



YOU CAN'T BUY A TURN

LEARNING NEW SKILLS DOES MORE FOR YOUR
SKIING THAN BUYING NEW GEAR

Skiing is a fantastic form of recreation. It's a sport that can be participated in for a lifetime, and one which families of multiple generations can go out and enjoy together. And because it's a winter sport, it has the added bonus of getting us out of the huddled comfort of our homes through those long, cold months of the year, saving us from the depressing effects of cabin fever.



While skiing is in many ways unique from other sports, there is one aspect of it that is very similar. The lure of new equipment! Each season brings an array of new products, prettier in color, and heavier of hype, than their counterparts of the prior year. Before the snow even begins to fly, store shelves get quickly stuffed with these new wonder toys that carry the promise of making us better skiers.



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I've been skiing for 47 years, and I've witnessed the perennial buzz of the new equipment parade in each of them. Seldom has the reality of what a piece of equipment could actually do for a person's skiing measured up to all the hype. Often, the innovations billed as "improvements" by profit oriented manufacturers have even been silly, to the point of comical, and have quickly faded away.



Unfortunately, marketing efforts are effective, and each season brings a rush of skiers looking for that new product they hope can take their skiing to the next level, and bring more fun to their time on the slopes. The truth is, while a new pair of skis may provide slightly different sensations to the experience of sliding down a mountain, the real improvements they bring to one's ski ability is minimal, and pales in comparison to what can

be experienced by focusing on developing one's repertoire of foundation skills.



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Take the introduction of the shape ski, as an example. I consider the shape ski to be one of the most important equipment innovations brought to market through the entire history of the sport. It provides skiers with the potential to take their skiing to a level never before possible. Sadly, though, because of lacking skills in the majority of the skiers who have purchased them, that potential has gone unrealized. Shape skis are designed to



allow skiers to carve small radius turns at tolerable speeds, theoretically making carving a technique available to the average recreational skier. The reality is, the vast majority of skiers who purchase shape skis don't have the skills needed to carve a quality arc to arc turn of any radius or speed, so they've yet to experience the full package of benefits the shape ski was designed to offer.



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Only through a dedicated regime of skill building does real improvement of one's ability level take place. When skills are improved, skiers will experience more fun on the slopes, regardless of the brand or type of ski they choose to ride. I get teased on occasion, because I tend to bring rather archaic skis to the slopes. They've usually been through multiple seasons, and have the cosmetic scars to prove it. It doesn't concern me. Beyond choosing a



particular sidecut for the type of turns I want to make on any particular day, the make or age of the skis I'm riding makes very little difference to me. I've long ago developed the skills needed to milk the full potential of any ski I happen to be on, and that's all that's required to have a great time on any terrain on the mountain.



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Still, I understand the allure of new equipment to aspiring skiers. I recently experienced a similar infatuation during my entry into photography. In trying to decide what equipment to purchase, I dove deeply into researching all aspects of cameras and lenses. I was spending hours looking at test results, and reading reviews, when I suddenly realized I was doing a great impression of the novice skier looking for the perfect ski that was going to help



their skiing. I was doing the same thing, looking for that top notch photography gear that would allow me to make great pictures. It dawned on me that I don't do

that in skiing. As I've said, the brand of ski I use makes little difference, and my boots are 8 seasons old. It finally dawned on me that the road to great pictures should be the same as the road to great ski turns, and I subsequently read similar sentiments written by professional photographers.





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In the end, I grabbed an older model camera that was being discounted, and started refocusing my energies on learning the basics skills of photography. For skiers who really want to improve, I'd recommend the same course of action. Great photographers can make great pictures with any old camera, just like great skiers can make great turns with any old ski. Get a ski, any make, not too wide under foot, not too long, and plenty of sidecut, then forget about all the equipment study. It's a waste of time. Just get out there and work on learning the skills of the sport. If you enjoy keeping up on all the specs of the new equipment that finds its way to the shelves each fall, cool, have at it, and have fun doing it, as long as you understand it's not the road to greatness.

