

STUDENTS MAY SEEM IN CONTROL OF THE CARVED SKI ON THE BEGINNER HILL, BUT WHEN THEY LEAVE THE LESSON AND END UP ON THE GREEN TRAILS WITH THEIR FRIENDS, THEY FIND THAT THEY DON'T HAVE THE SKILLS TO CONTROL THE CARVED SKI.

Letters

On the Ball (of the Foot)

Here are just a few comments to add to the article "Turn Initiation 101: Start with the Ball of the Foot" (spring 2009) by Patrick Hunter. Modern shaped skis certainly make it a lot easier to carve turns; however, I believe that with novice skiers (Levels 1-4), we still need to spend a fair amount of time concentrating on balancing and rotary movements.

Even though it's nice to explore some edging movements with our students, I don't believe we should put a primary focus on applying pressure to the ball of the foot to initiate the turn. Over the years since shaped skis arrived, I've seen far too many instructors work on instant results by having their students initiate the turn with a pressure and edge movement rather than teaching a well-balanced position from which to steer the skis with movements of the legs and feet. When the skier initiates the turn with a steering movement that promotes a controlled, skidded turn, the edges will blend with the turn shape and slope of the hill without forcing a pressure movement to the ski.

Students may seem in control of the carved ski on the beginner hill, but when they leave the lesson and end up on the green trails with their friends, they find that they don't have the skills to control the carved ski. The resulting acceleration and speed can be too much for them to handle.

I'd like to also point out that for our intermediate and advanced students, I be-

lieve the best movement pattern entails tipping both boots simultaneously while moving the center of mass to the forward and inside of the new turn. A skier who is pressing the ball of the foot of the new outside ski may very easily over-flex the outside ankle and knee, and over-rotate the hip at the beginning of the turn. It is much easier to control the pressure transfer at the beginning of each turn by taking weight off of the new inside ski, rather than applying weight to the new outside ski.

—Larry Dean
Vail, CO

Author Patrick Hunter responds: Thoughtful and well-reasoned observations, Larry. You think it's too much edge too soon, and that the forward weighted stance is a mistake. That was exactly the situation in American ski teaching some 20 years ago when I got started on this kick. At that time, most ski schools were producing poor skiers who stuck to groomed runs only, sat back, and skidded (albeit they were on straight skis that were far too long.) These skiers never reached the "dynamic parallel level," and never would.

I began to experiment with putting my clients on "very short" skis. I even started my never-ever privates on snow blades. In a way, it was a return to the Graduated Length Method (GLM). Other schools around the world, I came to find out, were still doing something like this. But the difference from GLM was the idea of adding some edge . . . SOME edge.

Then the shaped skis arrived. Eureka! The students' learning curves shot up. Soon,

these people were not just making turns on the groomed but happily tackling bumps, powder, and steeps.

Importantly, to avoid some of the very real problems that you point out, the teacher must maintain a balance. When our school started putting beginners on the 120-centimeter shaped skis, they had problems with students "railing out." Students were getting too much edge for the sidecut on the little skis. More sideslipping was needed early on. Personally, I began to teach the hockey stop to many students on the first day, right after sideslipping.

But fundamental to all of this work was a more forward stance. I had learned from racing that the amount of forward leverage that could be used was orders of magnitude beyond what I was used to. (Bode Miller was jerking the heelpieces out of his skis!) The most common fault with students is backweighting and rear leverage, concepts that are, of course, instinctive. Honestly, I have yet to see a student who puts his or her weight too far forward.

What I try to keep in mind with the various exercises and drills, including the ones in my article, is they really only serve to nudge the students in a certain direction. That's where the real "steering" takes place.



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