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## Howard Head

Born: 1914 Died: 1991

*Howard Head was a pioneer metal ski manufacturer. He made millions of dollars developing a revolutionary, lightweight ski. Also, a tennis enthusiast, Howard made an oversized tennis racket to improve his game.*

Howard Head began thinking about making a metal ski in 1947, and fortunately for the skiers of the world, he was in a position to do so. Head was then a self-educated structural engineer in the Glenn Martin airplane manufacturing company in Baltimore, Maryland. After he had his first weekend on skis, back in 1947, he figured there must be some less cumbersome kind of ski. His first aim was to make a lighter ski using the material and structural analysis he was using to work with – he made it out of aluminum.

The first thing he did was rent a corner of a stable, and set up a big vat of oil in which to boil the glue hot enough to set and glue two aluminum strips, top and

bottom, together. He quit his highly paid job and spent three years putting his own money, money he borrowed and won at poker, into his dream of a light ski. With incredible concentration and drive, going through about 40 versions, he came up with a workable ski. It was to be the first marketable successful non-wood ski in history. In 1949, he turned out 50 pairs, and then a greatly modified model, 300 pairs, in 1950. By 1951, he was over 1000, and quintupled that by 1953. He worked in the face of much disparagement and discouragement, and always with the cooperation of at least a few fine skiers. By the end of the decade, Head was the largest ski maker in the country. A major component of the sport had been altered by advanced technology. After this, the sport never looked back. Head kept his advantage by introducing the rubber layer in the Head 360, which eventually outsold the Head Standard, and from there developed Head racing skis. He was continually improving an already superior product, and never ceased to work with the best skiers he could get into his testing programs. Furthermore, he worked hand in glove with the best dealers he could get to carry the ski. He never failed to back up the dealers with his guarantee of quality. If a ski wasn't up to par, it was replaced at no cost.

The contribution of Howard Head is incalculable because he was the first. No one had substantially improved on a major component by using modern materials until Head did it. In today's whirl of multiple material miracles, it's not easy to look back to a day when the traditions of the ski industry were narrow-minded, and novelty was discouraged. It took a man of vision, dedication and immense vitality, a man with an undying interest in the sport, who loved to ski to make a breakthrough.

Not only had Head proved that there were potentially ways to improve ski equipment beyond the wildest imagining, but that there was a market for expensive ski equipment if the equipment delivered superior performance. The Head ski did. It was easier to turn, for most skiers, and it was a lot harder to destroy. The Head ski can be said to have played a major role in the rise of popularity of skiing after World War II, a time when skiing came into its own as a popular sport in the United States. Head's achievement of will and enthusiasm ranks with the most important in the history of skiing.

Howard Head was elected the U.S. National Ski Hall of Fame in 1979.

