

TRANSFORM YOUR TECHNIQUE WITH JUST ONE DRILL

One day you're skiing brilliantly, the next terribly. What happened? All you need to do is repeat one exercise to regain your balance, says **Mark Jones**, after the mandatory warm-up, of course

There are some key moves you can do to make an instant difference to your skiing ability so that you immediately feel 'on the money'. But before you tackle them it's imperative to warm up. Many skiers avoid a warm-up, succumbing to the temptation to slap the skis on and go for a blast.

Warming up is critical to getting the best out of your day. Physically, it increases blood flow to your muscles and primes your nerve-to-muscle pathways. Mentally, it prepares you to ski well. Failing to warm up and diving into high intensity skiing is going to make you more susceptible to injury and will reduce your chances of skiing at full potential.

This is the sort of routine you can go through before getting into your full skiing day, so you can perform at your full potential.

WARM-UP TECHNIQUES

Warming up doesn't have to mean doing embarrassing stretches in front of the cable car. But it will take a bit of time. Try to find a quiet, secluded, flat spot, then take your skis off and get moving. A bit of slow jogging on the spot works well — anything easy to get your heart rate up. Stop once you're starting to feel out of breath (which doesn't take long at altitude in the Alps).

Now is the time to get into action. Swing your legs one at a time, twist your hips and move your arms. Basically, you are trying to get your joints mobile and raise your heart rate. You won't be fully warmed up, but it will prepare your body for some work.

Now, at last, it's time to make some turns. For your first run, relax, take

it slowly, making some easy turns, and focus on feeling the sensations in your body.

This is a great opportunity to say 'hello' to your feet. You should focus on feeling centered over the middle of your feet, rather than relying on bracing yourself against the front or back of the boot. You should be feeling pressure through the sole of your foot, rather than through the shins or calves.

Whatever you feel, it's vital that those

first few runs are nice and easy — and well within your comfort zone. This is the right way to prepare your body to ski hard and fast.

Once you have warmed up, it's time to get skiing properly. As with any sport, you can have days when you feel like a legend, while on others you are forever making mistakes.

If it feels like one of your off-days, then it's definitely time to try something different...



Make sure you are well supported on the upper foot. This will give you the platform to balance

As you lift the ski, focus on being well balanced over the support foot. You should feel pressure through the ball and heel of the foot

Stay strong by maintaining an athletic stance while keeping upright enough that you use minimal muscular effort

Start to counterbalance against the pressure from the ski by moving your hips to the inside of the turn

JAVELIN TURNS

This is the godfather of all drills — any skier will feel an immediate difference after doing this. You lift the inside ski and hold it over your outside ski, which supports your weight. When you finish a turn put the lifted ski down and immediately lift the other one to start a new turn. Use medium to long radius turns at a slow speed. The lifted ski is crossed over because it puts your body in a more effective position and makes it easier to balance. This drill takes practice and initially balancing is hard work. To get through that frustrating period faster, a few points help:

1. Make sure you are balanced over the middle of the foot and not leaning against the front or back of the boot.
2. Relax the muscles in your foot. If there is too much tension it's hard for your body to balance and make those constant micro adjustments that are keeping you upright.
3. Use your arms to help balance, keep them forward, away from your body
4. Keep your belly button over your feet. This will place your centre of

gravity in a good position, letting you use your frame to balance, rather than rely on muscular strength.

Basically, it's about being upright enough to rely on your skeletal frame, while being low enough to be in an athletic stance ready for action. Though being low and flexed can help with balance, it does create a lot of muscular tension, which makes balance harder.

Once you have the drill nailed, then it's time to get some mileage in. It's vital that once you have performed the drill accurately, you repeat it. If you get tired, stop, recover, then go again. Using this drill on one long descent of an easy piste should be good enough. If that felt good then try some variations:

1. Go for the same drill with no poles. This will make you even more sensitive to balance and keeping your centre of gravity over your feet.

2. If you feel adventurous, continue without poles, but try folding your arms. This really challenges your balance and will deliver great results.
3. Try the standard drill on an easy piste, but increase the speed by riding on the edges of the skis. This will improve your balance at speed.

To finish, return to the top of an easy piste and make two or three good javelin turns. Then, without stopping, put both skis down and ski normally. Try to make the same radius of turn you made in the javelins, keeping your skis in contact with the snow and relax.

You should notice an instant difference. Your balance should feel more effective and you should be aware of a more sensitive touch over the outside ski. Essentially you should feel that you are skiing really well and that you are ready to take on higher speeds and harder slopes.



Mark Jones is a director and trainer with ICE, a performance training centre and gap course provider in Val d'Isère. Mark is also a trainer for The British Association of Snowsport Instructors. His ski tips can be accessed on icesi.org

WILL YOUR SORTIE END IN A CLIFF-HANGER?

In the second of a new series on enjoying off-piste safely, expert [Henry Schniewind](#) considers the under-reported hazard of ending up in a tight spot.

While avalanche accidents often hit the headlines, the dozens of skiers who are injured or killed from falling rarely attract the same attention. Yet hundreds of people every season are evacuated by helicopter out of tricky and dangerous situations in the Alps. One of them was Martin Moody, a keen skier who, with his family, found himself in trouble in Val d'Isère, France, when venturing away from marked runs.

"It was sunny with good visibility and we didn't have a guide," Martin recalls. "I thought I knew the route. When my 13-year-old son Simon asked, 'Do you know where we're going?' I replied, 'Of course I do.'" Thirty minutes later, as the consultant urologist and his family were perched on a cliff, he was more contrite, admitting: "It was obvious I didn't."

Martin and his family were winched to safety by helicopter at a cost of more than €2,000, happily without injury. Since then, he has skied with me back in Val d'Isère, where we went through some basic strategies to ensure that his future choices of route would be more down to science than luck.

Secured, ungroomed pistes (called different things in different resorts, from 'nature ride' to 'freeride itineraries') are secured 'pistes' that are not groomed. This is perfect terrain for anyone starting off-piste without a guide. After a snowfall fresh tracks can often be found, but the routes are official, so there are fewer ways to get into trouble if you follow the markers. Since the resort does not send 'piste-bashers' down you ski them at your own risk in terms of quality of snow. However, they are avalanche controlled and a pisteur skis down them at the end of the day. If such a run is closed, it is usually because of avalanche danger and should be avoided.

Secured, ungroomed runs must not be confused with off-piste itineraries, often marked by dotted lines on piste maps, which in France are genuine off-piste areas, and not secured.

What if the unsecured off-piste is the only option open to you? The first rule is: don't ski a slope if you're unsure where it goes, even if you see tracks. They could be from paragliding 'speed-riders' heading to a cliff they will fly off! And it is vital not to follow tracks on glaciated terrain where crevasses can be hidden. Here you should always go with a mountain guide until you have done courses on crevasse rescue and route-finding on glaciers. Rather, pick slopes you have skied with an instructor, guide or experienced skier, or which you have investigated very closely.

The second rule as you start venturing off-piste is: learn to judge slope angles. You should only ski off-piste where slopes — both above and below you — are no steeper than




PHOTO: Jamie Robertson/peakphotographics.com

25 degrees, equal to the steepest part of a French red run. Avalanches don't occur on such slopes. I will go into the subject of avalanches in the next issue.

It is also worth doing a bit of research. In most resorts there are great off-piste books and maps that tell you about off-piste in the area. Ask at the chalet, tourist office or local newsagent if they have any such guides. And remember, even if there are no cliffs around, skiing into the wrong valley can leave you with a huge taxi bill and blisters to match.

AVALANCHE AWARENESS TALKS

 The Ski Club, in association with Ortovox, Henry's Avalanche Talk, Ellis Brigham and Val d'Isère, is running avalanche awareness talks on the following dates:

OCTOBER

- 29 — Essentials Talk, Ellis Brigham, Manchester
- 30 — Advanced Talk, Ellis Brigham, Manchester

NOVEMBER

- 4 — Essentials Talk, Ellis Brigham, Covent Garden
- 5 — Advanced Talk, Ellis Brigham, Covent Garden
- 6 — Essentials Talk, King's Arms, next to Ellis Brigham, Bristol
- 10 — Advanced Talk, King's Arms, next to Ellis Brigham, Bristol
- 12 — Essentials Talk, Ellis Brigham, London St Paul's
- 19 — Essentials Talk, Ellis Brigham, Cambridge
- 20 — Advanced Talk, Ellis Brigham, Cambridge

The cost is £12 a ticket, but Ski Club members get £2 off. Visit henrysavalanchetalk.com or HenryOffPiste.com