

Ride Better... With Jenny Jones

The chance to train like a pro with an Olympic legend? Heck, yes...

WORDS LOUISE HALL

Jenny Jones is one of the world's best snowboarders, and her Olympic success at Sochi 2014 delivered a shot of coolness that caused a huge surge in younger riders. In person, Jenny, 39, oozes laid-back cool. Fun (with a capital 'F'), she has a wicked sense of humour and laser-focus. It clearly wasn't luck that she became the first Brit to be crowned a Winter Olympic medalist on snow, with her dramatic Slopestyle bronze.

It's all the more impressive when you learn that Jenny didn't try snowboarding until she was 17, when offered a free lesson at her local dry slope. After college she went off to the Alps for her first season working as a chalet girl, where she was talent spotted pulling a backflip. Nine years later, she won gold at the X Games in Colorado.

So no wonder that, post-Sochi, back in her Devonshire surf home (Croyde), she launched her own-brand business presenting high profile media gigs. Her Jenny Jones mindset weeks followed; these, inspired by her youth bettering her riding, instantly struck a chord with snowboarders across the UK. The concept? Distilling all her snowboarding know-how into a series of one-off workshops, run by her trusted team of handpicked experts.

"I've worked closely with them for years," explains Jenny. "The aim is to give exclusive access to the support an elite athlete would receive, and pass on that learning."

"We are appealing to the serious rider who's interested in shifting their mindset to improve their style. Together, we create a unique mountain experience with epic riding, expert tuition and training for mind and body."

The week focuses on improving fitness, mindset and skill-set, with coaching, video analysis and a take-home training program – all in a structured chalet-camp format.

When *S+b* was invited along, we jumped at the chance, and I'm here with 10 other clients, a mix of men and women, aged from 20s to 40s, in Sainte Foy.

MONDAY 18 MARCH SAINTE FOY, FRANCE

5:30PM

Tucked in the chalet snug, everyone's tired after a long day – yet focused and intent. Tonight is video analysis feedback with Jenny's former Olympic Team GB coaches Neil McNair and Rhys Jones. While I was sitting on the tarmac at Salzburg airport earlier (delays), these guys were navigating air and smooth turns in the powder-



◀ Steeps, deeps, fun and laughter: all under the watchful eye of a select gathering of top coaches

▶ For the group, it's all about goal-setting and self-improvement



laden valleys of Sainte Foy, with the GB coaches' camera tuned in on them. Collectively, they talk through today's footage of each rider, while tucking into homemade brownies, tea and beers. The mission is to work up their individual 'points to improve on' tomorrow. "The aim is to set tomorrow's goals," explains Neil. "And to be held accountable [on them] with the group."

5:45PM

Next up is Mark, who was working on his switch today. Despite battling day-two tired legs he's feeling "positive" and "so much happier" now he's worked out exactly what to work on tomorrow – turning smoothly at a constant tempo.

It's good to see the pocket blue 'Snow Workshop by Jenny Jones' notebooks (that were waiting on our beds as part of our welcome pack when we arrived – everything is considered here) being put to use, as people listen then scribble away.

6PM

Finally, there is a session with elite sports performance psychologist Lou Jones, from Wales, on the importance of goal setting, discipline and mental approach. She accentuates the power of positive self ('pep') talks, trigger words and visualisation, and the effect on our neural pathways.

"Goal setting is a habit of successful people," Lou tells the group. "Be clear about what you want to achieve before the end of the week. Don't bullshit yourself."

Her style is direct and on-point. The message? Love what you do. Be happy. Nail it. "The skills learnt here can be applied to all aspects of real life: work, relationships, fitness," Lou explains; she knows her stuff and delivers it with pace and punch.

"Part of the power of the psychology exercises is that goal-setting in front of your peers drives a 'can-change' approach; the non-judgemental, supportive environment creates this enabling space – for you to go out and prove [it to] yourself," she explains, before signing off with a story of overcoming adversity with Jenny. "It worked with Jenny. It can work with you."

In the last part of the psychology session the group set goals for the freeride powder day tomorrow. It dumped it down last night, so the schedule has been moved to fit.

Happy news; this means we'll be riding steeps and deeps tomorrow, gearing up for 'adventure day' the day after – the week's highlight.

7:05PM

The meeting ends and Jenny comes over to introduce herself. "Sorry, I was buried there," she says, before being swept out the door to the bar next door and engulfed in a tsunami of beer and Jägermeister with all the clan.

Excitement levels are high. It's been a good week thus far. I chat with Mark, the guest who was being put on the spot earlier. He tells me that he's been riding for 14 years and is excited about the psychology part of the course. Where others are couples or singles, he's come along with his mate Matt.

"I signed up to learn new tricks and kill old habits," he explains.

It's clear that this love for the performance sports psychology aspect is a big value-add this week; beer chat revolves around the 'power of the group' aspect before they split for dinner. The clients return to the chalet; JJ's team to their apartment.

"The team aspect is the secret ingredient," agrees Lou. "You could just get back from the slopes and hit the beers, without thinking about tomorrow. But this way you stop, reflect, think about your day, set a goal and owe it to yourself to go out and prove it to yourself. So you improve."

8PM

Lou and I split from the clients and head to Team JJ HQ for dinner with her girl team (psychologist Lou, nutritionist/yoga instructor Sian Leigh of Health Shed Life – Jenny's favourite yoga instructor and nutritionist – and PR Helen, who are all staying in an apartment together – "reliving the old days") where, true to their teaching style, they dissect the day, plan tomorrow and set the week's goals.

PHOTOS SAMUEL MCMAHON

9:30PM

Back in my room it's time to prepare gear for tomorrow. It's been a long day of delays and it's good to finally be here. I'm looking forward to hitting the slopes.

TUESDAY 19 MARCH
SAINTE FOY, FRANCE

9AM

We meet at the Marquise chairlift (one of just six lifts in Sainte Foy), which accesses north-facing powder fields and some fun tree lines. First up is an equipment check, a warm-up exercise, a team pep talk and then it's powder play. It dumped it down overnight so there's much excitement for the 'tricks in the trees' time today. Clients take turn pulling tricks. "Slow it down. Don't start the pop of your jump too early!" are words I hear hollered, as we turn tracks from top to bottom. It's exciting to ride with them, and see Jenny rocking her free-flow style. Even Sian, the wondrous yogi, is a natural rider. Jen and Sian whoop with delight as they pull tricks/swoop/ride together through the trees. Everyone is buzzing.

11:15AM

On the chair, Jenny talks up the importance of mental strength, of 'being in the flow' and overcoming adversity. Her mindset workshop is big on the importance of being present in the moment. The power of positive psychology, we are learning, is key to her success; she tells her tales of how she learnt to overcome the tough times, injury fears and to shine on through when things were looking bleak. It's a theme she continues later that evening in her psych talk with Lou on the power of visual imagery.

1PM

Time to refuel. We stop for lunch up the mountain, tucking into crepes on a sunny terrace. The serenity of the views stretching across the Tarentaise Valley is arresting here. That it's a pedestrianised resort adds to its charm.

2:20PM

This afternoon is free ski. But first a quick recap on what's in store tomorrow: an adventure hike 300m up to the north face of the Pointe de la Foglietta (2,930m). "It's a spry 45-minute 300m hike up, but be prepped for it to take 90 minutes, and expect some up-there views" explains Rhys. After, they'll freeride back down – fresh tracks guaranteed – while I fly home. For a moment I flirt with sacking off London life and moving to the mountains, or at least staying another day. But instead I nip off early back to the CGH Residences to check out the spa and enjoy a quick pre-dinner pool dip.



Factfile

The 2020 Snowboard & Mindset workshop (workshopbyjennyjones.com) will take place from 14 to 21 March. It costs £1,990 per person and includes seven nights' chalet-style accommodation sharing a twin room, full board, six days on the mountain with four full days coaching spread over the week, plus evening workshops. Flights, transfers and lift passes extra. With additional thanks to: Sainte Foy resort (saintefoy-tarentaise.com); CGH Residences & Spas (cgh-residences.co.uk); Ski Set (skiset.co.uk) and Snow Drone airport transfers (info@snow-drone.com).

4-6PM

Time for a quick catch up with Jenny before we head in for a restorative yoga stretch down with Sian. This class is one of the highlights of my day: like all the team in this camp, Sian is top of her game.

7PM

We reconvene for dinner at Restaurant La Maison à Colonnes at the base of the resort. Again, everyone is buzzing from the day. "How did it go?" I ask Matt, who I'm sat beside. "More nuggets of gold!" he says, as he explains his big take-out today: jumps. It's the challenge that he likes best about this week. "I'm a big a fan of self-improvement. I like rising to a challenge," he explains, adding: "A lot of the real take-away is the accountability aspect; the group energy; the getting out of your comfort zone; rising to the challenge, nailing it and that feeling of really being in the moment, living life," he says, as a hearty plate of Savoyarde cuisine is laid before him. "Pasta loading," he winks, at Sian, sat to my left. "It's a great choice!" she laughs. Of course, it's adventure day split-boarding tomorrow...

▲ Everyone's buzzing thanks to a heady mix of epic riding and epic tuition – from powder play to yoga



PHOTO SAMUEL MCMAHON

SAINTE FOY WITH FRESHTRACKS

Freshtracks is running a range of one-week Sainte Foy trips next winter, including on piste instruction, day tours and mountain craft weeks. To work on your technique with expert instruction, the Technique Top Up runs from 29 February 2020 and costs from £1,299. To experience some of the best terrain in Sainte Foy, there are Intermediate Day Tours trips running on 11 January and 21 March, from £1,299, and Advanced Day Tour trips on 7 March and 11 April, from £1,350. See skiclub.co.uk/ski-club-holidays for more information.