

WC Waxing Tips

By Dave Peszek

This is the fifth in a series of articles on ski and snowboard tuning that will appear this season in Ski Racing. Each issue, we'll tackle different topics that arise in the preparation and maintenance of alpine and nordic skis and snowboards. The author will attempt to answer any tech questions that you may have – Pez@holmenkol.us.

Waxing your skis, snowboard, or Nordic skis may be the most familiar task for most every racer, yet one that you should pay close attention to. This issue, we will bring to light several key components of successful wax technique so that you can achieve your personal best.

According to Ales Sopotnik, USST Women's WC Speed Service, "waxing in" your new or freshly ground skis is critical for fast skis. Ales suggests starting with several coats of soft wax, then gradually move into colder & harder waxes. "Keep in mind the use of the ski" says Ales, "so that you are waxing in the general range that the ski will operate." "Allow the wax to completely harden (as opposed to cooling) for at least a day," says Ales, then scrape & brush completely before waxing in the next coat. The process of scraping & brushing will help to **beat down** the structure, smoothing the micro-level sharp edges & allowing the skis to run faster. When you are done, you will have put 6-8 coats of wax in (before skiing) and end up with a very shiny base. The deep black, even shine of a ski base is sure sign of proper preparation that can only be achieved thru proper wax cycling of a new ski.

Even at this time, the base is still young, according to Ales. Now the skis can be run in, 2-4 runs per day, and re-waxed once each day. Only after several days of "running in" are the skis race ready and truly getting fast. During this entire process, be sure to 1st rub (crayon) the wax onto the base, then hot drip it on before waxing. The process of rubbing the wax on the base yields a slight insulating layer between the iron & the base, which is important so as not to burn the base. Newer skis & freshly ground skis are most susceptible to base burn from the iron. Most racers would be shocked at how much wax should be used between the iron & the ski – sure, some penetrates into the base, but most acts to keep the base from burning, now matter how expensive your iron!

The next time you are brushing your skis out after scraping & waxing, take a close look at the wax "dust" that your brushes bring up. "The wax dust should be pure white, not grey" according to Ales. White dust indicates a clean base, and grey is a contaminated (dirty) base. If your bases are dirty, they will not be fast. Except for the late spring when skis accumulate a thick layer of grease, you cannot see the dirt in the bases. Make it a habit to hot scrape clean your skis often in season and when new.

Speaking of scraping, Ales comments that scraping should be like "smoothly taking the wax down in layers, not ripping it off." It is important to have a sharp, burr free scraper (use a scotch-brite pad after sharpening to be sure there is no burr on your scraper). It should take 6-10 passes with a sharp scraper before you begin brushing. It is also a good idea to scrape lightly again after you change brushes, as each brush will bring more wax to the "top of the structure."

With regards to race waxing, Ales recommends waxing your skis as far before the race event as is possible – sometimes that may be 1 week, or simply the night before,

depending on many factors. In any case, the process should follow something like this: after training, the skis are checked and prepared (edges sharpened, base cleaning, etc.), and a base wax applied. This is almost always a hydrocarbon base wax, which yields deeper penetration and durability than fluor wax. Allow the skis to cool as long as you can, at least 2 hours. After completely scraping & brushing the skis, apply your race wax. Scrape your edges, tip, & tail, then set the skis aside. Get a good nights rest, and in the morning spend some time properly scraping & brushing your skis out for the race. You'll be amazed at how much harder the wax is after 12 hours as compared to just 2! Be sure to take a horsehair or a super soft steel brush to the start to brush more wax out, as the ski will "sweat" more wax out as the ski contracts. It is very important for maximum glide that you have the wax completely brushed out, especially at lower temperatures. At this time you are ready for an overlay if the snow conditions call for it.

Dave Peszek is the brand manager for Holmenkol USA, and a member of the Holmenkol World Racing Team. Dave also handles World Cup race service for Holmenkol and Uvex. "Pez" can be reached at Pez@Holmenkol.us and will try to answer all of your technical questions.