

**TECHNICAL EDITOR TONY CRESPI EXTOLLS the VIRTUES of CONTINUING to TAKE LESSONS.
 BONUS ONLINE ARTICLE from SKIER NEWS JANUARY–SPRING 2026 EDITION**

THE MOUNTAIN JOURNAL

SKI SCHOOL for EXPERTS??

DUE to a FULL JAN–SPRING 2026 EDITION, WE PRESENT THIS INFO as an ONLINE BONUS

By TONY CRESPI, SKIER NEWS' TECHNICAL EDITOR

Not everyone who skis is an expert. Nor do all folks ski like experts. In truth, not everyone can ski powder in the morning, tackle bumps before lunch and ski ice in the afternoon. Skiing is a challenging sport.

How can you expand your skills? Lessons are one vehicle. With good lessons and good coaches, you can expand your envelope. Remember that the best skiers in the world have coaches.

Okay, not all ski pros are equal. In fact, over the past 20 years or so, writing articles for publications throughout snow country, which have included several hundred ski pointers, I have skied with, worked with and observed countless pros and coaches. From coaches at the U.S. Nationals to PSIA, it is clear your choices vary.

Here is good news. There are many good pros.

Talk to the desk and ask questions. Why does quality vary? To start, the pay is low. It is tough to cobble together a winter teaching skiing with an off-season career with those who bring a very wide range of technical, skiing and teaching expertise. In addition, not everyone is polished in all areas.

Do not accept a bad lesson. Complain and ask to speak with the Director of Training. If unsatisfied ask for another lesson with another pro. Do not ski off.

Remember that skiing should be fun. Lessons should help achieve that goal.

Skiers sometimes ask, what makes a great ski instructor? That is easy. To start, top pros need more than great skiing skills. However, skiing skills are important but not enough. I once had a Ski School Director who told me, after hiring me, that he was hiring me less because of my skiing skills than because of his perception of my teaching skills. He felt heavy mountain time and effective training would easily advance my mountain skills.

What do you think is critical in your coach? That boss felt I was technically a polished skier while not necessarily the best on the team, but he loved my teaching skills and felt my teaching was the exemplar, which set me above the other coaches.

Should you consider a lesson? Only you can answer that question. Still, are you interested in improving? You should know that inside virtually every ski school there is likely to be at least one gifted pro who can make it fun, and who can help add new skills. Sometimes you have to talk to the Director of Training to get that name. Sometimes you can watch different lessons on the hill and gauge success by the sense of fun generated by the group.

So what is the lesson here? It is somewhat funny but in the end, if you want a top pro, remember that learning is supposed to transform. It is really just about helping you better enjoy the mountain, and it is about helping you more effectively enjoy the sensation of sliding on the mountain.

All the flashy clothes, highspeed lifts, costly mountain amenities and high tech equipment are just intended to foster the mountain experience. Pros the like of Killington's Keith Hopkins and Katherine Rockwell, in my mind, know that and have remained focused on helping students grow.

Here at SKIER NEWS we love to ski, and we love the mountains. At the same time, we truly want our readers to maximize their mountain experience. Sometimes lessons can help. Your challenge is to find the pro that can best help you.

Be Aware. Find A Top Pro.

Columnist Tony Crespi has served as both a Ski School Supervisor and Development Team Coach. His column is published throughout the season.

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**TECHNICAL EDITOR TONY CRESPI REPORTS on SKIING on ICY HARDPACK.
 BONUS ONLINE ARTICLE from SKIER NEWS JANUARY–SPRING 2025 EDITION**

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BLACK ICE: SKIING THE ICY HARDPACK

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By TONY CRESPI, SKIER NEWS' TECHNICAL EDITOR

Ice can be clear, blue or black, and real ice resembles those little blocks you acquire from your freezer. I explain this, not because I think you might not know about ice, but because on a Western adventure I heard a skier comment that he considered harder snow as ice. Grinning, I put things in perspective. What we were skiing was neither blue nor black. It just did not qualify as ice.

Black ice, blue ice, boilerplate, grey washboard, and some types of hardpack can be each, in different ways, a nemesis. Each can vary. Have you skied glistening ice? It is not like powder. Have you encountered gray washboard? The stuff I told my lift friend about, blue ice, is the most demanding. Fortunately, it is not common with grooming. However, hardpack and boilerplate still can appear on the mountain. In fact, while mountain managers may cringe at this commentary, I have observed that snowmakers can produce a certain amount of gray (and even blue) hard-pack.

The good news is that ice can make a solid base.

Given that powder days are too rare in New England, and since we could not ski if we waited for powder, experts must learn to master varied conditions. Is it enjoyable? Truthfully? Yes. In fact, Eastern skiers know how to use their edges, and know this is a sure-fire strength. In addition, I think it partially explains why many racers hail from New England. Diversity builds competence.

From a technical angle, there are several strategies most veterans use for skiing hardpack: 1) Maintain a Tuned Ski, 2) Develop a Square Stance, and 3), Learn to Ski Different Lines. You should consider each of these.

Maintain a Tuned Ski

While most recreational skiers may not need the high-level precision required for competition, it is helpful to maintain your skis in proper condition.

Are your skis tuned? Top skiers will often tune and polish side edges daily. In addition, waxing helps maximize ease of turning

If your skis are not tuned, speak to your mountain shop. Consider purchasing basic tuning tools. Even a few minutes of minor polishing and deburring can maintain overall performance between major tune-ups.

2) Develop A Square Stance

Some years past, skiing with former U.S. Team Racer Holly Flanders, I was humbled. While the terrain constantly changed, and although the snow was less than ideal, Holly appeared completely at ease. She stood square, evenly balanced, and she seemed ideally positioned for advanced skiing.

A square, well-balanced stance allows for an ideal position for retraction, extension, weighting and unweighting, and allows for subtle adjustments.

Balance and stance are critical on hard-pack.

While there are times virtually any skier will not be perfectly square, the ideal position for hardpack is a well-developed, and square, stance.

Pay attention to your stance.

3) Learn to Ski Different Lines

Eastern skiers tend to push their bragging rights about icy technique. One reason is that before grooming came to the forefront, ice was prominent in the East. Folks

realized that to ski often, we had to ski anything. In all honesty, racers have been skiing hardpack for years. The result is that many racers know the benefits.

Generally, if you survive the initiation, and most of you probably have, you will learn that hard-pack can vary from one day to the next and from one trail to another. It is an important point. In addition, top skiers often look smooth because they learn to ski different and varied lines. This can help as it allows you to take advantage of the best snow.

Personally, I wander as things deteriorate, often exploring trails I might not typically enjoy. Remember, most folks do not modify their technique on ice and turn in the same places, and on the same bumps, whether the mountain is blessed with powder or frozen granular. Most good skiers adjust their line.

Watch a top skier the next time you are on your favorite trail. Most top skiers smoothly modify their line as slope and conditions change. Remember, a strong tactical orientation can often be as important as technique.

If you find yourself faced with challenging snow this season, consider your options. Start with tuned skis. Then adopt a square stance. Third, learn to ski different lines. Finally, remember that when slopes are icy, novice runs can ski like intermediate trails and intermediate trails like black diamonds. Explore. The entire mountain is rarely frozen solid.

Savor your day, from your first run to your last run.

Tony Crespi is a former ski school supervisor and development team coach. He has skied on and enjoyed ice-glazed slopes more than he cares to admit.