just want better performance on the 29km-long trail into your favourite alpine area. Well, that niche has recently been filled by C&A Pro, who has designed the XCS to meet just that demand with its new crossover ski.

The XSC is a sturdily built set of skis, weighing in at a solid 7.9lbs. They look and feel tough, with a robust outer edge that looks like it can shake off a hit from a tree or rock. The profile has a

thick, 1″ deep centre keel for aggressive trail handling, matched with two shallower outer keels along the edges.

In my case, XCS will be replacing the stock Ski-Doo Pilot DS-2 mountain performance skis that have taken a few hits and are showing signs of wear (aka lack of talent).

The XCS offers a slightly wider and longer platform than the Pilot, with a less aggressively tapered tail.

The biggest noticeable different however is the profile, which has a lower angle of rise through the tip, and a flat rockered keel. (Note that due to perspective in this image, the XCS appears relatively larger in comparison to the Pilot DS-2 than it actually is.)

The skis are sold separately from all the necessary and mandatory mounting hardware specific to the sled application. Your stock mountain hardware won’t work, and neither will OEM runners/carbides. You’ll need both: mount kit and carbides.

The carbides for C&A Pro's lineup of skis come in two styles; the Shaper Bar from Stud Boy and the Round Bar made by Woody's. Both come with a hardened carbide fixed to the bottom of the bar, which in my mind is unfortunate. Riding as I do primarily in the mountains, I much prefer a simple runner or wear bar that comes without the sharp carbide. This is for a couple of reasons. 1) The carbides are sharp and strong and tend to destroy my loading ramp/decking/truck bed liner surfaces. 2) Riding mostly mountains, the snow is generally not hard or icy enough to justify the extra bite and cornering that the carbides provide. 3) Wear bars with carbides cost anywhere from 3-4 times as much as a simple wear bar or runner, which will usually last at least a whole season anyway.

Unfortunately for me, there is no option to purchase a simple wear bar to use with the C&A Ski. However, for someone riding both in the mountains and on trail and for who the XCS was designed, the carbide might just be the right tool for the job.

The first thing I did was take my trusty angle grinder to the carbide and spend 5 minutes rounding the corners and edges off in the hopes that they won't grab my ramp and decking as much. Man, that material is hard & tough! But the effort was worth it. Loading and unloading did put some small gouges in the plastic on my ramp and tailgate but it's really pretty minor and cosmetic. And as the carbides wear down a little more with use I know that this will become a non-issue.

Installation

I started by installing the carbides into the new skis, which was straight forward. The carbides did require a little persuasion with a hammer to get into place.

After that it was just a matter of securing the carbide to the ski. When you're doing this you don't want to over tighten the nuts because they will just compress the plastic. Go just tight enough that the carbide is pulled snug against the keel on the underside of the ski. It's also a good idea to go back and check the fit after a ride, because the carbide can settle in and might require an extra bit more tightening after some use.

Next up, squeeze the bushings into the skis from the inside. The bushings are a snug fit and I used a set of channel lock pliers to squeeze the bushings all the way into place to make enough room for the spindle and spacer.

Once the XCS skis were prepped, I loosened the hardware and removed one of the old skis. An impact driver makes quick work of this job.

After placing the rubber dampener into the ski and resting the spindle into the XCS, it was a simple matter of lining up the holes, greasing the new bolt, and fastening it all together with the provided washers and nut. Ta-da!

Here you can see the new C&A Pro XCS ski installed, next to the original Ski-Doo Pilot DS-2 ski. The shape is considerably different.

Test Ride

Trail

Heading up the trail with the XCS skis on, the difference from my old DS-2 skis is immediately noticeable. The stock Ski-Doo DS-2 skis have a tendency to dart around on the trail and feel pretty twitchy on the trail. Coupled with the easy tipping nature that the Summit XM was designed to exhibit—likewise for all other brands of modern mountain sleds for that matter—the DS-2 skis certainly didn't leave me feeling too comfortable at speed on the trail ride in.

Switching over to the XCS is kind of like getting out of a lifted pickup truck and hopping into a sedan with low-profile tires. The skis feel like they are locked in on rails. Darting was pretty much non-existent in the test conditions of a soft-to-medium hardness trail with a range of wet and sloppy to dry and fluffy. However, with such a deep keel helping the skis carry a straight line, the unavoidable trade-off is that the XCS skis require more effort to turn through corners. This wasn't an issue for me, except in very tight switchback corners where I noticed that quite a bit more effort was required. This can be alleviated to a degree by lightening the ski pressure with only a little loss of the advantage to stability that is gained by mounting the skis.

Being slightly longer and with a pronounced lack of rocker, the skis do slightly increase the turning radius of that machine, but that makes very little practical difference.

Mountain

My initial concern that the XCS would not float well due to lack of rocker was put to rest quickly. Even in isothermic slop at lower elevations (the kind of wet snow where your foot punches straight to ground when you step off a packed trail), the ski floated on the surface nicely. Whatever combination of elements it is that achieve this, whether it is the fore-aft mount point, overall footprint/surface area or just the shape, the designers clearly know how to make a ski stay on top. Even when driving through very steep transitions such as deep creek bottoms and a steep hill to flat lake situation, the XCS did not exhibit any signs of diving, which is a major plus.

The ski stopper is burly and performed well at both dampening the ski and preventing the tip from rising up and back towards the bumper pressured by a sharp transition or chunk of hard snow (or tree!). I've found this to be an issue with the stock setup, which eventually causes the ski stopper to wear out and require replacement.

The XCS holds a sidehill remarkable well. Its long, flat nature makes the sled feel very stable on a sidehill, almost as if it is locked in. The same is true for a turning carve. Once the sled is on its side, the steering feels very solid and smooth, and changes to tipping angle are easily made with small weight transfers.

Where the XCS exhibits an unforunate flaw however, is in the initiation of carving and sidehilling maneuvers. The ski requires significantly more effort to perform a counter-steering move, which of course is used to get the sled on its side for either a sidehill or carving situation. Once the sled is on its side it feels great, but getting there requires more effort than I'd like. This is likely due to the stiffness, length and less aggressive tail taper of the ski—all factors that play well into stability on the trail but which make a common mountain riding maneuver a little less

effortless.

The similar issue exists for the completion, or flattening out of a carving maneuver. Usually when it's time to complete the carve, the rider can turn the skis into the direction of the turn and the combination of flex and rocker of the ski will help pop the sled back upright to finish the move. This doesn't work well with the XCS, and you can't really use it to save you from over-tipping to the inside of a carve like you might be able to do with a ski with more flex such as the stock one. That is not to say that it can't be done, but you have to be on it a little more on it with the XCS.

Conclusion

The C&A Pro XCS Ski is very good at what it was designed for, which is a mix of trail and mountain riding. It is a big, stiff ski that is built for stability and can handle higher speeds. The ski is more aggressive than our benchmark stock Ski-Doo DS-2 Pilot ski, and it inspires confidence but also must be driven with intent.

The handling characteristics required for mountain riding vs trail riding are so vastly different that it seems impossible to built a ski that is absolutely perfect for both environments. C&A does a very good job here of improving performance in one arena without sacrificing too much in the other.

The XCS' strength lies in vastly improved trail performance over a stock mountain ski. In the mountains it does well, providing good float and precise handling. A concern there is that the ski requires more effort to initiate and complete sidehilling and carving moves than a ski with more flex and rocker.

That means that for a dedicated mountain rider, the extra effort required of a thousand-odd counter-steering moves during the course of a day makes the XCS in imperfect solution. For those riders, the mountain specific BX Boondocking Xtreme or MTX Mountain Trail Xtreme skis might be a better fit.

For riders that spend more than two-thirds of their time ripping up trails, with occasional trips to the mountains, the XCS is an choice that won't disappoint. It's a ski that won't limit a rider's ability in the hills, but where it really shines is on its home turf.

The C&A Pro XCS Ski floats pretty well over water too.

– MS