

Een artikel in het boek American Snow, The Snowsports Instruction Revolution by Peter Kray, lijkt mij de moeite waard als vergelijkingsmateriaal te publiceren met het artikel van Dr. Walter Kuchler 'Rockerski'.

Dit boek behandelt op een vlotte manier de ontwikkeling van de American Technique en de PSIA, Professional Ski Instructors of America. Fraai vormgegeven.

Voor de deelnemers aan Interski in Sankt Anton van 2011 staan er ook hoofdstukken in.

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Nol van Oss

THE ROCKER REVOLUTION

With all the new ideas presented at Interski, the Americans were surprised to be the only team to include the emergence of rocker technology in its clinics. Only the French and a few members of the Swiss team were even skiing on rockered skis in St. Anton. Otherwise, rocker seemed to have escaped the attention of everyone except the United States, though it may prove to be the greatest technological breakthrough since snowboarding.

Characterized by an exaggerated pre-flex of the tip of a ski or snowboard, and often the tail (think of a rocking chair), the technology makes it substantially easier to turn and pivot, most dramatically in deep snow, where the technology has flourished. For beginners and intermediates, the easy direction change accelerates the learning process so quickly that, as one ski instructor said, "It looks like the equipment has finally caught up with what we've been trying to teach." In snowboards, rocker channels a rider's energy to the edges, creating a giant sweet spot that greatly enhances the surfing sensation so central to the sport. "I've seen three revolutions in my career-snowboards, shaped skis, and now this," said Craig Albright, managing director of the Mammoth Mountain Ski and Snowboard School in California, where the region's Pacific-fed snowfalls made it one of the new technology's early takeoff points. "And just like how the old school guys said that shaped skis were cheating, or that snowboards wouldn't last, the same people were pooh-poohing this.

"Until they try it," Albright laughed. "Then they become great advocates."

For skiers in powder, instead of deflecting snow, a rockered tip rides above it. The relaxed tip also has tremendous advantages on hardpack and has been incorporated into everything from beginner boards to skis for the World Cup.

"It's really an extension of what most people have been trying accomplish since they first detuned their tips," said ski instruction guru Mike Porter, who helped test several of the early rocker prototypes. And at that Copper Mountain training session when the teams were dialing in their presentations (and a wave of early storms foreshadowed an epic winter to come), Adaptive Team member Geoff Krill was fascinated by how much easier rocker made it to turn a sit-ski just with lateral motion, saying, "It really is changing everything at once."

The late freeskiier Shane McConkey (who in 2011 was inducted in to the U.S. Ski Hall of Fame) was the design's earliest advocate. As famous for his sense of humor as for speeding down sheer faces and throwing great arcing backflips (sometimes in the nude) off giant cliffs, he reasoned that snow simply frozen water, so the best skis for deep powder should be designed in the same fashion as the hull of a ship. He even put a pair of alpine binding on water skis and proceeded to rip down giant ridges in Alaska on them to prove his point.

McConkey developed the category-busting, catamaran-style Spatula ski with Volant in 2002, and the appropriately named Pontoon with K2 in 2006 when he told the media, "Over the next few years, all the companies out there are going to start making rockered skis. It just works too well."

That was five years before Interski 2011 in St. Anton, by which time ski companies were predicting rocker design would be used for the majority of skis and snowboards sold in the North American market. Yet even at America's rocker ski clinic, the many Norwegians, Croatians, and Swedes who showed up were still on slim-shaped carving skis that in the powder were pushed around like skinny sticks. "I thought it was just for helicopter skiers," one participant said, shocked at the idea the technology could so greatly improve the experience for beginners and intermediates.

Rocker Glossary

Rocker is, quite simply, an exaggerated rise in the tip of a ski or snowboard that creates easier turn initiation and more float in mixed conditions and deep snow. Full rocker includes an exaggerated rise in the tail as well. Also called "early rise" because of the gradual raising of the shovel height at the front of a ski, designers can fine-tune the pivot point for an almost butter-like turning experience while also maintaining strong edge hold.

Tele-rocker

With its exaggerated lead change and steady rhythm of turns, telemark has always looked like an elaborate dance step. Involving every part of the body, telemarkers can ride up to 300 centimeters of effective edge at each turn's depth. As far as turning is concerned—especially in deep powder—telemark also has the greatest likelihood of falling apart. That is why when telemarkers are skiing deep snow, they typically try to balance the back leg enough to keep from flipping over the handlebars should the front leg sink. Not anymore, PSIA Nordic Team member Ross Matlock said, precisely because of rocker's forgiving tip. "Telemark skiers can go on the offensive in powder now," he said. "They ski powder now just like they ski anywhere else."

As PSIA Alpine Team Coach Rob Sogard said after the clinic, the United States certainly did its part to give its instructional brethren a heads-up. "It's industrychanging technology," Sogard said. "Given that we have kind of a reputation for being innovators at Interski over the years, how rocker is going to make that happen was a perfect message to come from us."

THE FUTURE STARTS NOW

The idea of American ski and snowboard instruction has always been built on the vast diversity of the United States. From the family-owned community hills with rope tows and hot chocolate to the proud powdered mountains with tram and gondola access, just as many young kids as retirees, as many mothers as fathers, and as many injured veterans just home from overseas as able-bodied civilians wanted nothing more than to move through that wintry world, skimming across the snow as if they had wings beneath their feet.

For half a century, through generations and presidential administrations, fashion trends, and music and hairstyle changes, PSIA-AASI has continued to celebrate that diversity, happily awaiting the opportunity to share with anyone and everyone its passion for the sport. If there is a past-is-present moment in 2011, it is the emergence of yet one more glorious on-snow renaissance brought on by the new technology available to skiers and snowboarders combined with the potential number of new riders in the United States.

Record or near-record snowfall across much of the country saw skiers and snowboarders swarming to ski areas in 2011, while the next new wave of riders was filling up children's ski school classes. Generations Y and Z, also known as millennials and the net generation, respectively - estimated at between 70 million and 100 million strong - are beginning to make their on-snow presence felt. What's more, their parents and grandparents are joining them on the slopes. Despite the recession that still gripped the United States in 2011, the U.S. snowsports industry enjoyed record ski and snowboard sales, while American mountains recorded their best season ever in terms of skier or rider visits.

Welcoming them all to winter were more professional ski and snowboard instructors across the United States than ever before as well, with nearly 32,000 PSIA-AASI members in 2011 compared to nearly 20,000 in 1991. "There are four to five generations on snow right now," Mark Dorsey said in his keynote lecture at Interski 2011, noting not only how the diversity of the potential ski and snowboard student population continued to expand but also how seamlessly the sport's future was being inspired by its past.

The Austrian hosts of Interski had also identified connecting the various generations on snow as a priority of the 2011 instructor's congress. Every day they ran a kind of volunteer ski school, bringing up kids on the trains from all over Austria to ski with instructors from around the planet. Lunch and the lift tickets were paid for, and for at least a day, each country sent someone from its team to ski with a class. The only team that continued to send instructors every single day was the United States.

Nick Herrin, a member of the PSIA Alpine Team from Crested Butte, Colorado, who served as a volunteer instructor, was happily surprised to be paired with a group of teenage girls who could speed across the snow like descending hawks. After tiring of trying to chase them down the groomed runs, he took them into the steep powder bowls to try and wear them out. After a second such run, he was asked on the chair why, at Interski of all places, when he could have only spent his time talking to other instructors, he had wanted to take out a class.

Amiable and energetic, with a smile that spread all the way across his face, Herrin laughed. The better question, he said, would be why wouldn't he? It was what he loved. "Writers write. Painters paint. And teachers teach," he said. "When I heard Interski was hosting a kid's ski school, I couldn't wait to sign up."

He talked about the history of ski and snowboard instruction, and how many people he kept meeting who inspired him with what they had contributed to the sport. Pioneers, mentors, and renegades, they had built a strong foundation in the past, and the most appropriate gesture he could make was to keep paying that culture of connection forward, and try to inspire someone else.

At the top the girls were all ready to rock. They were going back to the groomed run, they declared with their Austrian accents. While Herrin, standing there for a moment, was asked what, after 50 years of innovation, might the next 50 years hold for PSIA-AASI. What did he think - was it rocker, all the new kids hitting the snow, freestyle, or the session lessons - would impact the future the most?

"All of it," he laughed. "It's already happening. You say the future, but we're already living it."

Then "Hey!" Herrin called to the girls, who had stopped to wait below, and he went skiing after them, all of them speeding away together then, soaring down the mountain with the wind in their faces and their arms outstretched.

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