

Slalom Zones

By Matt Rini

As most skiers' 2001 season draws to an end, I thought it would be better to write an article that does not give a specific exercise to work on, but rather a better understanding of slalom skiing that can be applied throughout all levels. The area that I am going to focus primarily on, is from the hook up out of the turn to the release on the other side. Before I can explain it I need to backtrack a little and explain why this is important.

As every season ends and we look back on the performances throughout the year, it is clear that there is a new generation of slalom skiers, young and old, who are skiing shorter lengths and faster speeds than ever before. This, of course, can be slightly attributed to equipment advances, but mostly I feel more skiers have changed the way they are skiing the slalom course. We are now seeing people riding bigger skis, trying to carry more speed, and trying not to lean too hard, all of which in the past were flaws to eliminate. Now skiers are finding these very "mistakes" are helping them run more buoys.

In order to ski the new equipment to its fullest, turn harder and faster, and stay with the boat all the way through the course, we must first be at the buoy at the right time. Everyone knows that as the speed gets faster or the rope gets shorter, that window of being at the ball at the right time gets much smaller. The overall problem that most skiers have when the speed is increased or the rope is shortened, is that they are confused by the extra speed they are generating. For example, the speed that is generated at 12m through the wakes is much greater than that at 13m, and many skiers who first shorten to 12m, will start to shut the speed down after they cross the centre line of the boat because the muscle memory of running 13m is telling them "yes I have enough speed to get around the next ball". However, since that window is smaller, so is the time when we can coast after the wakes and still make the pass.

When you see a pro skier run 14.25m and 13m, it looks like they are coasting after the wakes, like they have more time than a less accomplished skier. This is because they have generated enough angle and speed out of the turn to carry them the width of the course, and the longer line allows them to stay beside the boat for a longer time. If this technique was tried at say 11.25m, the skier would still have enough speed to reach the width of the course, but they would get there too soon, and would not be able to stay beside the boat long enough to wait for the ball, as they did at 14.25m. The faster the speed or the shorter the rope length, the longer you need to focus on holding the angle and speed you have generated from the turn. This can be applied all the way back down through the speeds.



When you see a better skier run the earlier passes, it looks like they have more time and are not working very hard. This is because they would be riding the line longer than the minimum, and thus being much earlier in the course. If you run your earlier passes riding the line out longer, it will give you the practice and the feel you need for the harder passes.

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