

HAVE MORE

WITH YOUR HOME HILL A CONSTANT,
THROW ONE OF THESE VARIABLES
INTO THE EQUATION TO TURN A
HO-HUM DAY INTO A NEW ADVENTURE.

BY CHRIS FELLOWS

FUN



You've logged so many days at your local hill, you could probably ski it with your eyes closed. Though we wouldn't encourage such a thing, we commend your dedication. But if your excitement has given way to boredom, and the too-familiar terrain has you feeling restless, here are some remedies. First: Leave. Ski somewhere else. Take that Chamonix trip you've been talking about for years, or pack the kids in the car for a

cross-country vacation to Sun Valley. But if those getaways aren't feasible, and you're staring another homebound season in the face, here are 10 things you can do to change the way you see and ski the same old trails.

**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
JONATHAN SELKOWITZ**

Demo Different Skis

Ever swap cars with your spouse just to change up your daily commute? Rather than complain about your home hill, why not change the tools you use to get down it? Most ski shops offer demo packages, so you can try out the latest ski and boot offerings.

Different skis require different movement blends and offer distinctive sensations. Twin-tip skis, for example, are designed for freestyle skiing, a discipline that emphasizes creativity and spontaneity—two things your lackluster days might be missing. The turned-up

tails on twin-tips release more readily than flat tails do at the end of a turn, so you can easily spin surface 360s. Play with fore-aft and lateral pressure. Ride backward—or “switch”—for a while.

Riding backward and playing with different pressure patterns helps you

develop a better sense of—and feel for—the fronts and backs of your boots and skis, so you’ll be more confident skiing forward on your usual gear. For improving foot and ankle engagement awareness, this session tops all others. Plus, everyone can use another cool trick.



Learn to Carve—Really Carve In Europe, carving is held in such high esteem, groomed trails often get chewed up before fresh powder. Chalk it up to the Europeans’ ski-racing fanaticism. Like warm beer, carving hasn’t garnered the appreciation in America it enjoys in places like Austria and France. But skiing on short carvers or snow blades is one of the best ways to learn the intricacies of carving both skis. If you can let go of your vanity for a day, you might learn something. Extreme carving requires spot-on body mechanics that are all too easy to forget when you’re cruising unconsciously in your comfort zone.

Rent a pair of short, 80-cm skis, ditch your poles, and practice getting an equal amount of weight over both skis as you turn. Keep your skis hip-width apart. The short skis will wobble and dart away from you at first, but distributing equal weight over both skis and tipping them on high edges will stabilize them considerably. After a few runs, you’ll feel your skis loading, bending and reacting to your pressure changes. Like a speed skater, you can and should let your inside hand brush the snow lightly for balance as your body gets close to the slope, but keep your hand ahead of you. When you switch to your regular skis, you’ll be back at the bottom of the learning curve, but in no time you will be looking down to see two clean arcs—instead of smeared wash-outs—carved in the snow.

Ski Nonstop We hate to burst your bubble, but boredom is often a self-inflicted dilemma. Think about it: Not only do you ski the same trails over and over, you probably ski them the same way every time, taking rest breaks in the same spots, making the same turns in the same places, etc. Add challenge by skiing trails nonstop, top to bottom. Eliminating rest breaks will build your stamina (read: bye-bye quad burn) and increase your speed.

Long runs at higher speeds require more focused concentration and refined speed-control tactics. Tell yourself the pain in your legs is just weakness leaving your body. If your legs get really fatigued, stand taller for better body alignment: Your skeleton acts like a rack for your

muscles to hang on. Increase your efficiency by rounding out your turns and making them wider. Just keep your speed realistic.

When you’re tired, it’s easy to let your inside hand and shoulder rotate into the hill. Don’t. Keep your core strong and facing the fall line. An athletic stance, also called functional alignment, will open up skill variations you never knew you had, so you can respond to any terrain or snow changes. Endurance is a key element in strong and efficient skiing.

Watch Yourself Taking a private lesson from an instructor who can accurately identify your weaknesses and prescribe a remedy is invaluable. But if you've been around the sport long enough, you're probably capable of self-diagnosis—to a certain degree. Performing movement analysis on your own skiing and on other people's reinforces good technique.

A session of shadow boxing—watching your shadow and identifying flaws—is an effective way to evaluate your posture and get instant feedback about



your movements. Find a slope that has good sun exposure, and time your run so that your shadow is projected on the slope in front of you. Easy things to pick out from your shadow are low hands, asymmetrical turns, rotating shoulders, wild swimming actions with your arms, statue-like posture, an inactive lower body and an overall fragmented movement pattern. With these simple observations,



you can make adjustments immediately and connect what you're feeling to the image you're seeing.

Or take a video camera and a friend to the hill and record yourself skiing in as many places as possible. Seek out diverse situations that require different movement patterns. When you watch the footage, you'll recognize performance traits and tendencies that may surprise you. How does your turn shape change when you ski different terrain? What are your skis doing? Where are you looking? How's your posture? Are you using your poles effectively? Perhaps it's not that you're tired of your hill, you're just tired.

You can fix a lot of your performance glitches simply by being aware of them.

Work on Your Boots Boredom's partner in crime is apathy. Just because your mountain doesn't demand a lot of you doesn't mean you shouldn't demand a lot of yourself and your equipment—especially your boots. There are very few ski boots that provide their wearer optimal performance without some amount of customization. Moreover, every boot requires constant care. Your feet should feel comfortable and relaxed, whether you're standing in a liftline or making a long ski descent. If they don't, take immediate action. In-store diagnostic exams can only do so much. To really know what kind of connection you have between your body and your gear, you need to do some tests on the hill.

Start on familiar gentle terrain, which, as we've established, you have in excess. Ski with your boots unbuckled to get a sense of how your foot sits and moves inside your boot. After warming up like this, lightly buckle your boots and begin to feel for performance clues.

One of the first things you may notice is an ineffective footbed, indicated by a lack of response from your equipment as you articulate your feet and legs. Another common clue that your boots aren't properly sized is that your lower leg and foot muscles tighten as they grope for a neutral position inside your boot. If your feet sit in a different spot every time you put your boot on, you'll suffer from inconsistent and unreliable movements.

Skiing with your boots unbuckled is enough to make an easy trail pretty challenging. More important, it'll help to improve your balance as you get intimately familiar with your footbed and boot fit. Once you have a good grasp of what's working and what isn't, visit a reputable bootfitter who will help customize your boots for optimum performance.

Play Mini Ski Golf Not having your very own KT-22 is a poor excuse for being unprepared to ski sheer vertical. There's plenty of steep terrain around; you just have to know where and how to look for it. A short drop off the side of a catwalk, the outer wall of a half pipe or the side of a kicker are great places to practice your technique before easing onto more sustained steeps.

Agility—for jump turns—and patience—for sustained

fall-line descents—are the keys to mastering steep terrain. You can use a single drill to perfect both. I call it ski golf.

Look for pitches—short or long—with gentle run-outs, and guess how many turns it will take you to get down. That number is your par. If it's a narrow spot, practice hop turns. Here, double bogies are good things. Keep your core facing the fall line, and focus on rhythmic pole swings. If you do five turns on

your first attempt, try to fit in six or seven the next time. The more jump turns you can do, the better your agility and the more prepared you'll be to billy goat your way down a tricky steep section when linked turns aren't an option.

If your practice pitch is wide, play by traditional rules, aiming to make fewer linked turns each time you ski it. Before long, you'll be linking smooth and controlled turns worthy of any extreme terrain.





Chase the Chair Just because you can fly at mach speed down any trail at your local hill doesn't mean you've conquered the mountain. Ungoverned speed, after all, can be dangerous. More telling is whether or not you can pace yourself—increasing speed and also scrubbing it at the most appropriate times—while maintaining a consistent rhythm.

Chairlifts are like built-in pacesetters. Find one that runs up a skiable trail: Narrow and steep gullies or side hills will test your agility (less room to maneuver combined with higher speeds), while wide-open groomers will test your patience (more time in the fall line). Use the chair as a timing device—racing it to the bottom on tougher trails and staying even with or

behind it on easier terrain. Try slow doubles, high-speed detachables, even the gondola. The key is to maintain a consistent tempo that pushes the boundaries of your comfort zone without jeopardizing your safety—or anyone else's.

As you load the lift, make note of your chair number. During the ride, plan your line, looking for places where you'll gain and lose speed.

Remember, this shouldn't always be about beating the chair: On wider runs or less aggressive terrain, plan to make longer, slower turns, trying to stay behind your chair. This might be harder than beating your chair on steeper runs, but that's the point. Practice a turn type that gives you trouble. We all practice what we are good at and shy away from the things that challenge us.

Play I-Spy There's a difference between good eyesight and good vision. Improving your on-snow visual skills contributes to your athletic intelligence—your ability to make split-second decisions. Judging distances, reading terrain changes, maintaining your concentration in the face of visual distractions and shifting your focal length are all things you can practice anywhere, anytime—no epic terrain required. Plus, you can make it more challenging by picking crowded trails or practicing during inclement conditions. Any diversion you can throw in will up the ante.

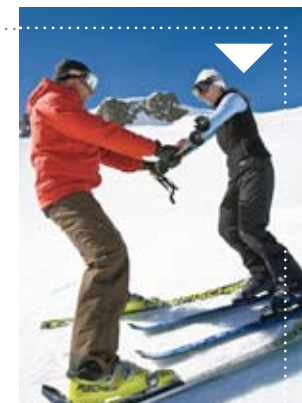
Start to keep track of the number of obstacles, such as trees, bumps, gates, towers and rocks, in your run. If you're constantly looking

down at your ski tips, try taping the bottom half of your goggles to retrain your eyes to scan ahead. Then try shifting your focus from what's directly in front of you to what's down the hill then back again. Practice reading trail markers and other posted signs while skiing uneven terrain. Improving your foot-eye coordination will help you make speedy micro-adjustments and reduce your response times.

Teach Someone to Ski Introducing someone to the thrill of our sport is good for your karma, and it's good for your skiing: Teaching reinforces the basics—which you've probably let slide in your complacency. Follow these steps for a smooth and productive day.

1. Go at your students' pace, and work toward their goals, not yours. Start the day by asking why they came and what they hope to get out of the experience. Don't try to get them

2. Break the lesson into manageable chunks. Skiing skills are best learned through a progression of small steps. Big concepts are hard to teach and hard to learn. A good rule of thumb is to introduce new skills on old terrain. Never try to teach a new skill on an unfamiliar slope.
3. People learn best by seeing, feeling and doing. Show your student what a move or drill looks like, then let him try it. Most new instructors fail to give students ample practice time to ingrain the new movements before introducing a fresh concept. If your student is either fearful or bored, teaching him anything will be a challenge. Strike a balance between the two for best results. Remember, above all else it has to be fun.



Weather the Storms Something as benign as flat light can make a slope look different. Throw some heavy snowfall and wind gusts into the mix, and you'll hardly recognize the place. If you're already feeling unsatisfied with your hill, inclement weather offers a convenient excuse to avoid the disarray and sip cocoa by the fire instead. Heck, you're a season-pass holder, so it's not like you're losing money. You'll just come back when the sky clears.

But what will you do next winter, when you've dropped several grand on a five-day stay in Whistler, and the Pineapple Express comes chugging through B.C.? You'll curse the day you cavalierly brushed aside the opportunity to hone your whiteout survival skills.

Fair-weather skiers are only equipped to enjoy the snow that comes with fair weather. Skiing on the ugly, stormy days will not only desensitize you to the physical discomfort, it'll prepare you for tricky and sometimes scary conditions. If you want to enjoy the spoils, you have to successfully weather the storm.