

# Cross country skiing with a twist, ski skating catches on

By Janet Reese, Special To The Rocky  
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Ski skating, sometimes called "freestyle," is for cross country skiers who want to change pace from moderate to overdrive. Be forewarned: One easily can get hooked on this sport.

Adopted by the Nordic ski-racing world more than a decade ago, ski skating has become popular among recreational cross country skiers. Ski skating got its start in the United States when American ski racer Bill Koch used the "marathon skate" technique to win the 1982 World Cup.

Today, ski skating is the trendiest skinny skiing around because it's exhilarating, fun, a great workout and surprisingly easy to learn.

Ski skating is a form of cross country skiing. In cross country skiing there are two major styles, the "classic" kick-and-glide style and the more recent ski skating style.

Skating on skis is much like skating on ice skates with the addition of poles. In both sports, you start your glide by pointing your blade or ski outward and pushing off a moving foot. In classic skiing, your skis move straight ahead; in ski skating, they are always moving on an angle.

Another difference is the way poles are used. Skaters use the poles together, while classic skiers use poles one at a time.

Proper ski waxing is important for both types, though skating skis are waxed for gliding while classic skis are waxed for gripping and gliding. Some classic skis are waxless.

"Ski skating appeals to people who need a transition sport to stay fit and active in the winter," said Igor Guzuir, director of the Snow Mountain Ranch Nordic Center in Granby. "Bicyclers, runners and triathletes who strive to keep up their aerobic capacity and stay in shape are attracted to ski skating. But you don't have to be an athlete to enjoy ski skating."

Ski skating is faster than classic, he said.

"You can cover a lot more terrain than you would classic cross country skiing," he said.

Ski skating terrain generally is flat with some rolling hills for added challenges. Ski skaters use separate tracks from classic. At Snow Mountain Ranch, a wide, groomed ski skating track parallels a two-track path for classic skiers.

Paul DeLong, of Nederland, said he prefers skate to classic skiing because it's fast and exhilarating.

"Skating is like biking, with the same kind of cadence," he said. "On skates, you can power up and over hills."

Ski skaters use a wide range of techniques depending on their speed and the terrain, much like shifting gears on a bicycle. There's a technique for going uphill, another for flats and slight uphill, and one for level ground and slight downhill.

## Getting started

Igor Guziur, director of the Snow Mountain Ranch Nordic Center, offers a few starting points for ski skating beginners.

- A Nordic center is the best place to start skating because it will have rental equipment, groomed tracks, instructors and lessons.
- Take a lesson and rent equipment at first to test the appeal of ski skating.
- Ask experts about the proper equipment fit. It's critical to have boots that fit well and match the binding system. The size and fit of skating skis primarily is determined by the weight of the skier's body.
- Learn how to wax skis by taking a waxing clinic at a Nordic center or ski shop.

## Where to do it

### **Breckenridge Nordic Center, Breckenridge**

Equipment rental, trail pass and a one-hour ski skate private lesson is \$65.

1-970-453-6855, BreckenridgeNordic.com

### **Devil's Thumb Ranch, Tabernash**

Weekend package: equipment rental, trail pass and a one-hour group ski skating lesson is \$50. 1-800-933-4339, DevilsThumbRanch.com

### **Eldora Mountain Resort, Nederland**

Weekend package: equipment rental, trail pass and a two-hour group ski skating lesson is \$40. 303-440-8700, Eldora.com

Frisco Nordic Center, Frisco

Equipment rental, trail pass and a one-hour ski skating private lesson is \$65.

1-970-668-0866, FriscoNordic.com

Keystone Nordic Center, Keystone/Dillon

Equipment rental, trail pass and a one-hour ski skating lesson is \$48. Make a reservation one day in advance. 1-970-496-4275, Keystone. Snow.com/info/winter.nordic.asp

Snow Mountain Ranch Nordic Center, Granby

Learn-to-ski package: equipment rental, trail pass and a one-hour group ski skating lesson is \$40. 1-970-887-2152, ext. 4173, YMCARockies.org

Vail Nordic Center, Vail

Equipment rental, trail pass and a two-hour ski skating lesson at 1 p.m. Saturdays are \$85. 1-970-476-8366, VailNordicCenter.com

## Equipment check: differences

## **Ski skating**

### **Classic cross country skiing**

#### **Skis**

Shorter and stiffer than classic skis.

Longer and more flexible than skating skis.

#### **Boots**

Stiffer with more ankle support than classic boots.

Softer sole and less ankle support than skating boots.

#### **Bindings**

Two systems - NNN and SNS. Boots must be matched to the binding system.

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#### **Poles**

Longer than any other type of ski pole. A rough guideline: pole should reach skier's chin.

Shorter than skating. A rough guideline: pole should reach skier's shoulder.

#### **Cost**

A package including skis, bindings, boots and poles ranges from \$350 to \$1,000.

A package of skis, bindings, boots and poles ranges from \$350 to \$1,000.

#### **Clothing**

Made of stretchy, breathable, wicking and wind-stopping fabrics.

Similar to that of skating: stretchy, breathable, wicking and wind-stopping fabrics.

#### **Technique**

Skating stride.

Kick-and-glide.

#### **Ski track**

Wide, groomed.

Narrow, groomed.

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