

Beginner Ski Lessons Tips from Tom

Normally the tips below would be given in the warm chalet before the first lesson, but this year we cannot gather inside or even in one big group outside. For this reason I would like you to be well prepared to start your lesson in a small group with one instructor who will start with the basics on snow. Remember that the more you ski the faster you will improve. So just get out there.

SKIS AND BINDINGS

If you are renting or buying skis, make sure you do not get beguiled by “Racing Skis”. They are too stiff and you will have problems starting off. For a beginner the softer the ski the better you will get on. For waxable skis make sure the bases have all the old wax taken off before coming for the lesson. Start by removing most of the old wax by gently scraping off the wax with a plastic or metal scraper. For a very clean ski, I use Varsol and paper towel for this as an alternative to expensive ski wax cleaners. I make sure the skis are not sticky and are dry to the touch. For no-wax skis with plastic bases or the new skis with skins for grip, just make sure they are clean and dry. Make sure you can attach your boot to the binding in the comfort of your home. It is surprising how many folk have not worked out how to do this when they first put on their new skis on snow.

POLES

Your pole should come up to between the top of your shoulder and your armpit when the tip is on the floor. Longer poles will be a liability when learning the diagonal stride. Make sure you know how to hold the pole. Your hand should come upwards through the loop of the pole strap and then grasp both the pole and the pole strap. The arm action transfers your force to the pole through the strap, and you do not have to use up energy by holding the pole tightly.

WAXES

If you have waxable skis you will need a basic set of waxes. Green is for temperatures less than -10°C , blue for temperatures between -3 and -10°C , and purple between 0 and -3°C , and red you hope never to use around 0°C . For beginners, having grip is paramount to skiing uphill in good style and for that I usually wax the whole ski. As you get more proficient you may only wax the “wax-pocket” under the foot. The waxes are cleverly designed to give grip when your ski is momentarily stationary when you “kick” off it, but do not slow the ski down too much when it is gliding. The instructors will have worked out the wax of the day for you.

CLOTHES

I usually dress in layers, say undershirt, shirt, sweater, wind breaker or anorak, and a woolly toque. Synthetics are best as they wick moisture away from the skin and dry quickly. As I get hotter I can remove layers. Do not wear jeans since they are made of cotton. If you get them wet falling in the snow, they do not dry well and you will get chilled. Nylon or wool pants are best. Do not wear a heavy quilted jacket or quilted downhill ski pants. You expend quite a lot of energy cross-country skiing and will get much too hot (and sweaty!). Thin nylon overpants work well as windbreaks. If it is relatively warm wear ski gloves but if it is cold wear mitts. Leather mitts with liners are the best since leather mitts stay dry inside when wet outside.

WET TRACKS

If the tracks you are skiing have a brown or grey patch, that means there is water on the track. Do not ski through it since you will get water on the ski base and in next to no time it will turn to ice and you will stick solid and have to stop and scrape it off. For that purpose it is always a good idea to carry the scraper, mentioned above, with you to remove the ice. It also serves well to remove the snow when it balls up under the foot when the temperature is hovering around 0C .

Tom Holden