

THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

TIPS for TESTING SKIS: TEST DRIVE OFFERS PERFORMANCE EDGE

By TONY D. CRESPI, TECHNICAL EDITOR

Interested in new skis? Are you worried about spending \$1,000 for a pair of skis and bindings which afterward might not feel ideal? You should be worried. One ski is not the same as the next.

"I found that you can read and talk about different equipment, but what you hear and what may fit can vary. You need to try different skis!" notes Ski Pro Bud Randall.

"It's amazing how skis vary," emphasizes Randall.

"I'm often surprised," reflects Randall. "Last year one of the skis I tested blew me away. I never expected I'd like it so much."

It's best to test before you buy.

Do you need a strategy? To start, narrow your choices to a maximum of three – and ideally two – brands. Because there are many fine skis on the market, too many choices can become overwhelming. Then, test different types of skis and in different lengths.

"You can listen to people talk but you're investing a lot of money in a new ski," adds Mount Snow's General Manager and PSIA Examiner Erik Barnes. "I suggest you go to a place that has some qualified people to help sift through the options. Talk to someone who actually has skied the product."

"I was really surprised," says one veteran recreational skier I met testing skis. "Years ago I never even thought of testing. Then I spent lots of money but the skis just seemed too stiff. I was very dissatisfied: I was stuck!"

To be truthful, this is not the first person to buy without a test ride and then groan. Many skiers have found their purchases less than perfect. Sometimes it is the model, sometimes the length. With shaped skis, relatively small differences in length can impact performance. Moreover, pre-mounted bindings with special plates change performance. In fact, side cut, flex, dampening, and core construction all vary from ski to ski. Side cut, for instance, the curve which runs from tip to tail on both sides of the ski, effects turning ability, but varies from ski to ski. Years ago, technology was such that skis could generally be constructed for preferences leading to shorter or longer turns. Today, in contrast, by blending different engineering principles skis can accommodate a wide performance band.

Are you skeptical? People should think twice before buying a ski off the shelf. Because of technology, different skis do

perform differently. Sometimes - dare I say it - the differences between skis can feel almost dramatic.

Pro Guide to Ski Testing

1. Provide the Shop with Accurate Information.

Start your search by helping the shop personnel know your current length and model of ski, as well as the kinds of turns and terrain you most frequently enjoy. Do you enjoy short, medium, or long radius turns? Do you like cruisers or bumps? Be honest. Be accurate.

This is important in calculating the best ski to demo.

2. Start the Test Day on Your Own Ski.

Starting with your own ski provides a base for solid comparison. Remember that any new ski will outperform a poorly tuned ski. So, if possible, maximize your skis performance with a solid tune. That way you can better judge the old and new ski. Further, test at least two to three different skis in order to clearly define your preferences.

3. Maintain a Record

Prepare index cards. The following categories can help: ease of turning, stability, edge grip and fun factor.

4. Use the Same Terrain for Each Test

"We used two trails," explains Randall, who tested approximately 25 skis with me on one of two days a few years ago. "We used one trail with a firm base, to test grip, and we used one to cruise and really open up. I had a ball too. We had nice conditions, and we could really get into it on some scratchy stuff. And we were like two big kids with new motorcycles."

Maintaining a consistent testing run provides for a more reasonable comparison. Choose terrain on which you are very comfortable, but which offers some variability. Test each ski on the same terrain, in the same conditions. Test on the same day to maximize your ability to compare differing sensations.

5 Find a test partner

It's great fun testing with a buddy. I know I love testing with Bud Randall, and I find it a helpful way to gauge my own reactions. In fact, we both test the same skis at the same time, taking turns sharing first impressions.

6. Maintain a Consistent Pace and Rhythm.

Start each run by going slowly to feel the essence of the

ski. When speed gets to high they all generally start to behave alike. So, go slow and drive them through different arcs. Also, vary turns. Really run the ski through a test. The ski that feels the best is most likely the ski for you.

Set a speed range for each run and include setting a turning rhythm.

7. Take Multiple Test Runs.

Two runs are ideal. The first run you learn the ski. The second run you really test the ski.

Do not vary in your test and plan to retest favorites later.

8. Vary Snow Conditions.

Test different skis in different conditions.

"I like testing in crud, and on firm snow. Try skis on different snow," explains Randall. "I like to test grip and I like to test all the different elements of snow conditions."

9. This is Worth Repeating: Choose a Test Partner

"You can compare notes and it makes you think," reflects Randall. "We played off each other. We compared notes. Then you can try skis again and determine if you missed something. And friends sometimes will help you push it. We took high speed cruising runs and some when we laid back."

10. Test Your Choice Ski in Two Lengths.

The same ski can vary markedly in two different lengths. I know. My ski at the time was a Volkl 6 Star, it skied differently in different lengths. Ultimately, I chose a 168. Understand, it seemed like a different ski in other lengths. And, while I was surprised to purchase a 168 – rather than my typical 175 length – I loved the ski.

Conclusion

Test your final choices before making a purchase. Sometimes we pick the skis, sometimes the skis pick us. A test ride always helps me, it may help you too.

Be Aware - Ski with Care -

and Test Before You Buy

Tony D. Crespi has served as both a Development Team Coach and Ski School Supervisor. A frequent contributor to regional and national publications throughout snow country, his column is published throughout the season.

NEW in COLORADO for the 2018-19 WINTER SEASON

DENVER, CO – Colorado Ski Country USA (CSCUSA) member ski areas have elevated the guest experience with new capital improvements, investments in infrastructure and new programs that guests of all ages and experience levels will appreciate. Colorado welcomed six new chairlifts at five ski areas across the state, six new dining experiences and two terrain expansions for skiers and riders to enjoy. This year's improvements will excite expert skiers and riders in addition to those that are new to the sport or returning to the slopes.

"Colorado is once again leading the ski industry with significant investment in lift infrastructure for this winter season," said Melanie Mills, President and CEO of Colorado Ski Country USA. "Guests to Colorado Ski Country member ski areas will experience new chairlifts, new terrain, new lodging, new dining options and multiple offerings that are directed at those newer or returning to the sport and those that may just be looking to enjoy the mountain environment."

Below is a summary of the many capital improvements and resort upgrades at many CSCUSA ski areas.

Arapahoe Basin Ski Area

Arapahoe Basin Ski Area announced the opening its full 468-acre terrain expansion into the Beavers and the Steep Gullies, including the new four-person Beavers chairlift.

A-Basin opened approximately 371 acres of terrain last season to give a preview to excited skiers and riders. For 2018-19, A-Basin operations crews constructed 97 more acres of tree skiing (glades) and continued improving the rest of the terrain with grading, glading and installation of the chairlift and picnic areas. Terrain in The Beavers includes two new intermediate groomed runs, allowing more skiers and riders to enjoy this scenic, north- and west-facing terrain. The Steep Gullies are approximately 91 acres of extreme (double-black diamond), steep, couloir skiing. These runs will remain hike-back for the true advanced skier or snowboarder looking for some of the most challenging terrain in Colorado. For more info: www.arapahoebasin.com.

Aspen Snowmass

Aspen Skiing Company is well underway on the Snowmass Base Village Development, a \$600 million mountain-resort development that will add lodging, residences and amenities over 10 years. The first phase of development includes the new Lighthouse Hotel Snowmass, a ski-in/ski-out hotel adjacent to Snowmass Mountain's Elk Camp Gondola that will feature 99 hotel rooms and 11 for-sale condominiums, plus a new restaurant, a children's game area and a five-story climb-

ing wall. The Snowmass Base Village will also welcome a central public events plaza to serve as the community's gathering space with an ice-skating rink, fire pits, children's pop-up fountains and other community amenities this winter.

At Buttermilk, families and children can enjoy Fort Frog, a new wooden, frontier style fort with lookout towers, a jail, snowball launcher and swinging bridge. This is a great option for skiing and non-skiing families alike.

Also new for the 2018-19 season, The Aspen Snowmass App will receive an upgrade to provide rewards and enhanced functioning of year-over-year stats and tracking, allowing families, skiers and non-skiers to track on-mountain movements. All Aspen Snowmass food and beverage outlets will go straw free. For more info, visit: www.aspensnowmass.com.

Copper Mountain

For the 2018-19 season, Copper Mountain debuted the new American Flyer and American Eagle chairlifts out of Copper's Center Village. The American Flyer is now a high-speed six-person chair with bubble enclosures to protect from wind and cold, the only active bubble chair in Colorado. The American Eagle is a high-speed combination lift that features both six-person chairs and eight-person gondola cabins. Both will significantly increase uphill access from the base area and reduce wait times.

Copper Mountain also welcomed a new base area restaurant, Downhill Duke's. Named after a beloved dog, Downhill Duke's will welcome guests and their four-legged friends to unbuckle their boots, take in some sun and enjoy lunch or après cocktails on the south-facing patio. For more information, please visit: www.coppercolorado.com

Purgatory Resort

Purgatory Resort will offer year-round access to the Inferno Mountain Coaster, a new gravity-fed ride that will zip through aspen groves revealing incredible views of the San Juan mountains. A great option for families with non-skiers or those seeking a break from the slopes, The Inferno Mountain Coaster is almost a mile long, including 300 feet of vertical drop, nine switchbacks and speeds of up to 25 miles per hour.

Brand new for the 2018-19 season, Purgatory Resort will offer a free season pass for all children in Fourth Grade or younger, with no blackout dates and no parent purchase required. For more information, visit: www.skipurg.com

Steamboat

Please read the Steamboat article on page 10, and for more information, visit www.steamboat.com

Telluride Ski Resort

The Meadows, Telluride's popular beginner area, has been upgraded into a world-class learning facility. The Meadows feature a newly installed 320-foot covered surface lift and a significant investment in a terrain-based learning program. Telluride skiers and riders will also find an expanded grooming fleet to enhance the groomed terrain across the resort, as Telluride continues its multi-year, multimillion-dollar venture in snowmaking upgrades and technology to improve efficiency and reduce its carbon footprint.

Telluride announced it is developing a consumer app, available for download, with lift status information, snow reporting, trail status, an interactive trail map, push notifications and more. For info please visit: www.tellurideskiresort.com

Winter Park Resort

New for the 2018-19 season at Winter Park Resort is a new 10-person gondola, the resort's first new on-mountain lift installation since 2007, reducing wait times by 15 minutes during peak season. The gondola serves a new daily Mountaintop Sunset Après at the Lodge at Sunspot from 2:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., with live music on Fridays and Saturdays. Foot passengers can ride free without a lift ticket beginning at 2:30 p.m. each day.

Winter Park also upgraded its snowmaking system with the addition of new energy efficient compressors, pipe replacement and new high-tech snow guns. A Zephyr Plaza upgrade in the Winter Park Village created a free-flowing plaza with stage area, fire pits and sundeck for general gathering and small events and concerts.

The Winter Park Express train service from Denver to Winter Park returns for a third season with additional Fridays added as well as a lounge car for food and beverages. For more information, visit: www.winterparkresort.com

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Colorado Ski Country USA (CSCUSA) is the not-for-profit trade association representing Colorado's 23 ski and snowboard resorts.

Information about CSCUSA and its members can be found at www.ColoradoSki.com, on Twitter @ColoradoSkiUSA and on Facebook at www.Facebook.com/ColoradoSkiCountryUSA.

This press release was edited by SKIER NEWS due to space considerations. The complete info and more, can be found online at: www.coloradoski.com

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