BEARHUG BINDING SYSTEM
Entered by: Helix Design, Inc.

Molder	**Designer**
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Moldmaker	**Original Equipment Manufacturer (OEM)**
Creative Machine Company 49 Omni Circle, P.O. Box 1720, Auburn, ME 04210	Tubbs Snowshoe Company 52 River Road, Stowe, VT 05672

Entry Description

Intuitiveness, ease of use and consumer appeal were the main objectives of the BearHug program. The binding system has a number of signature features that set it apart from the competition. The system is the first on the market with a left and right foot-specific binding and is angled to adapt to the natural step of the user. This allows for greater comfort and proper heel positioning. The system utilizes a ratchet-style heel and instep adjustment. The ratchet straps replace unfriendly nylon straps (typical for snowshoes) and allow for simple adjustment with gloves and mittens. The binding system also permits one-time fit; once the user has adjusted the bindings to their hiking shoe, the full-release instep buckle allows the user to step in and out of the binding without any additional tedious adjustments. Padded interior walls provide added comfort and protect expensive hiking shoes from scrubbing and marring. The built-in lip in the toe area reduces the amount of snow that can pack under a person's foot to help eliminate discomfort.

Why is this Part Innovative?

In addition to the above-mentioned design innovations, manufacturing costs and flexibility were vital to the development of the binding. The binding is injection-molded as a pair in a flat state to keep tooling costs low. The molded materials have enough flexibility to allow the binding to wrap over a broad range of boot sizes (Women's 6.5-10, Men's 8-13 for the large bindings), yet are durable enough to perform under severe physical and environmental stress. The tooling design permitted experimentation with various materials to find the optimum balance between performance and price. Furthermore, because of how the part is used, both sides of the part required sensitivity to appearance and the application of texture. To minimize costs, the binding was developed around pre-existing straps, buckles, and steel crampon elements, yet the use of flowing surfaces and highlights for the signature element create a "fresh look" for the entire system.