

THE ALTA POWDER TECHNIQUE

From the Powder Pros of the Alf Engen Ski School

Skiing in Rhythm with the Snow

Skiing in rhythm with the snow describes the experience we wish skiers to have in deep snow. Excellent deep snow skiers sense the resistance of the snow against their feet and skis to harmonize the duration and intensity of their turning movements to ski a desired speed and line. Snow depth, snow density, terrain steepness, speed and width of skis all factor into the size and shape of turns that are in tune with a specific deep snow situation.

The Technical Elements

- **The Ready Pole**

The “ready pole” is a classic deep-powder technique first used and taught by Alf Engen and Eddie Morris. The ready pole is an early pole swing as a turn is initiated. The pole tip is held forward and pointed down the hill as the turn is shaped and completed. The early pole swing contributes to unweighting the skis and a body that continuously flows forward and down the hill to maintain a relaxed balance over the skis. Holding the pole tip forward continues to help the skier maintain fore-aft balance, and pointing the pole down the hill in the last half of the turn contributes to the skier directing their torso down the hill as the legs turn under the body.

- **Floating**

In many deep snow conditions, the skis must usually “float” toward the surface of the snow in the turn transition to allow a smooth edge change and redirection of the skis. This porpoising action of the skis is accomplished through extension-unweighting at slow speeds and float-unweighting at higher speeds. Float-unweighting is created through relaxing the legs and/or actively pulling the feet up as a turn is being completed to allow the compacting snow combined with the rebounding energy of the skis to push the skis up toward the surface of the snow. In very deep and light powder snow a sensation of “floating” may completely permeate the skier’s experience!

- **Soft Carving**

“Soft Carving” in powder snow provides a light and relaxed sensation in the feet and legs when compared to the firmer sensations associated with carving on hard snow. Round turns in deep snow are accomplished by banking the skis through a curve as the snow compresses against the bottom of the skis. To accomplish this banking effect, the skis must be tipped onto edge as they are guided from the legs into a turn. The skis should glide forward with the tails following the tips through arcs.

Ski Selection

The variety of wider “powder skis” are strategically used to create successful experiences for the developing powder skier. Ski width and type are recommended based on the student’s skiing skills, experience, physical fitness, physical stature and weight and overall skier attitude in consideration with the anticipated depth and density of the snow. Appropriate ski selection allows us to share the thrilling and often spiritual experiences of powder skiing with more of our students.

Storm Skiing

Storm skiing, while often delivering the most amazing powder skiing days for the experienced powder skier can be a very challenging and exhausting experience for the new powder skier. Appropriate and high functioning equipment and equipment strategies, that include, high functioning non-fogging goggles, face protection, ski pole baskets, jacket powder skirt and hood, pant gaiters, grippy waterproof gloves/mittens and appropriate binding settings can all make for a better experience. Not to mention a Powder Pro with a high Alta IQ!