

Telemark Level 2 Hintertux 2010

By Chris Stewart

So time to undertake my first BASI course in an Alpine resort, that's if you don't include a BASI Alpine 1 at the Chill Factor^e, Manchester! Hintertux, Austria, in late April was the venue and the course? Telemark level 2!

I was given exemption from Level 1 as I had been racing for the British Telemark Team and had become British Telemark Champion in January 2010. The difference between Telemark racing which includes GS gates, a jump, a 360 degree rap (Banked turn) and uphill skating were sure to be miles apart from what would be required by BASI to pass!?



I had been introduced to Skiing at an early age by my father, himself a product of the BASI Alpine and Telemark system. I became hooked on Telemarking, having my first go when I was 10 years old, on dendex at Pendle Ski Club with leather boots (that didn't fit) and 2 meter Atomic Telluride skis....how things have changed, from then on I never looked back, but this wasn't my only departure from Alpine skiing, the real 'black art' was to be Cross Country!

I had the chance to go to Norway on a Snowsport England winter meet and there I met with two inspirational characters who were both former Olympic cross country skiers, Mike Dixon and Patrick Winterton. Patrick himself had also raced Telemark and was twice a former British Telemark Champion and around at the beginning of the BASI Telemark development. I wasn't to know it then but the skills learned on those skinny cross country skis were to hold me in good stead once I started racing, not only was my balance and aerobic capacity to improve but the ability to skate would become an essential element in the races to come, the shorter distances were my preferred events. The discipline didn't just appeal to my sporting mind but I was also encouraged to try new things on those ridiculously thin skis and that included jumping, something that I now consider to be a fundamental part of my skiing!

Photo : Chris Stewart aged 17 jumping on skinny skis in



Norway

So 12 years on from those early Telemark turns I arrived in Hintertux. I was accompanied or should I say I accompanied Ian Johnston, a long time pal of my Dad's and an avid Tele' skier and climber who likes nothing more to get off piste as often as possible. It was Ian who likened falling on telemark gear to being trapped in a deck chair!!

The first day came and we were to meet our Trainer, John Eames a man of reputation and co-owner of one of the most successful Telemark ski companies, at 08:45 at the bottom of the lift station. Ian had been the victim of many an assessment and was keen not to make 'schoolboy errors' so he started introducing the assessment strategy to me, including getting up ridiculously early, lining all the days kit out on the bed, eating porridge and shaving!

There were 7 individuals on our course and a further 4 on the ISIA level 3, awesome to have that many free heelers all together. Introductions over we made discreet sizing up of the other students, then we were off. We alighted from the top gondola into truly atrocious weather. A full blown 'white out' with freezing winds and no way of orientating ourselves, at least John wouldn't be able to make a first impression count as he couldn't see us !! The day improved as we travelled around the mountain, changing slope aspects to find suitable pistes with weather that would allow us to observe, learn and demonstrate our skill.

The Hintertux spring course was a bit of a special event as there was sufficient interest for BASI to run all 3 levels of Telemark course (there is no, as yet, ISTD Telemark). Level 1 is quite commonly used as a second discipline for those seeking to attain ISIA Alpine. I know Alpine for me will be my SECOND discipline and I hope to reach Telemark ISIA and possibly Telemark ISTD.

After the first day the weather improved dramatically, we had superb weather, great snow and the pistes have to be some of the best and diverse to be found on any glacier anywhere, great for high speed carving !!! The fortnight progressed pretty much as most courses with central theme, lesson delivery and video reviews of personal skiing playing a major part of proceedings with the great conditions even allowing us to explore the 'strands' of off piste and bumps. I particularly fell in love with the bumps, having not done much in the bumps on Teles it was finally great to have some analysis and tuition but also to look around and learn from other great bump fiends, I can safely say I have found a new favourite element in skiing.

For me, the course, I am sure, has made me better skier, pushing my limitations not so much in making me go faster, jump further and skate faster but in fact encouraging me, for when I need to, to go slower and smoother with subtlety, accuracy, and grace. I had to detune! I didn't see anything wrong with it, after all skilful skiers are meant to be versatile and adaptable performers. Being made to ski in this different way just further developed my holistic skills.

I think I am really lucky, I have taken part in one of the greatest sports to grace the mountain, I've visited some amazing places which some people never get to see, but mostly it is the people I have met, I have had the fortune of being coached and influenced by some of the great guys. I cannot stress enough what these guys have done for me and that just goes to show how important great instruction and coaching is, If Telemarking is to move forward we need more high quality instructors and coaches. I would urge young Telemarkers and skiers of any discipline to get involved in coaching. Aside from all the

reasons why we instruct/coach, such as the reward of a client succeeding, nurturing athletes as people and performers and generally making a difference, it has helped me become a more analytical performer, and I approach competition in a more thoughtful way.

Now I'm meeting yet even more people whilst going through the BASI system, and I can't wait to see what the future holds. I learnt loads on my BASI course, I tweaked a few things and in some areas 'de-tuned' my technique and successfully passed. The 2 weeks in 'Tux' were fantastic, great weather, great trainer, great laughs, and great to make new friends. As a racer did I find it hard? On occasions, did I find it challenging? Yes, Did I have fun? Yes. So what more could you want? Get paid to do it.....maybe someday.

Now back to Racing and throwing myself off things, with Level 3 next season. So come on, wrestle this great discipline from the olds and let's get a few under 30's into the system, you don't need a woollen sweater or a beard!!

If I can say one last thing; I believe we are all products of our environment and my environment and experiences so far have been amazing, hopefully I will continue to be influenced by great people, athletes, instructors and coaches. 'Coaches' are vehicles for long distance travel; the journey so far has been great and its not over yet.....

There's every chance that Teieing' will be in the 2018 Olympics so that's a whole new ball game. See ya there???



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