

# BREAK ON THROUGH

**EXPERTS ONLY:** Tips to bust through your intermediate rut

Topics for these columns are frequently drawn from conversations with clients, random chairlift partners, and man-on-the-slopes impressions of burning questions in skiers' minds. A familiar theme goes something like this: "I ski great on the groomed, but I don't like bumps." "A few inches of powder is nice, but beyond that I struggle." "I ski best when it's sunshine and soft corduroy."

Of course, we are all masters of the hill when we're smack dab in the middle of our comfort zone, and that's a wonderful thing. After all, skiing is fun. If we want to do something hard we can practice calculus or learn German. But sometimes that comfort zone can get mighty comfortable. This is particularly true if we practice the same set of moves all the time. While cruising

ing benevolent groomers is perfectly great, are you putting yourself in a rut by skiing the same way on every run? What undiscovered joys may lie within your reach, but outside your normal habits? Let's explore the broad plateau of the Intermediate Zone, and see how you can go beyond it.

## DRIVER OR PASSENGER?

High-end skiers can make a wide range of movements with their skis, most of them intentional. They push on the skis, tip them, pivot them, and spring them up off the snow. In contrast, intermediate skiers tend to ride on top of their skis. Their primary goal is usually balancing on top of the skis while going down the hill, trying not to get left behind. The skis seem to be the boss and the passenger is along for the ride, hoping for the best.

So, step one for the aspiring skier is this: push on your skis. Don't just stand on top of them, tell them what to do! Try this simulation. While standing still, draw a line across the tops of your skis about 6 inches in front of your toes. Now imagine trying to break your skis in half along that line. C'mon, really crank on them, put some serious muscle into it. Uh huh, now check out how you're standing on the skis. Your



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### PASSENGER

Balancing on top of the skis



GRANT NAKAMURA

### DRIVER

Pressing on the outside ski, putting energy and purpose into the turn

joints are flexed, you're pressing forward, you're standing like an athlete... holy cow... that is just how you've been told you are supposed to stand on your skis. Except now it's not a just a pose, it has actual purpose. Imagine that!

OK, next step — which ski should you push on? The outside ski. The outside ski just loves to be cranked on, and nice rewards will come your way if you try it. By pushing on that outside ski, you will be flexing the ski, bending it into an arc, and making the ski turn. Meanwhile, your body won't be left behind because you will be driving the pace and taking an active role in what your skis are doing. Lastly, balancing over your outside leg is an efficient and effective way to stand on the skis. Sharp readers will recognize this theme from previous columns because it's fundamental to good skiing.

Let's get a little bit more specific. Not



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The best place to direct your energy is on the big toe edge of your outside ski.

only do you want to push on your outside ski, ideally you'll push with the part of your foot in the neighborhood of your big toe. That focuses all of your massive power directly to the part of the ski that matters most: the inside edge of the outside ski, in the area right under your foot. Think of this as the ski's sweet spot, where your effort is rewarded with maximum dividends. Once you get the feel of it, you can casually toss around the term "sweet spot." As in, "Duuude. I was, like, totally dialed in on the sweet spot on that run. Did you catch that on video?"

## ADD VERSATILITY BY CHANGING TIMING

Another hallmark of skiers who are stuck in a rut is that they make the same turn all the time. That's why those skiers are off their game on powder days or in

bumps — because their standard move suddenly does not fit the conditions. The fix for this is easy. Vary your timing, and along with it, the intensity of your movements.

If you push on your outside ski gradually throughout the turn, you'll get a long-radius turn. If you push with a sharp, focused effort, the result will be a short, snappy turn. Most of us tend to loll along in medium to large radius turns much of the time. If you want to improve your versatility, bring short turns into your repertoire more often. Try confining your turns to one or two groomer widths and seek an upbeat, purposeful tempo. Or mix up your rhythm by skiing some short, medium, and long turns all in the same run. Better yet, throw in some hockey stops a few times per run. Those do wonders for developing power and timing, and of course are indispensable for dousing your ski partners in snow spray.

To wrap up this theme: press on your skis and do it like you mean it. Focus your energy on the big toe edge of your outside ski. Apply this move with varying rhythm and intensity. And most of all, ski in the driver's seat rather than riding along as a passenger. In addition to improving your skills, I think you'll find this is a reassuring and empowering way to ski, and it can take you to new places in your skiing. Give it a shot and have fun! ♦

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The hockey stop is a classic way to dial up your timing and intensity. Bonus points for dusting your friends, but please don't run them over in your attempts to be rad.



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