

SKI



TUITION

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→ JON (AKA WERTY) AT ALTITUDE

Jon is one of the few instructors in the world to hold the top qualifications from France, Switzerland and Britain. He can teach on- and off-piste skiing throughout the Alps, and as Ski School Director, Jon helps manage the ski and snowboard school, the instructor training programme, the Verbier freeride camps, and also the winter and summer kids camps. altitude-verbier.com, +41 277 716 006

Skiing off-piste is one of the highlights of skiing; floating down in waist-deep powder is a dream for any skier.

However, off-piste skiing will also be the toughest on your legs, and requires good technique to get the most out of it. There are some things you have to do to stay safe, and some common mistakes to avoid. In this article we'll look at a few tips to optimise your off-piste performance, and get you loving the powder.


SAFETY FIRST

Once you venture away from the pistes you are putting yourself in added danger: no longer will you be on slopes that are patrolled and avalanche-safe. Make sure you have the correct off-piste gear: a transceiver, shovel and probe, and that you know how to use them. It is highly recommended that you get some training in using your sit and off-piste safety. Also, make sure your insurance covers you for skiing off-piste – many don't!


DON'T SIT BACK

If only I had a penny for every time a client has asked if they are meant to sit back off-piste. There is a common misconception that in powder you sit back to get your skis out of the snow; in reality this just puts the skier in a tiring position that is difficult to control, with the added possibility of straining some ligaments. There are times when you may need to sit back (such as when you're straight running along a flat in heavy powder), but in general don't do it, it's much better to be the driver not the passenger.


MOVEMENT

Unlike on-piste where you have a solid piste to work against, off-piste snow will be soft and moving. Your edges won't be able to help as much to start the turns so you have to use your legs. Try extending your legs at the start of the turn – this puts some force on the skis and helps them turn. Through the second half of the turn focus on keeping your legs soft so that they can absorb the uneven lumps and bumps – like suspension forks on a bike.


STRONG CORE

When you're off-piste there will be many unseen little bumps waiting to throw you off balance. To counter this you need maintain a strong core (the muscles around your spine, abs, back and upper thighs). Think about tensing your stomach muscles tight before heading off. This will keep your upper body strong and still, rather than be thrown around by the terrain and upsetting your balance. For more information see our previous article on balance. For more information about skiing off-piste safely, or if you wish to book an off-piste adventure day in Verbier, then please contact info@altitude-verbier.com or visit altitude-verbier.com.


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KIDS SKI TIPS
Racing For Children

For many children (and parents) racing can be the next challenge once they've become masters of the slopes. I know many children that dream of being the next Didier Cuche, and are out there training as often as they can. So how can parents help these future medal winners?

Initially, finding a local race club is a great first step. If you are in the UK there are clubs operating at most dry slopes and snow domes, as well as up in the Scottish snow fields. Many of Britain's Olympians start out at this local level. There are also race clubs operating

in the European ski resorts. There are the local European clubs and, increasingly, the independent ski schools are offering race clubs in English. As well as regular clubs, there are race camps offered by some schools, normally run as a 5-day course from Monday–Friday 9am–5pm.

If you're looking at race camps or clubs a big consideration should be the coach. You don't need a World Cup winning skier as a coach, but experience as a race coach (as opposed to normal instructing) is a great indicator to the quality of the training. Speak to the coach about the programme; a good coach will have a long-term plan with days set aside to train,

compete and just have fun. Other than organised racing camps or clubs there are some more informal things you can do. There are often very accessible races running regularly in resorts. Speak to your ski school or the tourist information and see if there is a race that your child can enter while you're in resort. They are usually organised by age so every child can have a fair chance. You can also enter yourself! This will be a great way to test the water and see how your child enjoys the competition.

Altitude in Verbier run race camps during the holiday weeks of the season, and also has a race club that runs every weekend of the season. altitude-verbier.com

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