

THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

EARLY SEASON SKILLS AND DRILLS: REFINING SKIING SKILLS THROUGH SPECIFIC DRILLS

By TONY D. CRESPI, TECHNICAL EDITOR

Most top skiers booting up in the base lodge at resorts ranging from Sierra-at-Tahoe or Sugar Bowl in California to Okemo Mountain in Vermont know that performance skiing demands a complex mix of physical skills. In fact, even with pre-season conditioning many skiers – including Olympic Freestyle Medalist Nikki Stone and Bromley Mountain Ski School Supervisor Bud Randall – are stiff after the first few mountain outings.

“I’m usually sore,” admits Stone.

“I hate that stiff feeling,” adds Randall.

WHAT CAN HELP? WELCOME TO OUR MOUNTAIN CLINIC.

Early Season Pointer #1: Start On Modest Terrain

Start each day on modest terrain. Do not hit the steepest and meanest trails for the first run.

Start modestly. Crank it up gradually.

“I mix things up,” notes Stone. “I ski long, GS (giant slalom) turns and some slow, swing, turns. I mix things up.”

“Don’t just start on the steepest and meanest run,” suggests Randall. “Start out with longer gentler turns. Do not just jump into that high speed run. Start out easy.”

Vary turn shape. Vary speed. Mix things up.

Early Season Pointer #2: Use a Moderate Pace

Slow, deliberate skiing takes concentration.

Sometimes it is more difficult to ski at a slower speed while maintaining accuracy than when moving fast. Sometimes pros try to make accurate turns on steep terrain at a slow speed. It takes good balance.

Try starting a nice, round, turn, from a stopped position. Be aware how you need to shift your weight forward, down the mountain, - to initiate that first turn. Do not be rough or jagged. Moderate your pace by moving smoothly and deliberately.

“I like varying my pace,” explains Randall, who has coached skiers at resorts ranging from Vail in Colorado to his current base at Bromley Mountain. “Speed control is a good thing. I like starting at a more moderate pace. Then, later, I crank up the volume.”

Refine your speed control. Just as a driver scans the traffic and moderates speed depending on traffic and

road conditions, so advanced skiers can learn to maximize speed control.

Refine your speed control and practice varying your pace.

**VISUALIZE EACH MOVE.
HEAR THE SOUNDS OF THE SNOW.
PAY ATTENTION TO DETAILS
AND CONCENTRATE.**

Early Season Pointer #3: Widen Stance

“This is modern skiing,” explains Stone.

“Widen your stance,” suggests Randall.

Start early season by adopting a relaxed and functional stance. A functionally wide stance is new school.

“I often take a student to an easier slope and spend a few turns in a wedge position, and I drive the ski through a turn, gradually powering the turn up,” notes Randall.

Take a pointer from Randal. Adopt a wide stance.

As you relax, gradually practice a series of different skill blends – different kinds of movements and turns – on modest terrain.

Early Season Pointer #4: Restore and Refine Balance

Virtually every accomplished skier knows the importance of good balance. To an emerging intermediate skier, of course, good balance can simply mean staying upright while skiing over ice or through tracked powder. In contrast, to a world-class skier good balance may mean being able to ski the entire mountain while standing solely on one ski.

No matter how sophisticated and modern the skis or boots or bindings, you cannot ski well unless you are balanced. Initially, standing still, after you put your skis on, try rocking forward and back. Feel the front of your boots and the rear of your boots. Slowly reduce the

rocking action. Feel yourself become centered.

Think! Do you feel when you are out of balance? What helps restore balance? What parts are missing? Try to focus. Try to feel your movements.

First, practice smooth, round, turns at moderate speed. Second, watch the throttle. Third, try to vary turn shape. Fourth, do not rush those turns. Fifth, practice skiing with your weight slightly forward and then slightly back. As you glide - slowly - from one long, round, turn to the next, rock slowly from a forward to a slightly backward position. Gradually, reduce the rocking action.

Becoming a balanced skier takes time, practice, and you need to feel how your body continually balances and rebalances itself on skis. Early in the season, make a habit of starting the day practicing slow, round, turns. Try to find your balance point.

Remember: good skiers constantly are balancing and rebalancing. Try to feel how and where you are most balanced.

Early Season Pointer #5: Practice Visualizing Turns

Top skiers visualize their turns.

Stop. Picture a top skier. Think of a favorite trail. Remember the cold air. Remember the pitch. Feel the snow, the edges, and the tightness of the boots. Picture your BEST turns.

“I do this all the time,” notes Olympian Stone.

“It’s a great and powerful skill,” echoes Randall. “Top skiers do this regularly. It’s a powerful skill!”

Practice “pre-living” your turns in your mind’s eye.

Visualize each move. Hear the sounds of the snow. Pay attention to details and concentrate.

Visualize yourself skiing smoothly, easily, and happily as well.

Approach early season deliberately

Set the tone for a long, long season

Be Aware. Ski With Care.

Technical Editor Tony Crespi has served as both a Ski School Trainer and Development Team Coach. A contributor to publications throughout snow country, his column is published throughout the season.

SKIER NEWS • SKI CANADA'S KOOTENAY ROCKIES

CANADA'S KOOTENAY ROCKIES in B.C. GET CONVENIENT with DELTA FLIGHTS

Discover the Powder Highway & the experience of a lifetime

KIMBERLEY, BC, CANADA — Deep snow, funky towns and some of the most down home, snow laden, and adventure packed ski resorts on the continent. More resorts, backcountry helicopter, snowcat and touring operations than any other region in the world. That is the Powder Highway in the southeast corner of beautiful British Columbia, Canada.

Start wherever you like, perhaps in one of the northern resorts of this group, in Revelstoke. People have been skiing there for a 100 years.

Perhaps begin in Nelson where the snow buries perfect heritage houses or in Golden where it is poetically said that the mountains scratch crystal blue skies. Perhaps you will begin in colorful Roseland, or at the southeastern end of the province in Fernie, where steep trees, storybook villages and ‘cold smoke’ have stolen the lives of many wandering ski bums.

Your journey may not start in a town at all. The adventure could begin high and hidden in the folds of the Purcell Mountains, or the Selkirks, the Monashees. Perhaps it would begin in the Valhallas at a backcountry lodge where the sun rolls up and down glacially carved peaks. This is where you would inhabit a world that is entirely uninhabited, except for you.

Maybe you would prefer a remote heli-ski lodge or a fly-in cat-ski operation. The Kootenay Rockies happens to be the birthplace of both. For good reason of course: there may be no better terrain suited to backcountry powder skiing on the planet.



On the left, the Highway part of the Powder Highway, Main Street in downtown Fernie, BC. On the right, the Powder part of the Powder Highway, family skiing on Fernie's varied trails.

Photo courtesy of Fernie Resort, RCR and credit to Henri Georgi, photographer



To be sure, no matter how it begins, once you are here, there is one highway that connects many ski and snow adventures. You will find almost perfect snow, spectacular mountains and friendly people. It all exists on the Powder Highway.

This area has long been included in the travel plans of many globetrotting skiers. Now Delta Air Lines has discovered the tourism treasures of the Kootenay Rockies Region, and those pristine slopes are about to open up. That is good news for U.S. skiers this winter. On December 17, 2008, Delta begins non-stop jet service between their Salt Lake City hub (SLC) and the new Canadian Rockies International Airport (YXC) in Cranbrook, BC, which is in the heart of the Powder Highway.

With convenient connections to many U.S. cities, this new service will make it entirely possible for you to hop in an airplane in the morning, arrive in the Kootenay Rockies just after 1:00pm (Mountain Time, of course) and be at your hillside condo within minutes. In fact, you have eight world

class ski resorts to choose from, four of them within 20-90 minutes of YXC. Fernie Alpine Resort, Kimberley Alpine Resort, Fairmont Hot Springs Resort and Panorama Mountain Village are the closest. A little further along the way you will find Kicking Horse Mountain Resort, Revelstoke Mountain Resort, Whitewater Winter Resort and Red Mountain Resort. Each has its own unique claim to fame, whether it is the best champagne powder, the steepest vertical, the ultimate family escape or the deepest snow. You'll want to come back year after year to uncover the many secrets of the Powder Highway.

The Kootenay Rockies is British Columbia's fastest growing tourism region, providing visitors a stunning array of vacation experiences around the calendar. Four national parks, 77 provincial parks, hot springs resorts, artisan shops and friendly communities complement the dozens of backcountry lodges, golf resorts and adventure operators for thrill seekers at all levels. World beat music can be heard in the hearts of Kootenay coffee houses, festivals and pubs. Community theatres host home-grown and top notch touring shows, and the comforts of home are always close by.

For more information about this stunning corner of the world, visit www.KootenayRockies.com for information for all seasons.

Visit www.PowderHighway.com (either directly or from an easily found link on the homepage of www.skiernews.com) and follow the links to explore this winter wonderland. To speak with a Powder Highway rep, you may also call 1-800-661-6603.