

[Bottom-Line Design]

# HEAD OF THE PACK

With its high-performance helmets, **Swedish startup** Poc is winning over skiers at blazing speed. BY BRIDGET FINN

**W**HEN AMERICAN Julia Mancuso won the gold medal in the super giant slalom at the 2006 Winter Olympics, Stefan Ytterborn may have been the only Swedish skier celebrating. But he had a good reason: His startup, Poc, designed the high-tech helmets that Mancuso and three other U.S. skiers wore as they crossed the finish line.

Now the tiny Stockholm-based ski-equipment maker is careening into the mainstream with its flagship product, the Skull Comp, considered the Porsche of ski helmets. "Our goal was to have one World Cup skier using our products the first season," CEO Ytterborn says. "Instead, we got four Americans and the Swedish downhill ski team." He founded Poc in 2003 with funding from several business partners and angel investors such as Swedish World Cup skier Patrik Jarbyn. The futuristic-looking Poc helmet hit the market last year but has already scored nearly \$1 million in sales.

Ytterborn's timing couldn't be better: The ski helmet market is exploding. Revenue in the U.S. alone has almost doubled, to \$57 million, since 1999, and the category is expected to maintain double-digit growth for the next several years. Why? Because people actually want to be seen wearing them. "Helmets are no longer just a protection product," says Ed Wray, Eastern sales and marketing manager at SnowSports Industries America. "They're also a fashion



**FASHIONABLY SAFE** Poc's helmet designs have varying weights and features for specific skiing needs.

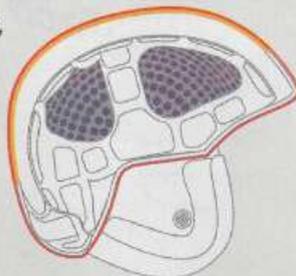
product." Not that Ytterborn has ignored the safety aspect. He met with doctors and neuroscientists to design a helmet that would best prevent head and spinal injuries. (See box below.)

This ski season Poc helmets will be sold by as many as 450 retailers worldwide. Revenue will be

eight times what it was last year, Ytterborn says, and if all goes as expected, the company should be profitable by 2008 and ring up at least \$50 million in sales by 2012. "We have a vision to become the No. 1 supplier of protection for skiers," he says. Looks as if he's off to a flying start. B

## BUILDING A SAFER SKI HELMET

**1** On impact, the thin outer shell implodes—lessening the chances of whiplash and brain swelling.



**2** When the shell implodes, a layer of mesh like that used in bulletproof vests prevents objects such as sticks and rocks from penetrating the helmet.



**3** Below the shell and the mesh are layers of honeycomb urethane cushion and soft, dense EPS foam to absorb and diffuse shock.