

Choosing a Classic Ski

Several people have asked me on what to look for when choosing a classic ski. First, I've been asked if I had only one classic ski what would I chose, waxless or waxable. Then I've been asked, what to look for if upgrading classic ski equipment.

So the first question: like many people, you don't have unlimited funds, so if you can only buy one pair of skis, what would you buy? In order to answer this question, you need to look at what kind of skier you are. If you are a beginner skier who is just getting into skiing you might want to think about choosing a waxless pair of skis as a start. Ditto if you are someone who don't want to fool to much with the technical details of waxing and just want to get on a pair of skis and go. If you get more into it, you can always buy a waxable pair later. All our younger beginner skiers start off with waxless skis and all our classic rentals are waxless for a reason, they are more maintenance free and you don't have to worry about a grip wax of the day. Notice I said more maintenance free, not completely without maintenance. If you buy a higher end waxless ski you will still want to glide wax the tips and tails of the ski (where the grip zone, pattern, scales, hairs or whatever they use for grip is not, so it will glide better. You might also want to apply a wipe on glide wax on the grip zone so that snow won't stick and build up in the grip zone, as it's apt to do with certain snow conditions. For the less expensive waxless skis, glide waxing the tips and tails will not likely add much as the base of cheaper waxless skis does not absorb much wax so you end up scraping all of it off anyway. How to tell cheaper bases from more expensive ones? Well, price is always a good indicator, with those under \$100 less bindings having poor bases that do not absorb wax. Skis \$200 or more will likely have better bases that will benefit from glide waxing. The placement of where the grip zone is located on the skis is also a good indicator of quality bases. Better waxless skis will have the grip zone from just before the heel of where the boot would be when in the binding to a foot to a foot and a half in front of the bindings, just like where a good waxless ski's grip zone would be. The better waxless skis will have softer base material, if it's super hard then it will not likely absorb wax. Now for myself, or for those interested in performance on skiing and don't mind figuring out what wax works in various conditions, if I had only one pair of skis, I would choose a good waxable classic ski. For the most part, waxing is relatively easy and painless in our interior conditions. This year has been exceptional in that we have had such variable conditions. Most years we would be skiing on a blue grip wax for 80% of the time. A properly waxed pair of skis will grip and glide better than waxless skis, except when you have snow just around the freezing mark. The snow is undergoing a lot of transformation at 0 degrees and a fraction of a degree one-way or the other makes a big difference in the structure of the snow (that's why there is so many different grip waxes from the minus 1 to plus 1 range). And a waxable classic ski can do occasional duty as a skating ski, provided the binding is mounted at the balance point (so the tip does not dig in the snow when skating) and the grip zone is either covered with a glide wax (note you'll have to clean the glide wax off, and apply the proper grip wax to the grip zone next time you want to classic ski) or a hard grip wax that does not provide any grip. When I first started skate skiing many years ago, we didn't have fancy special purpose skate skis and we used our classic skis.

Of course there are still those days where you just don't feel like waxing, or the snow conditions are very tricky or, in the spring, the snow in the shade is considerably different from those in the sun, when a good pair of waxless skis come in handy, which is why I have a pair as a fourth pair of skis, after my cold classic waxable, my skate skis and my warm classic waxable (and I want another pair of in between classic skis and a dedicated cold skate skis plus a slush skate skis and a pair of klister classic skis and...will you help me by talking with my wife about my addiction??!)

So the next question was, how to chose a good pair of waxable classic skis? I've notice the quality of skis from all the major ski brands going up the last 5 or so years. Fisher, Rossignol, Madshus, Solomon, Atomic, Peltonen etc. all have good lines of skis from beginners to racing models and what you buy depends on what you want to do. If you are an all out racer or want to be, then you will want to look at the high end racing models, but if you are a recreational skier who only want to do the occasional loppet or citizen race, then the fitness or citizen racing models may be just the thing for you. Note the more the skis are oriented for racing and speed, the lighter the skis are, but also the less robust the skis are, so you need to take greater care of them. However if you do take care of them, a good pair of skis can last

many many years. I have skis going on 15 years with lots of life left in them. (In fact some world-class skiers have old favourite pairs that fit them perfectly and they reserve them just for races; for photo ops they would grab a new model so ski manufacturers who sponsor them, can sell the new models). So what brand you chose has more to do with how the skis feel for you then on actual ski performance. If you can get to a ski demo day where many different ski manufacturers let you test ski their products, do, as side by side comparisons are the only way you can see how a ski (or boots, bindings or poles) perform and feel. For instance in side to side comparison with the same glide wax, a top of the line fisher skate skis was just as fast as a pair of top of the line Solomon skate skis but I found, for me, that the fisher skis just seems to feel a bit more livelier (maybe due to its honeycomb core construction), while the Solomon skis really came into it's own at high speeds. So what is your style and what do you like? That only comes with experience and trying lots of different brands, if you can't make a demo day then trade skis with friends of similar weight and try each other's skis out.

So you heard me mention weight that is key to getting a properly fitted classic skis. The secondary camber, (where it gets harder to press the skis down and where the grip wax pocket is applied) has to be matched to you. So when you are standing with your weight equally on both skis, the grip wax pocket should end just before your heel (if you are a fairly accomplish skier) to about a foot and a half in front of where the boots attaches to the skis. The expression of the camber (how much it's off the snow) should be about a regular 20-bond thickness piece of paper folded 3 times. When you put all your weight on the skis then even one thickness of that piece of paper should be held firmly in any of the grip wax pocket. That's the recommendation for a general-purpose powder ski, what we generally ski. For a klistler ski the grip wax pocket is shorter (generally just before the heel but only about a foot in front of the binding) and the expression is greater (a piece of paper folder 4 to 6 times so that the klistler wax if held off the snow until needed). Better ski shops will have more sophisticated pressure plates that will map the pressure required to press down on a pair of skis and will more precisely match you to the skis. The Norway's' National team members get to go direct to the factory to precisely match skis to them, so the wider range of choice you have, the better chances are that you will get the correct fitting skis, which is why it pays to shop where there are lots of skis and early in the season so there is a wider choice. However a knowledgeable staff can tip the odds in your favour for a good match and near the end of the season is when the deals are. I don't worry as much about the length of the skis as the actual running surface of a 205 (which I normally ski on) is not that much different to a 200 cm skis (which is what is recommended for me) as long as the camber is correct.

Make sure you look at the skis to make sure that they are as nearly matched as possible. Skis are made one at a time, then they have to match them up and pair them, unless you have one side, irredeemably stronger than the other, you will want matched skis. Talk to a knowledgeable ski tech for further info. Good hunting for that perfect pair of skis. See you up at the hill, conditions are super!!!