

Tips for Beginner Skiers

Your lesson will be in a small group with an instructor who will start with the basics of cross-country skiing on snow. The more hours you spend on skis the more comfortable and better your skiing will be. It is mostly a matter of getting out there.

SKIS AND BINDINGS

If you are renting or buying skis make sure you do not get beguiled by “Racing Skis” or training skis. They may be too stiff for you even if they passed the “paper test” in the shop 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. I use Varsol and the blue car-cleaning rolls from Canadian Tire since paper towel can leave bits of paper fibres behind. Varsol is an alternative to expensive ski wax cleaners for a start. I make sure the skis are not sticky with traces of the old wax 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 your armpit while 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 up through the pole strap and then grasp the pole and the pole strap. The arm action transfers your force to the pole through the strap and then you do not have to hold the pole tightly since that costs energy. The poles with glove holders attached are a pain in cold weather since you cannot wear mitts with them.

WAXES

If you have waxable skis you will need a basic set of waxes. Green is for temperatures less than about -10C, blue is for temperatures between about -3 and -10C, purple between 0 and -3C, and red for use around 0C. For beginners having good grip is important to learning to ski well, and especially skiing uphill in good style. One waxes the wax-pocket under the foot but I tend to extend that a bit for beginners for a start. This is often true with newly bought skis which may actually be too stiff for you even though they have passed the “paper test”. As you get more proficient you need only wax the “wax-pocket” and perhaps wax the tips and tails with glider wax for speed. The waxes are cleverly designed to give grip when your ski is momentarily stationary and flattened when you “kick” off it, but they 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 and wind breaker or anorak and a woolly toque. 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 down-hill ski pants. You expend quite a lot of energy cross-country skiing and will get much too hot (and sweaty!). Thin nylon over-pants and jackets work well as windbreaks. If it is relatively warm I wear ski gloves but if it is cold (below -10C) I wear mitts. Leather mitts with liners are the best since leather mitts stay dry inside when they are wet outside.