

## The Latest Skating Trends on the World Cup

by Lee Borowski

When I started cross country skiing in the 70s, ski technique was quite the mystery. It was almost impossible to get any footage of the best in the World. Still photos in books and magazines were all we had.

But has that changed! Lately, with nearly every World Cup race available on the internet, anyone with computer access can analyze technique to their heart's content. Of course I took full advantage and downloaded every World Cup Biathlon and Cross Country race from last season. This is what I found.

Over the years there have been subtle shifts back and forth in V-1 technique. The two variables being amount of flexion and rate of turnover - and the two have usually been related. More crouch, faster turnover; more erect, longer glide.

So which way did the pendulum swing this past year? Without a doubt, it was to the more upright method of skating. France's Sandrine Bailley won the overall title for the women's Biathlon and Germany's Axel Teichman was the season's Cross Country champ for the men, both using an erect style that appeared almost effortless.

So, let's look closer at what they were doing and see if it's for you. First, what is the benefit of upright skating? Holding posture in a more erect posture is obviously much less fatiguing. So it would seem a no-brainer to skate that way.

But there are some downsides. The major flaw of many citizen racers is sitting back. Trying to ski using a more upright posture could push many skiers into just that flaw, and that means slow and inefficient skiing. Why? To ski fast, it's important to maximize forward push and that's not possible without forward lean.

So how can you avoid sitting back while skiing upright? The answer is simple: Just lean forward with the entire body, especially at the ankles and then fall onto the poles at the beginning of the stroke. I call this "The Drill" in my video, *The NEW Simple Secrets of Skating*, and while it is used mainly for the V-1, the "falling forward" principle is true for all skates.

The second problem that can stem from upright skiing is that the angle of poling is not as effective. A crouched position, especially more bending at the waist, allows the poles to be angled more to the rear.

So it is no surprise to see champion sprinter Christian Zorsi adopt one of the more bent over postures of World Cup skiers. In fact, when accelerating or sprinting, any skier unconsciously flexes more in the torso and legs to increase their range of motion. But the tradeoff is that extreme flexion becomes very tiring over long distances.

Fortunately, forward lean at the ankles, then falling onto the poles, helps drive the poles more to the rear. Whereas, sitting back with a vertical pole plant is the sure formula for slow skating; then most of the effort is up, not forward.

Now I'm going to throw a wrench into the mix. The general consensus is that the two best skate technicians presently on the cross country World Cup are Tore Ruud Hofstad (who skied the final leg of Norway's World Champion relay team) and fellow Norwegian Marit Bjorgen (who dominated the women this past season). Both skate with moderate flexion, much like the original model of perfect skating, Torgny Mogren. So, they have postures that are in the middle, about halfway between Teichman and Zorsi.

In fact, most skiers on the World Cup skate in the moderately crouched position of Hofstad and Bjorgen. And their turnover rate is also right in the middle - not the windmill style of a Maurillio

DeZolt or the long glide of a Thomas Alsgaard (who probably was the original model of upright skiing).

So what style is best for you? Only a little experimenting will tell. And maybe it will change in different situations, more upright and stepping on the long steep climbs but increased flexion on the fast short ones.

However, no matter the style, the basic fundamentals are the same. While this article doesn't have the space to cover every aspect, let me leave you with one basic checkpoint for all efficient skating strokes: Skate-off must occur **AFTER** the poling hands reach the waist.

This checkpoint is almost a magic elixir to produce powerful skating. First it guarantees complete weight transfer which ensures maximum glide; no falling off the ski. Second, it ensures that you get the most out of your poling.

So, if you try out the latest trend to more upright skiing, make sure that you aggressively lean forward at the ankles. Then fall onto the poles, finally completing your poling before skate-off. If you do these three things, your skating will be efficient, no matter which posture is best for you.