For Immediate Release

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Cook: "Make it to beep when I'm slow"

PARK CITY, Utah (Aug. 27) – Alpine racer Stacey Cook (Mammoth, CA) was certain she was knifing a turn while training in New Zealand. But, according to the constant beep in her ear, she was wrong.

The U.S. Ski Team Sports Science department has been kicking out the jams, so to speak, during summer alpine training camps in the Southern Hemisphere. One of the hits: the vLink Racing Computer, a training tool attached to skis and designed to beep when a racer is sliding turns instead of carving.

"It's so cool to hear what you can't feel," said Cook, the 2008 U.S. downhill and super G champion. "It's like having a coach right in my ear. There was a certain turn that I thought I was nailing, but the beep says I'm not."

It would also beep when athletes were accelerating, a high tone for the gas and a low tone for the brake. For Cook the mixed noises was too confusing, especially when "maching" on an icy slope. So she started asking Sports Science Director Troy Flanagan questions.

"She wanted to know if we could make it beep only when she was slowing down," said Flanagan, who has worked with Olympic and World Champions across 16 Summer Olympic sports. "And we're working on it to do that. Athletes are very sophisticated these days and it's our job to find and cultivate the tools to help them perform."

As part of that process, Flanagan and Co. tested the vLink before bringing it to the athletes. Off the shelf, the computer takes photos of the snow at a rate of 6,500 images per second. For Flanagan, that wasn't enough.

"We took it to a pitched skiing carpet and experimented with it and we also tested it on a run we built on a snow bank behind the Team training center in Park City. We sent the vLink down on a sled in various snow conditions and had a magnet stop it at the bottom," he said.

The idea was to make sure it was easy to use and extremely accurate before even presenting it to athletes like Cook. By the time Flanagan was done with it, it was measuring sideways slip at half a millimeter. Additionally coaches can overlap the tones with video in order to analyze a run more accurately.

According to Cook, it's going to help her find that extra hundredth of a second she needs to be faster. The women's Alpine Ski Team heads to Chile in mid September with vLink in tow.