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Telemark Skis

Ah, Telemark skis. Nothing, save for cross country skis, causes more confusion than talk of these mythical creatures. The closest most skiers have come to a Tele ski is catching a gentle whiff of that furry-faced local guy with the “broken bindings” as he rips past you on the hill. No more, we’ll have you straightened out in no time.

So.....what exactly are these things?

Skis, dummy. No, no, the answer is a little more complex than that. Much like their Alpine cousins, there are a few different flavors of Telemark skis. Much of what you know from the stiff boot alpine crowd will hold true for Telemark skis as well. There are fat skis, skinny skis, soft skis, stiff skis and about every combination of the aforementioned. With that said, let’s talk about the three most important things for a Telemark ski: width, shape, and flex.

You like fattys don’t you?

So, width is pretty obvious. The ski is X-mm wide in certain places on the ski. You’ll see the ski’s dimensions quoted as 3 numbers. These numbers give you the tip/waist (underfoot)/tail measurements. Skis keep getting fatter and fatter, and this allows each to specialize in certain snow conditions. You will see the skis broken up into 4 categories: narrow/hard pack, mid-fat, fat, and, well, real fat.

The hard pack skis usually have a fairly narrow waist (underfoot), generally less than about 75mm. These critters are fairly stiff in comparison to their fatter buddies, and being narrower, they are quicker edge to edge. This means that you can transition from one ski to the other quickly. The more time you are on your edge, the more control you’ll have, and the faster your “tele-beard” grows (ladies are not exempt from this). They tend to not do as well in the fluffy new stuff, but thrive in snow that looks like the corduroy pants of the quiet girl that works at the coffee shop. Additionally, for you kids that like to ski bumps, these skis are for you. Quick short turn radius skis are great in bumps. Some standouts in this category include: K2 She’s Piste & Super Stinx.

The mid-fat skis are a little bigger (really?) than the hard pack skis. They are generally considered the all around skis. They do well on hard pack, and are decent in new snow. They are usually around 73mm to 79mm underfoot. They are great skis for areas where you get big infrequent storms followed by glorious high pressure and bluebird days. Consider these the SUVs of the Tele world. Some favorites around here are the K2 World Piste, Schi Devil, and the cool new G3 Ticket.

Next up are the fat skis. These are like linebackers; fat, but amazingly quick for their size. They are generally 80mm to just under 90mm underfoot. These are skis that are noticeably big when you see them. It's not uncommon for these to have 125mm+ shovels on them. They are great all around skis for areas that receive their annual snowfall in many small storms. That means there is usually some powder to be had somewhere. These skis are still okay carving on the front side, skiing from powder stash to powder stash. Describing their carving prowess is like describing a 1986 Chevy with a 3 inch lift in Indy car terms; it doesn't translate well. Nonetheless, they can be great all around skis. Some shop favorites might be: K2 Work Stinx and the Atomic Kongur.

Last are the "Jabbas". These are big fat skis. These things are monstrous, sporting more than 88mm of underfoot powder love. These are a great choice for a second pair of skis for those days that are deeper than your freshman Philosophy professor. Some wide examples of these are the Black Diamond Verdict and the K2 Hippy Stinx.

More Shape than a Van Gogh

We have grouped the shaping of Telemark skis in roughly three categories: not a lot, a lot, and a whole lot.

The "not a lots" are what tele skis used to be back-in-the-day. These have narrow tails and usually slide or release quickly from a turn. Because of this, they are for making long radius turns. If this is your gig, then look for something with less than 31mm of sidecut. You're not going to find much.

Next up are the "a lot" skis. These will actually turn, not slide through a turn, thus they are the most popular. These skis have a sidecut from around 32mm to 37mm.

The "whole lot" bunch are the carving specific skis. These little sports cars will turn faster than the girl's head in *The Exorcist*. Bump skiers or people that like skiing right down the fall line will love these things. When you add a stout flex, well, just make sure you eat your Wheaties before you hop on one of these.

Gymnastics - How flexible are you?

Ah..... Flex. If you want to get a tele-skier worked up, all you have to do is disagree about the way a ski flexes. First off let's get a few things straight; flex and stiffness are not the same thing. Skis flex longitudinally (tip to tail) and torsionally (edge to edge). How much or how little the ski flexes is a reference to its stiffness. Softer flexing skis don't perform as well as stiffer skis in anything but powder; side edge hold in soft snow is about as useful as a screen door on a submarine. On the upside, a soft ski is great to learn on and is less demanding to ski on physically. A stiff ski, on the other hand, will hold an edge better on hard pack to help you reach a speed close to that of the space shuttle on re-entry.

Manufactures have learned that tele skiers are particular about flex and have figured out ways to alter it. Nowhere is this more evident than in women's skis. Women apply pressure to a ski differently than a big hairy dude does. Surprised? No wonder you're single and reading about skis rather than skiing with your, well whatever you have. There is a difference between men's and women's skis. The difference is primarily flex and weight. Since ladies tend to be lighter, the manufactures soften up the skis a bit.

So.....the three things you should check out on Telemark skis are width, shape, and flex. So have at it, grow out your beard and free your heels!