

# PARALLEL TURNING

Sprucing up your parallel turns will improve your skiing

WHETHER IT'S A CARVED ARC, a surfy schmear or a dainty swoosh, the parallel turn is the foundational move in skiing. It is infinitely adaptable for varying speeds, snow conditions and intentions. But it's early season, and the volume knob on our skiing may not be dialed up to 10 just yet. Maybe now is a good time to dissect that parallel turn as we log our first runs of the winter.

When we teach new skiers, many of them quickly graduate to finishing their turns with their skis parallel. As a skier progresses, the point in the turn when the skis become parallel happens earlier and earlier until the skier is executing a parallel move from start to finish. Except when they don't. A little, stubborn remnant of a wedge or a stepping move remains in the early part of the turn for many skiers. Particularly when we're uncomfortable, tired, or skiing off-groomed. What's up with that?

Skiers who use a snowplow (AKA wedge) turn keep their weight between their feet which is why it feels so safe — your weight never really travels very far out from under you. This seems stable

and secure but is also inefficient and exhausting. By contrast, in a parallel turn the skier's mass is not between their feet, it is well off to one side — the inside of the turn. If you squint and imagine what a parallel turn feels like, you're leaned over, right? In fact, you can't really demonstrate this move in your kitchen unless you support yourself against the counter to give you something to simulate the forces of the turn. (Don't pretend you've never shredded the gnar in your kitchen, either, you know you have!) At the end of the turn your weight crosses over your feet and off to the other side in the next turn. (Those of you following along in the kitchen, lean against the opposite counter now.) So the recipe for a parallel turn is simple — your weight passes from one side to the other as you change direction, allowing you to balance against the pull generated by the turn.



BY KARIN KIRK

The moment when your weight passes over your feet and enters the new turn is an illuminating one. It conveys the movements you've used to create the turn, it tells us if you are in balance and it reveals the gusto with which you are headed into the next turn. If any of those three things is off (mechanics, balance, purpose) your weight most likely won't proceed directly toward that new turn. Incidentally, the direction you'll be moving at that point is down the hill to some degree or another. There is something fundamentally hard-wired into most people that advises us against hucking our mass down the hill, particularly when the terrain is obscured by flat light, clad in gravel-studded ice, or is otherwise uninviting. So that is where a small hesitation, balance correction or additional braking movements enter the picture. The result is a tiny wedge, a step with the inside ski, or a brief widening of the stance to create a more stable platform to move from. Once the turn is under way, things return to parallel.

As a ski instructor, I view those movements more as something that illuminates a skier's underlying technique rather than an imperfection to be erased. Is the hesitation due to fear? Or because too much speed has built up in the turn? Or because the skier is not quite in balance and therefore can't get their weight to cross over into the next turn? Those are the interesting factors and the ones worth exploring as we make our journey toward

better, more efficient and more giggle-inducing turns. So as you return to the slopes this month, take a moment to take stock of your parallel turns and see what it might reveal about your skiing. You might be surprised at what you discover!

## Do you really want to lean into the hill?

There's a common misconception that we should be careful with here. In a parallel turn, you don't want to intentionally lean into the hill to generate the turn. Ideally the turn is created with your feet, legs or skis as you tip the skis on edge or steer your feet around the turn. Due to the forces created by moving around the turn at a happy rate of speed, your body will naturally move toward the inside of the turn to balance against those forces. The faster you go, the more you can lean toward the slope. But it's important to note that leaning in toward the hill is a result of the turn, it ought not be a purposeful move in and of itself. Create the turn with your feet, then balance with your whole body. Got it? ♦

*Karin Kirk is a ski instructor and staff trainer at Bridger Bowl, where she watches everyone's turn transitions from the chairlift. Yes, even yours. She can be reached at [karin@kirkframeworks.com](mailto:karin@kirkframeworks.com).*



1



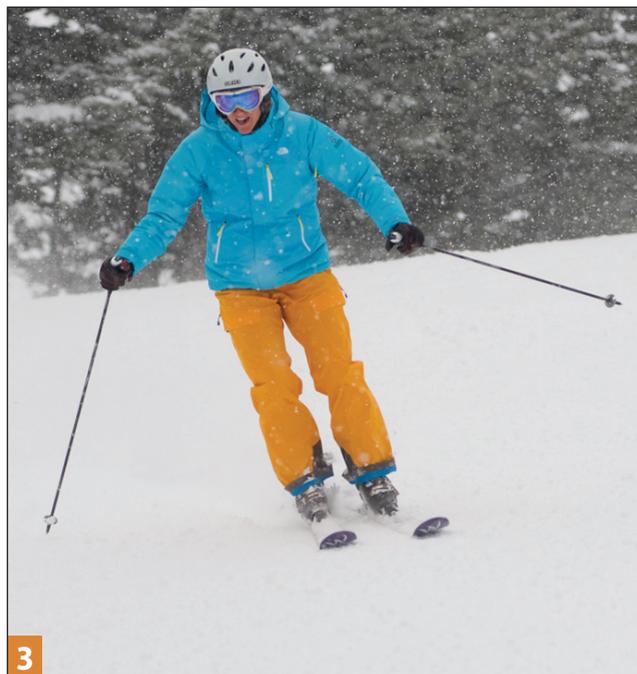
2



5



4



3

A basic parallel turn. It all boils down to frame 3 where the skier has left the old turn and is moving into the new one. You can see that the skis stay parallel throughout the whole sequence and the skier's weight moves cleanly from one side to the other.



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