

# 2020 SKI-DOO 850 SUMMIT X WITH EXPERT PACKAGE

BY RYAN HARRIS



Big news might not seem like big news. It certainly didn't when we met up with Ski-Doo engineers in January in a secret location for a private test session aboard the new 2020 prototype. When we entered the shop that was full of Ski-Doo Summits, we quickly scanned the area for the new secret weapon. We didn't see it.

And that seems to be the reaction that many fans are having as we write this just a few days after the global launch of the 2020 Ski-Doo Summit lineup. Many sledders on social media are commenting that they just don't see the big change for 2020 in what Ski-Doo ambassadors and marketing is clamoring about.

They're wrong. We're here to tell you that a very significant new sled was sitting among the crowd in that Summit-filled shop: the 2020 850 Summit X with Expert Package that was designed with Carl Kuster and Tony Jenkins.

That's the advantage a viable industry media has over a

social media page using reposted photos to sway public opinion: we rode it. Our opinion is based on actual experience and seat time. We've pounded the Expert through whooped-out single-track, blasted through trees on off-camber sidehills, popped over open creeks and dug trenches trying to hang onto our line until the next cluster of pine trees opens up.

So when we say the shorter tunnel makes the sled handle like a completely different machine than the Summit X, or that the removal of the snow flap completely alters the track's efficiency of getting traction in deep snow, we base that on three staff test riders having ridden the Expert (and the Pro RMK Khaos, and the Alpha One ...) the way we ride every other mountain sled we test. It's not conjecture. It's our profession.

With that out of the way, here's what the SnoWest test staff had to say following our test sessions on the 2020 Ski-Doo 850 Summit X with Expert.

## SUMMIT EXPERT RIDE REVIEW: RYAN HARRIS

Like it says at the beginning, I walked into the shop one day ready to be blown away, and saw a sled with a shorter tunnel. I didn't see the big deal right then. Of course, we've ridden sleds with chopped tunnels off and on since 2013, and ridden without snow flaps off and on since Ski-Doo made triple-shock rear suspensions. So the introduction presentation was interesting, but underwhelming. The shorter tunnel was intriguing, but the changes to the handlebars (2mm smaller grip diameter, shorter riser block and new handlebar grab strap), new shock package (Kashima-coated shock bodies with new lightweight, high-strength steel coil springs, stiffer valving), new ski rubber (a new profile, new rubber composite material molded around a metal plate), slightly changed spindle (different bottom profile to adapt the new ski rubber and keep the ski flatter), new seat (the small and lightweight FORTY7C seat that was a Ski-Doo accessory this season), adjustable limiter strap (by just switching a lever on the tunnel) and improved running board (more open for snow evacuation and traction) all seemed more like updates you'd expect to see across the Summit lineup rather than singled out as a new model.

Then we hit the snow. And suddenly, I saw it differently.

The very first thing I noticed was the vastly better suspension setup. I say vastly better knowing that the Summit SP and Summit X are not race sleds. Most of the riders who buy those sleds prefer a cushy ride. I (and many of you reading this) prefer a much more aggressive suspension spec. I was very impressed with how the Expert rides higher in the shock stroke and supports the front end in monster moguls. The

shock action is smooth and plush, but ready to hit anything at full speed. The rear suspension absorbs the biggest hits and tracks straight without deflecting. This is the first Gen4 Summit I've felt I could blitz whoops on at wide open throttle. This shock package is superb.

As we gained elevation and started picking lines into the hills, the next thing that really stood out was the change to the ski rubber and spindle. The ski stays very flat with the terrain, rather than pivoting and hooking the snow and turning the nose of the sled uphill. Even in bumps, the ski staying flatter seems to make the front of the sled stay on top of the moguls better. Every time the ski on a Summit or any sled stands up, it scrubs speed and shifts your weight forward. It's like hitting the brakes. But we didn't notice it until we got on the Expert, because it doesn't do that. So the Expert goes through sketched out terrain noticeably faster because of that.

Once we got into the mountain and the really deep snow, things got interesting. The Expert goes through deep snow like it has a 15-horsepower advantage over the other stuff. And it handles like a trials bike. That's the tunnel/snow flap combo.

First, the handling. Both the Summit X and the Expert can run a great line through tight trees, right? Fairly equal here, but the tighter you go, and the faster you want to ride, and the quicker you want to turn—the Expert has clear advantages.

First, it's more efficient at using the horsepower that is reaching the drive axle. It's spitting most of the snow it's chewing through out the back rather than recycling it through the tunnel. As the ground speed slows to a crawl, the Expert is tracking through fresh snow, while the Summit X is

also fighting to chew through the snow that has compacted and cycled through the tunnel and been dumped out right in front of the track approach. It's also not dragging a scoop (the Ski-Doo snow flaps are the longest and most rigid of the class) behind itself as it's driving forward.

Second, the snow flap and rear 5 inches of the tunnel are not dragging in the snow. That allows the sled to better dig down and find traction. And it allows for amazing pivot turns ... you know the ones you see on Instagram where riders stand the sled up, spin around on the rear idlers and drive right back out on the track they came in on? Totally doable by just about anyone on the Expert.

Third, the Expert rides like it's about 30 lbs. lighter. The tunnel carries significantly less weight in the form of packed ice and snow. We rolled the Expert over numerous times on our test rides to inspect. You could see the tunnel metal from corner to corner at the drive axle and above the track.

All of that makes the Expert handle quite differently than the Summit SP or Summit X.

Add to that the more comfortable grips, the lower bar riser (which gives you better control of the sled and chassis roll in technical riding), the seat and



the other few changes. The net result is a mountain sled that is Summit in name, but a totally new sled in reality.

## THERE ARE FIVE SKI-DOO MOUNTAIN SLED MODELS TO CHOOSE FROM FOR 2020:

**Freeride (850 E-Tec only)**

**Summit X with Expert Package (850 E-Tec only)**

**Summit X (850 E-Tec only)**

**Summit SP (850 and 600 E-Tec available)**

**Summit Sport (600 carbureted only)**



## 2020 SKI-DOO FREERIDE 154 AND 165

- New lightweight spindle with updated bottom profile
- New ski rubber, designed to keep the ski flatter on the snow surface in rough terrain for improved sidehill control
- New improved profile running boards, 40 percent wider openings at the front of the running board and 30 percent

- more grip for boots, with 0.8-lb weight reduction
- New drive belt with new PBO material and design
- New graphics and colors — Intense Blue color way is new for 2020



## 2020 SKI-DOO SUMMIT X WITH EXPERT PACKAGE

- Spring-order only
- 850 E-Tec
- Designed with input from backcountry riders Carl Kuster and Tony Jenkins
- Features everything the Summit X has, with these upgrades:
- Shortened tunnel. It's essentially the tunnel from a 146-inch track Summit on the Expert 154, and the tunnel from a 154-inch track Summit on the Expert 165.
- Minimalist lightweight snow flap.
- Kashima-coated KYB HPG Plus front shocks
- KYB HPG Plus center shock
- KYB Pro 36 EA compression-adjustable rear shock
- Lightweight coil shock springs have fewer coils
- New expert-level stiffer shock valving
- New lightweight spindle with updated bottom profile
- New ski rubber, designed to keep the ski flatter on the snow surface in rough terrain for improved sidehill control
- New FORTY7C lightweight mountain seat. Developed with Carl Kuster, the seat has a lower profile, shorter length and

narrower shape

- New handlebar with smaller-diameter grip. The handlebar ends have been machined down 2mm to accept a new grip for reduced arm pump and greater ergonomic comfort
- New 4.7-inch bar riser block
- New low handlebar strap with more flexible material
- New flexible hand guards, protection for the brake reservoir
- Factory external limiter strap adjuster with two settings for quick adjustments
- Adjustable limiter strap
- Updated profile running boards
- Two unique color ways: Ultimate Black / Orange and Lava red / White
- New drive belt with new PBO material and design
- SHOT available
- Sea-level calibration available
- Two track options:
  - 154x3
  - 165x3

### SUMMIT EXPERT RIDE REVIEW: STEVE JANES

Within hours of Ski-Doo releasing its new 2020 Summit X 850 with the Expert Package, a friend called and asked if I thought this was going to be a significant improvement over the 2019 models. "Do you think it will actually be a noticeable improvement on the snow ... or is it merely cosmetic?"

What he didn't know at the time was that I had already spent some significant time on the 2020 Summit X with the Expert Package in deep snow conditions and wasn't trying to base my opinion on media hype, but rather from actual riding conditions.

From what I found, there are 10 significant improvements in design on the Expert Package that will be noticeable on snow. They are: significantly smaller snow flap, shorter tunnel, better running boards, improved front suspension, improved rear suspension, lower and lighter seat, lower handlebar risers, smaller diameter handlebars, adjustable limiter strap and improved ski boot.

Although I could go into detail on each of these improvements (something that will happen in future SnowWest issues), there are a couple that jump out when you ride this sled.

First, the tunnel/snow flap combination allows the Summit X

with the Expert Package to cruise through much deeper snow easier. There is less drag, and less snow being recycled back through the tunnel which tends to rob you of horsepower.

This improvement also allows your reverse to work much better on the Expert Package. You no longer back over your snow flap. We actually found that you could back up in almost any conditions ... at least enough to change direction or create a better base under your track if you need to jump out of a hole.

Everything about the Expert just seems to work. It's quicker, better in the bumps and easier to control/predict in the snow.

Although some will feel the handlebars are a tad low (you can always increase the height of your risers), you will notice that the smaller diameter handlebars will feel much more comfortable and will reduce arm fatigue.

The Expert is a better sled ... and one that makes you a better rider. So when my friend asked if I thought it would actually be a noticeable improvement on the snow ... or just merely cosmetic, I just smiled.

The Expert Package delivers everything I want in a mountain snowmobile, and then some.



## 2020 SKI-DOO SUMMIT X

- New graphics and colors — Ultimate Iceberg Blue and Sunburst Yellow/White are new color ways for 2020
- New improved profile running boards, 40 percent wider

- openings at the front of the running board and 30 percent more grip for boots, with 0.8-lb weight reduction
- New drive belt with new PBO material and design

### SUMMIT EXPERT RIDE REVIEW: LANE LINDSTROM

The “older” a snowmobile model gets, you keep wondering what a manufacturer is going to do year after year to keep it fresh.

Sometimes the changes are subtle refinements; others are more dramatic, such as a new engine or refined chassis.

When it comes to the Summit X, Ski-Doo has done a yeoman’s job of keeping that model at the top of its game—and on the top of the mountain in the West. There have been so many changes in the Summit X over the years.

So what could Ski-Doo do this year to keep the Summit X fresh? More power? Lighten the sled up here or there? Better ride? Bold new graphics? Or maybe address a couple of SnoWest Magazine editors’ gripes?

Okay, address my gripes. I really enjoy riding the Summit X but there are a couple of things that just make me shake my head and wonder when they will get remedied.

My gripes really boiled down to a couple of things. First, that pesky snow flap problem. It is especially pesky when unloading the sled from a trailer and/or ramp. Or backing it up in the any kind of deep snow. The sled would simply run over the snow flap and come to a stop, meaning you had to get off the machine, lift the back end and try again.

The new short tunnel (one of the most visual changes to the Summit X with Expert Package) without a snow flap (did you catch that? “Without”) takes care of the backing over the snow flap problem. A standard rear lightweight snow flap with LinQ-ready attachment points replaces the snow flap. Problem

solved.

While we’re at it, the shorter tunnel means better deep snow riding. I found that to be true in the two days we rode the Summit X with Expert Package as the snow clears out much easier because there’s less tunnel for it to get hung up on.

Next is something that is a little more dramatic than backing over a snow flap. There are times when the snow is deep and the track is digging as it climbs that the front of the sled rises up out of the snow and kind of has a mind of its own as it bobs and weaves up the hill. Yes, I am well aware you can adjust the limiter strap to minimize the front end lift but I am somewhat of a lazy snowmobiler. When we’re riding through the trees and then pop out of them and decide to attack a mountain by climbing it, I don’t want to stop, get off the sled, lie in the snow and adjust the limiter strap. Or vice versa. I don’t want to readjust the limiter strap when we’re not climbing so the sled behaves in the trees. Like I said, I’m lazy.

But with the Limiter Strap Adjuster right there on the tunnel, my reason for sacrificing sled control because of my laziness tends to evaporate. I can, when the terrain (or even snow depth) changes, reach down and adjust the limiter strap by turning a lever. Yea, it’s that simple. I don’t even have to get off the machine.

Of course, there are so many more pieces to the Expert Package but those are the two that really jump out. I do like the smaller diameter handlebar grips. And the FORTY7C seat is so easy to maneuver around.



## **2020 SKI-DOO SUMMIT SP**

- New graphics and colors — Octane Blue/Black color way is new for 2020.
  - New drive belt with new PBO material and design (850 E-Tec only)
  - Updated deep snow running boards, with 40 percent wider openings at the front of the running board and 30 percent more grip for boots.
  - 0.8-lb weight reduction (from running board update)
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