

SELECTING THE PERFECT SKI...

By Jerome Jang , a former level 3 CANSI and telemark instructor as well as a level 3 NCCP coach. With over 30 years of experience, Jerome has worked with the BC and the National Cross Country Ski teams and is currently the head coach of Nickel Plate Nordic Centre located in the Okanagan.

THE SECRET

Knowing your customer is the first step in helping them choose the right ski for their needs. There are a number of factors that you need to consider with your customer when choosing a ski. The most important factor is the terrain because it will determine the ski category. If they want to ski untracked meadows and explore the backcountry then a recreational touring ski would be the best choice. If they ski mostly groomed trails for fitness then they may be looking for a recreational fitness or entry level racing ski. If they have plans to win the local loppet or race, then they may be looking for full on performance racing gear. Each category of ski optimizes performance for specific conditions. Performance skis, while providing speed and great glide on groomed trails, do not do well in the backcountry. While some recreational/fitness skis may work both on groomed trails and on easy ungroomed terrain, the customer should know that that ski is a compromise and be OK with that. And of course, if they wish to skate ski, then a skating specific ski (and poles) should be what they look at. The majority of skis sold fall under these categories: classic sports, recreation, fitness, performance skis, and skating. After you have settle on the ski category, it is important to consider factors such as weight, height, skills, physical abilities, expectation, and cost to help the customer choose the correct ski.

THE WEIGHT

Almost everyone is familiar with matching the right camber to the weight of the skier. The camber's strength is represented by a number called FA value. This number can be found on the sides of Fischer racing skis. Most ski shops can match the appropriate camber to skier's weight accurately by using the Fischer test board or weight chart. Weight is one of the more important factors to consider when selecting the right skis for your customer. None the less, the weight chart or the test board are a rule of thumb and a number of other factors should be considered before deciding on a ski.

THE HEIGHT

While the right camber is most important and ski length is less important, it should be considered. A taller skier will be able to handle a longer ski than a shorter skier. All things equal, a longer ski will give better glide and distribute the skier's weight and force over a larger area. A shorter ski will be lighter and seem more agile, particularly around corners. So matching the length of ski to height of skier is a consideration.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

The skill of the skier is extremely important. An expert skier will be able to weight and un-weight all of his body weight forcefully and quickly from one ski to the other. The expert skier will be able to handle a stiffer ski than an intermediate skier. However even an expert skier does not want a camber that is so

stiff that they have to work hard all the time to flatten wax pocket, or that is it hard to work in iffy conditions. So, an expert skier may choose a ski which requires almost 100 percent of their full weight to completely flatten the camber while beginner skier may wish to have a ski which only requires 60 to 80 percent of their body weight to flatten it. However, the less weight it takes to flatten the camber, the resistance it will create during the glide. Moreover, an expert skier will have more forward lean than a beginner skier. This puts the expert skier's centre of gravity ahead of their toes while skiing, while the beginner skier's centre of gravity is more or less right over their feet. As a result, the beginner's grip zone should be almost equal in front and back of the feet, while the expert skiers grip zone should be mostly in front of their feet. The new mounting plates called NIS are an excellent innovation, allowing retailers and skiers to fine tune the location of the wax pocket (PHOTO). Putting a beginner on skis designed for experts will likely make for a frustrating experience as the beginner will not get the grip they need. An expert on a beginner's ski will likely be equally frustrated as they will not get the glide he want. This brings us to another important factor that tempers the skill factor.

PHYSICAL CAPABILITY

A fit, athletic person with good co-ordination, balance or experience with related sports such as downhill skiing, hockey player, and running will likely want to move at a higher pace than a more sedentary customer who may want to enjoy the peace and tranquility of the winter outdoors while getting some exercise. Keeping the fitness level of your client in mind, you don't want to sell a ski that the customer will outgrow within a very short period of time or an advance ski that he will be unable to use. What are the expectations of the customer? Do they expect to work on their technique, join a local club and do the occasional race or just be able to keep up with their friends? If they want performance and will work at it, then they need higher performance skis. If they don't care so much, then a wax-less recreational ski may suffice. All things being equal, a waxed ski will give higher performance in terms of both grip and glide in all conditions than an wax-less ski (except perhaps when the snow temperatures are right around zero or if there conditions are very changeable).

AFFORDABILITY AND COST FACTOR

Higher performance and race skis cost more due to research and design, tighter manufacturing standards, high tech materials, more selection (in bases, camber, construction etc.). A high end ski cost about \$700 instead on \$350 for a recreational ski. However, amortise over 10 year, the difference boils down to \$35 versus \$70 a year and a well-treated pair of skis can last well over 20 plus years.

The enjoyment given from a good pair of skis is worth a lot more than the \$35/year difference. In addition, if your customer demand maximum performance, and can afford several pairs of skis, then you can start introducing them to the differences between a powder ski, a warm condition ski, a cold condition ski, hard klister ski, soft klister ski, wax-less and zero skis plus the different grinds for these different skis.

SKATING SKIS

All the above factors apply for skate skis. Many new skiers are drawn to skate skiing because the cruising speed is usually higher, there is no need to apply grip wax, and the learning curve is faster than classic skiing. However, glide waxing and ski preparation, is perhaps even more important. Skate skis have a single camber ski (as oppose to double camber for most higher performance classic skis). Moreover, the camber is usually harder. The flex, how the ski distributes the weight of the skier while gliding, also determines the performance of the ski on hard snow versus soft snow conditions. A stiffer flex will perform better hard snow and vice versa. So again, what kind of conditions do the skier ski in most of the time? In a perfect world, people should have two pairs of skate skies. A stiffer ski for hard snow condition and a softer ski for soft snow condition. So, knowing your customer well is the first step to helping them with their purchase. A satisfied customer is likely a customer who will return. Help to educate by considering all the above factors and you will likely have a satisfied customer who will come back.