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A look at Alpine Touring Skis:

One of the big questions that we hear from people looking for a ski to ride in the backcountry with AT or Randonee bindings is, "if I am going to be skiing with my heels locked down, then why don't I just use an alpine ski?" Well, first, you can. Second, we'll explain why you probably don't want to.

When you are traveling under your own power, weight becomes an issue. AT skis are significantly lighter than alpine skis in most cases. Advantage number one! The reason they are lighter is that the ski designers and manufacturers don't load them up with dampening materials and stiffening materials that are a benefit to someone riding on hard, groomed snow. Don't forget that all these enhancements for hard snow cost money, making most AT skis considerably less expensive than Alpine skis. Advantage number two!

Because the snow that you are going to encounter in the backcountry is softer than in the resort 90+ per cent of the time, you'll want your ski to be softer longitudinally. A softer, more even-flexing ski wants to float on the snow rather than dive into it. Doesn't that have powder skiing written all over it?

And, as the AT ski is not going to have as much metal, carbon- fiber or plain old fiberglass on board, it is also not going to be as torsionally stiff. That is okay for a couple of reasons: first, you generally will be in softer snow that doesn't require as much force to initiate your turn; second, when on hard snow, like windblown or icy snow, you will be skiing more conservatively because the consequences of blowing it are so much greater in the backcountry than in the resort. This means you will be generating far less of a twisting force on the ski in your turns and needing less stiffening materials in your ski to counteract that force.

Now, if you are an aggressive skier skiing steep, hard snow possibly in a narrow place (like a couloir) and don't mind the consequences, then this is the place to consider a stouter AT ski or an alpine ski; if you are willing to carry it to the top!

Many skis in the backcountry category are appropriate for both AT and Tele. Manufacturers set up the binding retention plates in backcountry skis to accommodate either binding type. In general, just as in resort skiing, pick a ski for AT skiing to be a little stiffer than the one for free heel skiing. This is because in most cases, two legs pressing down in concert with each other (alpine style) can apply more force to the snow than two offset legs (tele style).

If you haven't bought skis for a while, be aware that ski lengths have come down considerably. Europeans have been skiing shorter skis off-piste for many years, much to their benefit. Ski length is primarily determined by your weight, and secondarily determined by your skiing ability. An expert skier will apply more force through the ski to the snow than an intermediate skier, and can ski a stiffer or longer ski than an intermediate of the same weight. When choosing skis, if you are in the middle of the recommended weight range, then it's simple to just go with it. If you are at the cusp on the high or low end, then consider your ability and adjust up or down a ski length. As an example, if you weigh 175 lbs. and the recommended weight range of a 177cm ski you are

interested in is 135-180 pounds and you are a darn good skier you may consider going up a size to the 181cm ski (particularly if you are going to be skiing with a pack on most of the time).

As with Alpine skis, AT skis come in a variety of shapes, flexes and widths. Choose one that fits your ski tastes...wide and soft for powder, wide and stiff for big mountain skiing, stiff twin tips for narrow couloirs, etc.

While not as large an issue in AT as Tele, consider the compatibility of the ski with the boot. The boots we have chosen will drive any of our skis well, but there are boots on the market that are lightweight racing boots that would not be appropriate for stiffer or wider skis.

Call us for personal assistance! (970) 925-2849

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