



# AND YOU THOUGHT YOU COULD SKI...

## On a ski improvers workshop in Austria, Rebecca Corbally went from zero to hero.

**I GENUINELY THOUGHT I COULD SKI. BUT IN MY FIRST IMPROVERS LESSON IT TURNS OUT THAT THIS JUST ISN'T THE CASE. IN THE COSY RESORT TOWN OF HINTERTHAL NEAR SALZBURG IN AUSTRIA, I HAVE JOINED A SKI WORKSHOP OF SEASONED SKIERS WHO WANT TO SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVE THEIR STYLE, CONFIDENCE AND SKILL – ALL IN A MATTER OF A WEEK. IT'S 9AM TO 5PM AND IT'S HARD, THE GOAL BEING TO BRIDGE THAT GAPING GAP BETWEEN SKI SCHOOL AND SKI LEGEND.**

Carl, co-owner with wife Sandra, has the immense task of moving the five students he is faced with up the stylish skier ladder. We are sitting at breakfast on our first day toggled up in warm clothing sipping cups of coffee in Carl and Sandra's hotel. We're handed our theory paperwork and open

to the first page. I'm your average British skier, I have not skied for a very long time, and I'm nervous.

On our first morning of theory, I'm taking it all in. I was told before I booked that as long as I have the right attitude and I'm keen to progress I should be fine regardless of my experience. Later, as we clump our way down the road to the lifts I start to sweat, the result of a jittery cocktail of anxiety, caffeine and too many layers of merino wool.

Carl, dressed in obligatory ski instructor red, sidles over as we walk and repositions my skis and poles so that I'm balanced and look the part. "If you look like you don't know what you're doing," he laughs, "then I look like I don't know what I'm doing." A good point, and as I look around I notice a surprising amount of skiers who don't know what they're doing either.

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By 10am we've all done a couple of blue runs to show Carl our moves. As I feared, I'm at the back even giving it my all. We regroup and to my horror I see he's been filming us the entire time. He explains that we're to spend much of our first day doing drills to deconstruct what we've been taught before.

Nobody is above a few drills and it helps remind you to focus on your position, not your speed. It also exposes any potential show-offs and teaches us to concentrate on what we are actually doing as opposed to simply getting down the slope. If you can ski perfectly on a blue run then you can ski practically anywhere, Carl says, and I'm starting to see this man with a halo. We stay on blue and we go over and over our positions in minute detail.

During the evening meal, we sit together at a big table in the hotel's small restaurant. Candles are lit, the waitresses are attentive and the food is to die for. Five courses file out with welcome pauses in between and we chat among ourselves about what lies ahead, as the real skiing is yet to start.

The following day after our theory and a warm up, we practice 'the turn', the part of a run which everything seems to hinge on. Everyone thinks they can turn already, of course, but largely it seems that most just



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slide. We try our hand at the different styles of turns required on different types of snow. Using the correct turn at the correct speed on each different type of slope and snow condition will ensure you are smooth, controlled and stylish; the opposite of me right now. He reiterates control as being the key point here as one in our group bombs past at top speed, arms flailing and stops too late to regroup. Speed doesn't necessarily equal style, it seems.

As we gather in the bar the following morning, theory begins again and we stand in our socks and practice different positions. He teaches us how it should 'feel' if we are carving, he shows us where our bodies should be in relation to our legs and what our arms should be doing and within seconds a dull ache sets in. I wonder what chances of success we have on a 30 degree snowy piste if we can't do it in the warm bar.

But once we're chinking up the lift again I'm sure I've got it, I really feel the penny has dropped and I'm going to 'wow' him. The previous day's drills and repetition have boosted my confidence and I'm faster, but that's all. Carl skis a 400 metre patch of red run and then makes us do it one by one skiing towards him like toddlers learning to walk all over again. Equal measures of praise and frank criticism make us feel we are

really learning.

Back on the slopes again after lunch, we all seem like different skiers and my speed creeps up as my confidence improves. My bright red face beams as Carl praises my turns and position and now he teaches us the Hockey Stop. It's important we know how to stop very suddenly as we're confined to red runs now and we're churning through the kilometres at quite a pace. The gaps between stopping to assess our skiing and for videoing get wider as we make fewer mistakes, and my body is burning.

The days tick on and we plough through our booklet nearing the end.

We are soaring in confidence now and although the least experienced I'm not always at the back. As we come off our last lift of the day Carl tells me he's amazed at how far I've progressed. Feeling like I've got a crush on my teacher and grinning like a loon I follow him at speed over another piste. By the time I read the sign it's too late. It's a big black board which reads Caution: Iced Slope For Speed Skiing. And it's a black run.

I apply my new hockey stop, and shudder at the drop off. He is just ahead and gives me a confidence bolstering 'chin up' chat. He says I can do it easily, he reminds me to apply my quick short turns and to read the

snow. He says don't think about it being black, think about your skiing. There is nobody around and so I creep forwards feeling his eyes heavy on me and lurch into a turn right behind him. He springs into life and like skiing down a waterfall we make rapid turns until we're down with the others.

We run it one more time and this time I do it without following the security of Carl's tracks. I'm alarmingly confident and make it alone, as I reach him I see he's filming us. Once back at the bar that evening he plays our tape from the first day followed by our tape of the final run while we sip hot drinks and refuel on homemade cake.

Watching the screen you cannot argue that all five of us are much better skiers, that we've had a laugh - often at each others' expense - and that we are of the minority on the slopes who can actually apply the correct turns on the correct terrain. I'm a faster, tighter, tidier skier and though an awfully long way off legend, I'm fast becoming competent and that's much more than I thought I'd achieve at the outset.

### SKI IMPROVERS WORKSHOP

Rebecca stayed at the family-owned Chalet/Hotel Haus Salzburg which has 7 rooms with 23 beds, many of which are family rooms. Packages are half board with five course evening meals for adults and earlier high tea for children. Nursery slopes, ski school, bars and lifts are in easy walking distance.

Carving Workshops 5 days (five full days tuition) costs £250 per person. Carving Workshops 3 days (2 half days tuition + one day ski safari) £80 per person. Half board accommodation at Haus Salzburg from £459

New for 2008/2009 is the Intermediate Carving Workshop based on three days of half day lessons including video analysis, practical and theory. Prices are: €100/head (Min 3 people - Max 8).

The Hinterthal area comprises 150km of skiing, including 36 lifts and 37 mountain restaurants and it has an exceptional snowfall usually from mid-December - mid-April. Hinterthal is a one-hour transfer from Salzburg airport.

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