

SNOW  
EAST!

Chip Dwyer

Chip Dwyer is a PSIA Level III Ski Professional at the Killington Ski School and Master Fit certified bootfitter at Northern SkiWorks.

## Where the Boot Meets the Snow!

Today's four buckle overlap boots are much more comfortable and warm than boots were in the days before shaped skis, but, in my opinion, they have not changed because of the shaped ski revolution. Modifying ski boots for your foot and body type is important, yet often overlooked.

For example, let's look at the upper cuff adjustment. Most boots have it (some on the inside and outside of the cuff), but most skiers never bother to use them. Yet it is an important step in the "Canting Process," and affects both comfort and performance. Many ski shops never touch it. I had a friend with very sore muscles on the outside of both lower legs, and with a simple turn of an allen wrench I fixed his upper cuff. One week later his legs were back to normal and he was skiing better than before, because his skis were flatter when in his normal stance.

To adjust the cuff on your boots, use one of two methods: the dynamic or the static method. If no custom footbed is being used, do the dynamic cuff adjustment. Stand in the boot on a hard floor (no carpet) with the liner inserted, and have a friend release the cuff adjuster. Now you should flex the cuff into place. Have your friend lock the adjuster with your knee in a relaxed stance. This method is less precise, but it is the best method without a custom footbed.

With a custom footbed (orthotic), place the footbed into the shell minus the liner and step into the shell and close the buckles. Standing in preferred ski stance width, (boots parallel 4"-6" apart measured on inside of the soles) have a friend check to make sure shell is equidistant to each side of your leg, and adjust the cuff if it is not. Once the static cuff adjustment is completed, check that your legs remain centered when the knees are flexed forward. If the knee does not track straight, check to see if the footbed isn't excessively pronated or supinated. A good footbed can sometimes be thrown off by a boot board under it that is tilted or not ground flat before adding the custom footbed.

Many people think that boots have become much softer in a forward flex to complement the shaped ski's ease of turn initiation. I do not. I do believe we need a spectrum of boot flexes to match the skier's ability, weight, and body type. The ability to adjust flex through a mechanism is a very nice feature that comes on a lot of boots these days. And let's not forget that the buckles and power strap are also flex adjusters.

On my boots I do not have to play with my buckles every lift ride like some people I ski with. But over-tightening the top buckle in the morning and winching down the power strap has a negative effect on the flex of my boots and on my ability to absorb terrain and balance well. If you have seen a skier from the chair bending at the waist excessively while skiing, you can bet they have over-buckled their top buckles or purchased a boot built for a 200 pound World Cup racer.

It has been said many times among race coaches, "You can tune and wax a ski to save a couple of tenths of a second on a race course, but a perfect set of ski boots can save you seconds."

So, purchase boots carefully and then have them modified to bring out the best in your ability. These modifications should include a custom footbed, adjustment for your fore/aft balance, (ex: ramp angle increasing or decreasing) having them stretched and ground for your comfort, and, finally, have the upper cuffs adjusted as one step towards the Canting Process. The whole Canting Process has four phases, but results in a ski that is flat when skiers stand normally and stays flat as they flex their ankles and knees.

Like the avid skier that makes sure his car has the best snow tires to ensure that he gets to the ski area during that Nor'easter, you should make sure your boots are at their best for your skiing pleasure. \*

