

Racing and Ski Selection - what is important

Choosing the Right Skis on Race Day

Choosing the best pair of skis with the right wax is a challenge to many skiers. The hours leading up to a race can be somewhat stressful, especially in adverse weather conditions. Too often I see racers spending more time testing skis than warming up before a race. Here are some tips to make choosing the best skis and wax easier.

Skis are the most important

The best wax in the world won't work on the wrong skis. Most of you probably own one or two pairs of skis. One pair of skis should work in most conditions. This step is taken when you purchase the skis. Use a knowledgeable ski shop when it comes to buying skis. Tell them where you plan to ski and race. Inform them of your skiing ability and what your goals are with the new skis. A good ski shop will be able to narrow down your search to a few pairs of skis from several manufacturers. The most important aspect of the ski selection now is finding the right flex, or stiffness, of the skis. If you only plan on buying one pair of skis then you can't go wrong with a medium flex ski. This ski will work on hard-packed and soft snow. If you have an older pair of skis that you still plan on using but want a new pair to add to your racing quiver then try a new flex. Go stiffer or softer than your other skis depending on what type of conditions you plan to ski in. One of the last things I look at is whether the ski has a warm or cold base. Flex is far more important!

Structure is also important

The structure of the ski base is the next most important factor in having fast skis. Most company's skis come straight from the factory with very good stone-ground bases. I made the mistake once of taking a great pair of Fischer's www.fischerskis.com and getting them stone-ground again. The ended up being slower and I wish I had left them in their straight-from-the factory condition. Some ski companies put an aggressive structure in the base of some of their skis. If you find that the skis you have chosen (based on flex) do have an aggressive structure pattern then I would recommend getting them stone-ground with a less aggressive grind. This is something that your local ski shop will be able to help you with.

All the testing I have ever done regarding structure has lead me to one conclusion. Less is better! I always found that a fine grind worked better that a heavy, more aggressive, grind. On those really warm days I found that a fine grind with rills over the top worked better than a heavy grind.

Wax should be the least of your worries If you have chosen a pair of skis with medium flex and a finer grind then waxing should be easy. All you need to do is "be in the ballpark" with the wax and your skis will run just fine. Do not over think the waxing process.

Testing skis

So you have your skis and wax box and you head of to the big race. The day before the

race you either ski the course or get the latest conditions from race headquarters. At many races the major wax companies will have a representative giving free advice on waxing and any testing they have done at the race venue. Using their suggestions will save you a lot of time testing on your own. Now all you have to do is decide what wax to put on what skis. Take your best pair of skis and put on the best wax for the forecasted conditions. If you have another pair of skis then wax them for slightly different conditions just in case the weather changes. The more skis you own the harder this process becomes. It requires knowing each pair of skis very well and keeping track of what conditions they are fastest in. Regardless of how many pairs of skis you own don't wax more than two pairs (three if the weather is very questionable) for race day.

Race day

The most important thing on race day is a good warm-up. Try to limit your ski testing to twenty minutes or less. One trick that I learned was that you need to ski close to race pace for a few minutes when testing skis and wax. Some skis, usually softer ones, feel better when skiing easy but are actually slower when you ski faster and more aggressively during a race. You should be able to feel which skis glide the best by skiing a kilometer on each pair. When you have decided which pair is the best set them aside and warm up on your slower skis. This will save the wax on your race skis. Now you have time for a good warm-up and time to concentrate on your race strategy.

Race season - preparation

I am often asked by skiers how to prepare for the race season. This is a difficult question to answer because everyone trains differently and has different goals throughout the season. Preparing for your first major race requires different training than what you have done during the summer. For the World Cup skier it is important to increase the intensity by doing more interval sessions while maintaining a large volume of distance training as well. The guys on the US Team will be racing approximately thirty races this season starting in early November and finishing in April. That is a long time to be in race shape! If they let the training volume decline in order to get in race shape for the early races they will be in for a tough time come March and April. There will always be the "Thanksgiving Turkey" who performs great in November but usually disappears by January due to a dramatic decrease in training volume accompanied by lots of interval training too early in the season. The top skiers in the US will use the early season races to help them get into race shape when it counts (World Championships, Olympics, etc.). This concept of racing yourself into shape is evident by seeing the top skiers out skiing for three or more hours the day before an early season race. Most will ski a second workout after the race as well. These skiers have the confidence to ski a twenty-five hour week of training leading up to a Continental Cup race. For many of you marathon skiers the first major race of the season will be the Boulder Mountain Tour in early February. While you are probably not too concerned about peaking for a World Cup race in March you do want to ski fast at the Boulder while getting ready for the best Birkie of your life. The key is to do a few races before the Boulder to get those racing jitters out of the way. I always found that the first few races of the year were the most difficult. No matter how good of shape I was in I skied like a cat whose tail had been slammed in a door. Once that racing bib was on I skied tense and inefficiently no matter how many intervals I had

done leading up to the race. What I learned was that I needed about five races under my belt before I could race totally relaxed. During those early races I would focus solely on technique. I even went as far as telling my coaches to not give me any split times or tell me what place I was in but instead to give me technique pointers as I skied by them. I recommend doing a few races leading up to your first marathon. It doesn't matter how long or what technique. For those of you still without snow try a running race or two. The idea is to continue your training while doing a few races to get both your mind and body prepared to race. You will feel better and more relaxed during the first marathon which should help you reach the ultimate goal of skiing fast and having fun.