

Mt. Rose blooms with steeps, impressive day lodge

By Kathryn Reed

RENO – It's one of those days when the slopes are as enticing as relaxing in the lodge.

At 8,260, Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe has bragging rights for having the highest base elevation of any Tahoe area ski resort. The summit is 9,700 feet.

Being located on the Mt. Rose Highway between Lake Tahoe and Reno, it falls into a pattern that gets hit hard with good snow. And the elevation of the resort means if the groomers do their job right, the snow is good even when Mother Nature hasn't dumped freshies in a while. A week ago when some area resorts had spring-like conditions, Rose was ripe for carving turns on the hard pack.



The slopes of Mt. Rose are reflected in windows of Winters Creek Lodge.

Photos/Kathryn Reed

But it, like other exposed resorts, is susceptible to the wind

wreaking havoc. It was blowing so hard Mt. Rose didn't open Valentine's Day.

Even with today likely to be a powder day, I wouldn't go in the chutes. And I certainly wasn't going down what looked like a glacial ice field last Thursday. I'm just not good enough.

All the chutes at Mt. Rose are 45- to 50-degree pitches. That's something that sets the resort apart from most of Tahoe – the number of steep runs as well as the sustained pitch.

Resort officials say they benefit from a bit of a cult following. The chutes are one of the reasons. About 50 percent of the clientele is local – which is mostly Reno residents. The rest are primarily from the Bay Area, with the South Bay dominating that group.

Mike Pierce, marketing exec at the resort, isn't exaggerating when he says Mt. Rose's blues are equivalent to Northstar-at-Tahoe's blacks. Going down Ramsey's – a blue – I feel like this is a black at many Tahoe resorts.

With the amount of terrain, it's easy to pick a side to ski, after all, this used to be two distinct ski reports – Mt. Rose and Slide Mountain.

Slide Mountain, the closest to Reno, opened in 1953. Both were in operation in 1964. Slide went bankrupt in 1987, when Mt. Rose bought it out. The Slide side is on U.S. Forest Service land, while the Rose side is privately owned.

The lack of lodging at the resort makes it a definite day-use area and not a destination resort. But the Rose side is slated to be developed – one day, with something. The market will dictate if it's houses or hotels or condos or something else that gets built. Nothing is being talked about at this time.

The privately owned resort is doing better than a year ago, Pierce said. The early snow made for a base that all the Tahoe

resorts have been living off of since Mother Nature has been chincy with the white stuff in 2011.

Another draw this season was the opening of Miller Time, the ninth gated chute.

Still looking brand new is the Winters Creek Lodge on the Slide side that opened last season.

Remnants of the old Reno Ski Bowl are no longer visible now that the Winters Creek Lodge has opened on the knoll that was home to the old structure. Employees used to be park here, too.

With nearly 360-degree views from the floor-to-ceiling windows, this high point of the base area is definitely being put to better use. So ideal is the setting, the lodge has a separate website from the resort's because of its high demand for special events.

Washoe Lake shimmers on one side, while the snow covered slopes are in the opposite the direction. The contrast, especially this time of year, is stunning, as the Carson-Reno area seems a brown desolate desert in comparison to the winter scene on the mountain.

Jazz is playing as we walk up to the lodge in the morning. A few people are getting breakfast. Not many cars are in the lot. The Blazing Zephyr six-pack opens at 8:30am, 30 minutes before the rest of the mountain.

Lodge or slopes? A lot of both is the best answer.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe, take Highway 50 east. Turn left on Highway 28 at the top of Spooner Summit. In Incline Village, turn right on Highway 431 – Mount Rose Highway.

The Mt. Rose base is the first entrance on the right. The

Slide Mountain entrance is about a half mile farther on the right.

More information is online.

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