



Phantom Splitboard Bindings

Revolutionizing splitboarding—one rocket scientist at a time.

story and photograph by **Scott Yorko**

“You can’t be afraid to fail,” John Keffler says as he hand-drills another 1/2-inch hole in the side of a \$700 pair of ski boots. “How many light bulbs did Edison make before they worked?” This fearless innovation is what keeps the aerospace engineer hunkered down in his Evergreen, Colorado garage night after night, running a CNC machine and tweaking bite-sized pieces of metal to submillimeter specs. Keffler’s garage is the global headquarters for Phantom Splitboard Bindings, the only hardboot-specific splitboard binding company in the U.S. The place looks like Santa’s workshop stacked with disassembled boot shells and a wall of parts cataloged in plastic containers, but Keffler is the lone elf running the show.

With a master’s degree in mechanical engineering, Keffler works nights in the garage because his day job keeps him busy with NASA’s Orion Program. That’s right, he’s part of the team developing a rocket to explore deep space on the first manned mission to Mars.

Closer to home, Keffler believes snowboard bindings with highbacks and strap buckles are too heavy and imprecise for backcountry travel. Ditto with soft snowboard boots. The better way? Keffler’s Phantom bindings employ lightweight Dynafit tech toe pieces for the uphill; a low-profile base plate that locks the board together for the downhill, and simple heel and toe bales to secure a hard plastic “ski” boot. The boot of choice with backcountry snowboarders running Phantoms—a growing market, especially in Canada—is a modified Dynafit TLT6. Keffler tweaks the flex—fore, aft, and lateral—by loosening up the walk mode mechanism, relocating buckles, and cutting strategic slits in the shell. That’s where the hand drilling mentioned above comes in. The Phantom setup saves about two pounds per foot in tour mode over soft boots, which adds up after several hours in the skin track. “Skiers had leather boots a long time ago, but they don’t anymore for good reasons,” he says. “Someday snowboarders might realize how much extra energy they’re expending with soft boots in the backcountry, trying to kick steps and sidehill without any leverage.”

Until that day comes, he’ll keep plugging all his profits back into new ways to revolutionize splitboarding. It’s not rocket science. But if it were, Keffler could handle it.

