**Removing Obstacles to Telemark Skiing**

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Growing frustrated with my skiing, I decided to do something about it. What I’ve tried and learned might be helpful for others. Some is perhaps specific to tele skiing, but most is relevant to all forms of skiing.

None of this means I will necessarily ski any better. But these were all obstacles to skiing, so I’ve given myself a chance!

**Equipment**

2 years ago in Austria, a boot fitter too 2 minutes to measure my feet, look at my boots and pronounce; “Your boots are 3cms too long – you’ll never be able to telemark in these.

It’s always been a conundrum for me. I have short, wide feet so I either end up in pain from boots that are the right length but too narrow, or I have comfy boots but when my rear foot bends, the bellows (which is in front of the part of my foot that flexes) doesn’t. So I can’t get any pressure on my rear ski because the boot is “tippy toe,” rather than flexed.

The boots I had at that time were the comfiest I have ever had, but I couldn’t ski in them for toffee.

I bought some new boots last year that are radically smaller. I’m still working at getting them a good fit but they feel totally different – I feel that I can ski again.

**Posture**

I have always had a subtle but definite tilt at my hips, standing, walking and skiing. I fold slightly at the waist and have a slight lean forward. When skiing, this becomes more pronounced and I end up too far forward, bent at the waist, bum hanging out the back and with no weight on the rear ski.

I spent quite a bit of time just getting clear about this – awareness raising. I then used the standard progression (useful for all sorts of stuff in skiing) of trying out something new; first standing, then walking and then finally skiing.

I’ve spent almost a year focusing on standing and walking with a more up-right gait. Not easy after 50+ years of doing it my “normal’ way. It still feels different, but it’s becoming more patterned and just what I do naturally – when standing and walking. Skiing remains a stretch.

The aim is turns where my hips are forward and my bum is tucked underneath, with weight centered between my skis, rather than bum hanging out the back accompanied inevitably by all my weight on the front ski.

**Fitness and Strength**

Most of what I used to do was on the bike. So in the summer, I would average 100 miles a week and then in the winter months, do spin classes etc. But this wasn’t working for skiing.

I tend to go out for 20-50 miles, with the focus more on enjoying it than hammering. But with no hill sessions and not being bothered to really kill myself, I realized that whilst this was keeping my aerobic system in good shape, it was not doing much or anything for strength, a key factor for tele skiing.

A friend of mine who knows (a lot) about this kind of thing told me a few years ago (when I was moaning about taking days to recover from a bike ride), that as we get older, the hardest thing to maintain is strength. We can maintain our aerobic capacity relatively easily, but strength is much harder to maintain.

So I decided to do something else to get stronger. I started doing weights sessions, getting some advice from a fitness trainer, specific for my focus on tele skiing.

I started doing this in October ’15 and here in January ’16, I’ve now done 30 leg strength sessions, plus various bike, rides, spin sessions and core work as well as being out in the hills. The difference since starting is very marked. I do around 40% more per session now that when I started, and I only need 1 day for recovery rather than 2-3.

I’ve skied 3 times so far this year, and I’m easily completing twice (to three times) as many turns before needing a rest as I was doing last year.

I’ve included my current leg session below purely as an example. (Weights are right for me i.e. I can do the reps.) I also have a separate core session that I combine with spin or some form of cycling.

**Core Strength**

Its well knows that cycling does absolutely nothing for your core strength, and that core strength is essential to cycling. With my focus on cycling (only), my core was pretty non-existent.

I used to think core strength was about planks and similar. This all helps, but more is needed for tele skiing.

Another of my (many) faults as a tele skier is that I tend to “A-frame.” Looked at from below, there will be no separation between my legs when I execute my turns – my legs come together with knees close to touching. What this means is that my rear ski is not on edge and is therefore of little use to me. That’s the reason for exercises like “John Wayne” turns, which focus on maintaining leg separation.

Watch a strong tele skier. You will always see space between their legs during a turn. Their knees will be nowhere near touching.

However, as I explored this some more, I realized that my focus was all wrong. In trying to get weight onto my rear ski, I was pushing desperately through my rear foot (which is knackering) and vaguely trying to push the knee of my rear leg to the inside of the turn.

But this is nonsense from a biomechanical perspective. My legs are built in a straight line – ankle, knee and hip all line up. Ankle and knee flex and bend forwards and backwards, but not out to the side. Trying to push my knee out to the side is both daft and potentially threatening to health!

And it doesn’t work! I ended up with an un-weighted flat rear ski. Ignoring the boot size issue, if you try to get your rear ski on edge by engaging your knee, nothing will happen - the rear ski will remain flat and consequently out of control. Therefore, you will learn not to trust it and not to weight it. This applies no matter your lateral (front to back) ski separation. Tippy toe is tippy toe, whether you have a boot length or a cricket pitch between your front and rear foot.

As I stood in front of the mirror (sometimes!), trying to make sense of this, I realized that I was completely missing a focus on engaging my hip muscles. In order to get my rear ski on edge, it’s the hip muscles on that side that I need to engage (which brings the “little toe” feeling with it.)

So core strength becomes about building up core across my center, but connected to hips as well. So for example, when doing high leg step-ups (see below), my focus is on engaging the hip of the raised leg, so that I can control the whole movement, without relying on impetus/momentum from a push off from the other leg. This makes that exercise 3 times harder.

**Balance**

Balance is a good example of using the progression of standing, walking, skiing. If you can’t balance easily on one leg standing (walking would be more of a stretch), how are you going to manage to ski? Can you ski on one ski? For longer than ½ second? (Be careful if you try this.)

I used to think that my balance was rubbish because my proprioception was rubbish. But I’ve realized, the main reason my balance is rubbish is because I don’t engage my hip muscles and they were non-existent as a consequence.

When doing the balance bar exercise (below), I find it really tough to do. I wobble like crazy and my hip complains of overwork. But it is getting better.

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| **Exercise** | **Weight** | **Reps, Duration** | **Notes** |
| Warm up on bike |  | 10 mins |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| Leg Press | 73kg | 10, 6, 4 reps, 10 sec hold on each  3 sets |  |
| Squats | 10kg kettlebell | 12 reps, 3 sets | Use band for knee separation.  Maintain posture |
| High leg step up | 10kg kettlebell on high foot side | 12 reps each side, 3 sets | Build up to not using foot on the floor for initial lift |
| Hamstring curls | 30kg | 3 sets of 20. Each set done as (5 reps plus 5 secs hold) \* 4 |  |
| Leg extension | 27kg | 3 sets of 20. Each set done as (5 reps plus 5 secs hold) \* 4 |  |
| Bosu tele’s | Weight bar in “hoop” hold in front | Static leg planted on Bosu.  10 reps each side, 3 sets | Gather core at start and hold – do not allow bum to go out the back, or “fold” down.  Focus on holding core plus engaging hip of rear leg in particular on each turn |
| Bridge | 20kg (? – blue power bag) | 3 sets of 20. Each set done as (5 reps plus 5 secs hold) \* 4 |  |
| Balance bar | Lightweight bar | 3 sets of 10 on each leg | Standing on one leg with core and hip muscle engaged, lower bar down next to shin and back up again, using toes of other foot on floor for balance if needed |
| Teles |  | 3 sets of 20 turns | Engage core and engage hips for each turn. Hold hands as a hoop |