

“Z” skier or “S” skier?

By Professor José “Pepo” Hanff

If you dislike the feeling of your skis pointing down the hill and you usually ski making long traverses from one side of the slope to the other, you belong to what I call the “Z” Club.

A large number of people belong to that club. They are the ones who feel extremely uncomfortable even with the thought of having their skis aiming down a hill and as a consequence they ski crossing the slopes in straight diagonal lines from one side to the other and then make a very sharp small turn, sweeping the snow with their tails to pass as quickly as possible the moment of terror and be able to start another long traverse crossing the slope in the opposite direction. If you observe the tracks left by their skis you will notice that they resemble a “Z”.

Next time you get on a chair lift you should spend your riding time observing the tracks left by the good skiers. You will see that their tracks have the shape of a series of letters “S” linked together. Usually a good skier is always making a curve, be it large or small. At the end of every turn he immediately links another turn without wasting any dead time sliding straight across the slope.

It is all a matter of mental attitude: when you are driving a car and you see yourself approaching a red light, you obviously put your foot on the brake, however if the light turns to green while you are still approaching you won't leave your foot on the brake but will move it to the accelerator.

When skiing you should think in the same way; while skiing there are braking periods which correspond to the exit time of each turn but equally there has to be acceleration periods that allow you to gradually recover the lost speed. These stretches correspond to the entry period of the following turn. It is absurd to drive your vehicle permanently braking. It is equally absurd to ski permanently braking.

Probably you also think that the turns are carried out by quickly sweeping your tails to the side. In reality the skis were built with their tips curved upwards because they were designed to slide forward with the tips floating **forward** over the snow without sinking on it. Internalize this concept and from now on always try to make the skis slide only forward in a curve and not sideways.

If you would like to learn to make “S” turns, I suggest you try the following exercise:

1.- In the first place make sure you pick a run that has an easy enough slope that, if look at it, you consider that you can ski it sliding straight down it in a “shuss” without making turns or snowplow. At this technical level there isn't a worst blockage to your progress than to ski on a slope that causes you fear. If the only

thing you can think of while sliding is survival, it is unlikely that you will be able to concentrate on technical aspects.

2.- Now remember; you must only leave tracks with the shape of "S" therefore you must not slide straight at any time while skiing (except at the start to pick up enough speed).

3.- Make sure you execute the exercise described below in a wide stance, that is, with your skis parallel at hips width and keeping that distance between your skis at all times.

4.- Start sliding by pointing your skis straight down to make sure you pick up enough speed.

5.- Now start turning thinking that your turn is being carried out while you are **skiing forward**. Stay on the same turn without interrupting your gradual turning effort. Keep turning until your skis decrease their speed to the point in which you feel the speed comfortable. Don't "rush" the turn neither at the beginning nor at the end. Remember that you can continue turning until the skis are almost sliding uphill. You must only make sure not to come to a complete stop but only reach a moderate speed to be able to link into another turn.

6.- Although it might seem repetitive I must insist on the subject of skiing **forward** on a curve, not sweeping sideways. Good skiers usually control their speed by continuing their turning effort for a longer while and not by generating friction sideways by sideslipping. Just watch their tracks; they are always narrow and well marked on the snow whereas sideslippers make a wide unclear track. Remember that skis slide because of the force of gravity pulling them down the hill, therefore all you need to do to slow them down is to gradually drive them away from the fall line.

7.- Often low intermediate skiers think that the more the skis are turned up the hill the harder it will be to return them down the hill. It is only a myth; irrelevant of how much your skis are turned uphill all they really want to do if you let them is to go downhill absorbed by gravity.

8.- At this moment we have reached the critical point because we must now start our acceleration period in which we recover the speed lost previously. Remember you have chosen a slope that even if you shuss it straight down nothing bad will happen.

9.- Do not for any reason now try to start another turn in the opposite direction. What you now must do is **allow the skis to go in the direction they want to go**, that is, down the hill. You will easily achieve this by displacing both knees from the side they are at (uphill) to the opposite side (downhill). It consists of trying to feel that your skis start to go downhill by themselves, gradually being pulled by the slope. By displacing your knees to the other side your skis become flat to the snow

and eventually change edges which allows the external force (gravity) to pull them down the hill.

10.- It is essential during this period not to make any effort to try to start a new turn yourself. You must feel that the new turn starts by itself, not by any kind of turning effort on your part. Any kind of turning action you apply at this point in time will be very counterproductive to the effect you seek.

11.- During the displacement of your knees to the other side your only concern should be to maintain your balance. The word to apply here is **patience** because the following turn will commence **very gradually**.

12.- The period to recover your lost speed will last from the moment you start moving your knees to the downhill side to the time the skis reach the fall line.

13.- All that now remains to do is for you to start the new deceleration period by repeating the actions described in point number 5.

Once you achieve linking turns comfortably with this technique look again at your tracks; **Welcome to the "S" club.**