

An Introduction:

Skiing is a very simple sport based upon the interaction of the skier, their equipment and the mountain. The skiers we admire and aspire to achieve harmony with these components, they are effortless, skilful, playful and in control. The skiers that do not achieve this harmony look wooden, forced and they struggle. Skilled skiers flow whilst others fight their way down the slope.

As we plan our trips to the snow and look forward to our skiing think how you can achieve this interaction and go onto the slopes considering these 3 components of your performance:

The skier:

The human body has evolved through thousands of years of hunting and gathering to be athletic and active. Regardless of whether you spend more time sitting behind a desk rather than fighting off wild animals your body still retains its natural ability to move and balance subconsciously – give it the freedom to work.

Skiing is a sport not an armchair activity and does require a level of physical effort. You don't need to be a fitness fanatic to enjoy skiing but do make sure you have a base level of fitness and agility to be active at altitude. Get fit to ski – usual disclaimers apply – see your doctor, join a gym and get moving!

The equipment:

Whether you own or rent & no matter what level you ski to, the boot / binding / ski combination is designed specifically to help you control your descent down a slippery, snow covered slope. Using the design features will make life easy; whilst fighting against them the ski / slope will always win!

Taking the ski as the tool to control our descent (leaving the boot & binding as the connection between the skier and their skis) the important features to be aware of are:

Mounting Point: the technicians take care over mounting your bindings correctly so your boots and feet are in the right place on the skis. Balance through your feet naturally and you will be in the sweet spot of the ski – Fall away from this point and the ski will take you for a ride!

Side Cut: the ski is designed to steer curves – use it! Either skid the ski by scraping its edges lightly over the snow or carve by following the natural design of the ski.

The Edge: you can control how much you tilt the ski to make it grip – be aware that it will respond exactly to your input so be sure on what you are asking it to do. (see future articles)

Running Surface: the base is waxed and slippery on the snow and is designed to help us slide down the mountain - allow the skis to do what they are designed to do and let them slide! Sorry for stating the obvious but I see many skiers trying to stop their skis from sliding. This occurs when they are on too steep / difficult a slope.

The Mountain:

When you go skiing there are countless routes down. The gradient, snow texture, terrain (bumps etc) all contribute to make one slope easier or harder than another. These prepared slopes are bracketed into different coloured ‘pistes’ (green, blue, red and black) but you will still find some runs of the same colour easier or harder than others (ie Pleney B compared to Pleney D). You will also find that the same slope changes as evolving snow, terrain conspire to make it harder.

So, choose which slopes you want to ski on depending on your confidence level and your ability. Don’t be led by more experience skiers saying “you’ll be fine, it’s easy down here”. Remember ski instructors are trained to make decisions on which are the most suitable slopes to consolidate, reinforce or challenge ability without over stretching – your friends are not. Only when you are comfortable and confident on the slope in front of you and when you have a positive frame of mind, will you be able to unlock the potential of your skis and body.

When skiing as a group, appreciate the ability of the weakest, it is not possible to short-circuit their learning. A skier may be able to 'survive' getting down but it will be at the expense of their technical development, their confidence and often at the expense of their enjoyment.

When skiing with a party of mixed ability arrange different routes to the same point. For example from the top of the Pleney gondola, skiers can choose from the easier (Pleney B) or harder (Pleney D) blue runs, the red (piste H) or the black (piste J). It is important for individuals to choose their challenge allowing them to achieve the flowing, effortless descent that comes from body, equipment and the mountain working together in harmony.

Enjoy your skiing.