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Rocker Your World (And Get Students In on the Ride)

By **JIM SCHANZENBAKER**; Photos by **CESAR PIOTTO**

With the rocker revolution in ski design at full throttle and volume, this is an exciting time to be exploring this technology and how it's impacting a huge spectrum of skiers—including our students. ¶ But before delving into how you can incorporate these tools into lessons (a topic the PSIA

Alpine Team presented at Interski 2011 and will take into clinics here at home), let's take a minute to look at the

differences in rocker characteristics.

In general terms, "rocker" describes a variety of bend profiles that manu-

facturers are putting into their skis these days. The first and most simple of the design characteristics is early rise, which means that the point at which the ski rises up off the snow is farther back from the tip than with a "traditional" ski. When this concept is applied to both the tip and tail of a ski, most would consider the profile rockered. The most dramatic application of this is when the bend from the tip and tail reaches all the way to the center of the ski. I like to think of this as "full rocker." Two



It s a slide;
it s a carve...
it s a s larve!

other adaptations are when the middle of the skis are either completely flat or bent with traditional camber, while still incorporating early rise in the tip and tail. Figure 1 shows a few of these combinations.

A “full rockered” ski (fig. 1a) would excel in crud and powder type conditions because this profile is conducive to maximum float and maneuverability. A ski with the combination of rocker at the tip and tail and camber in the middle (fig. 1b) is going to offer a nice blend of extra surface area when going off piste and the power/stability of a carving-type ski when on piste. The ski that is flat in the middle (fig. 1c) will provide more stability than the full rocker when on piste and less rebound than its cambered sibling.

When considering all these variables you should also give thought to the width of the skis in which this technology is being applied. A good rule of thumb is that “the wider the skis, the better they are for deeper snow.” On the opposite side of the spectrum, we

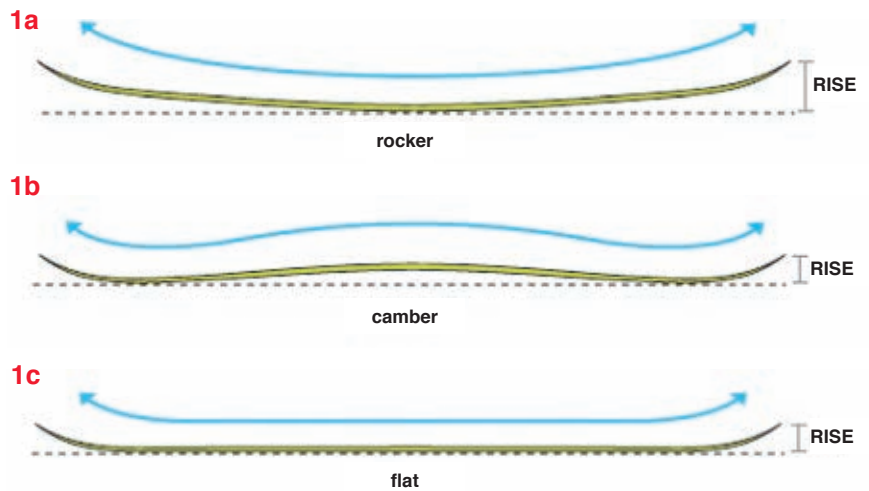


Figure 1: Modern ski profiles

are also seeing some of this technology being used in skis for beginners and intermediates. These skis capitalize on rocker technology to create easier turn entry and support continued mobility throughout a turn. This combination provides outstanding control and makes it easier for skiers to link turns.

With students, one of the keys is to

teach good skill development. First, assess the tool someone comes to the lesson with—like you’ve always done. Just understand that if someone is on rocker skis he or she may experience a different reaction from that tool than if it had a traditional cambered design.

When working with beginner skiers, recognize that they will experience

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enhanced maneuverability from a short length and the ease of turn entry from the rocker ski tip. Teach good steering mechanics as a primary foundation for control and security. Traditional exercises like bow ties, falling leaf, and skidded uphill turns will be easier on this technology than on traditionally cambered skis.

In introducing these types of exercises focus primarily on getting students to develop effective leg turning. If skiers can isolate the rotation in the legs and limit rotation in the pelvis or shoulders, they will be able to access linkability from turn to turn and better turn shape to control their speed.

As you get into the intermediate realm of skiing, skiers really want to begin exploring more of the mountain. This is where rocker skis at fatter widths come into the picture, since they allow skiers to access a much broader scope of the mountain and at an earlier stage. Among the fundamental things to have your clients work on in cruddy snow are sideslipping exercises, medium-radius skidded turns, and shorter pivoted turns. Through these types of exercises skiers will more quick-

ly relinquish the need to hold onto an edge for security and realize that added mobility can offer them great speed control and the option of choosing their path down a slope (that is, not letting the mountain or snow conditions dictate where they go).

All of this previous work should set skiers up to enjoy the vast array of big mountain skiing. As you take more advanced skiers into steeper and more variable terrain, you can focus on tactical decisions like line choice, speed checks, and negotiating/incorporating obstacles. Once skiers develop an under-

turns with some straight sections that involve skidding.

A fringe benefit is that getting comfortable with these choices opens the door to freedom when skiing moguls or trees. Skiers will find that *they're* in charge, instead of feeling like they have to settle for what the environment might normally require.

Like the shaped ski revolution of the 1990s, rocker technology is making an impact in a broad range of applications worthy of checking out and understanding. So go have fun skiing

Rocker skis allow skiers to access a much broader scope of the mountain at an earlier stage.

standing of speed control and mobility they can then playfully add more speed, which may take them more down the hill in a typical turn. Or they'll find out that speed isn't always associated with carving. Letting go of the edge starts to change the path down a slope, which gives skiers more choices of where and how to get from point A to point B. In lessons, encourage student to mix round

on some of the latest shapes and sizes and remember to teach sound skill fundamentals to offer your guests the best experience possible. ☑

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A rocker ride can help intermediate skiers conquer crud more easily.

