

The XC Ski World Guide To Roller Skiing

Equipment Information

Roller Skis

Roller skis can be purchased thru a variety of stores and mail order firms. Two excellent sources in North America (Nordic Equipment Inc. and Sunnyside Sports) are featured in our [XC Ski Expo](#) section. Despite a very specialized market, several brands of roller skis are currently available including ProSki, V2, Marwe, and Swede Ski. The differences between the brands primarily have to do with wheel speed, cost, weight, and tire wear. Every brand has several models to choose from including ratcheted and non-ratchet options (for classic/skate or skate only skiers).

Your best bet is to go with a ski that fits your particular situation. Wicked fast skis might seem fun to tear around on but certainly not on crowded urban roads or in steep terrain. Slow skis might gather dust if you have tons of country lanes available but it takes you an hour to go 2 km. You also need to consider your general ski abilities, coordination and balance when choosing roller skis--much more so than snow skis.

A final note--we have yet to test the newest (but most exciting) roller skis designed for dirt or grass roads. Several brands are experimenting with new technologies and we hope to offer a report sometime in 97'. Available right now are new models with wheels designed to counter rough roads while V2 is experimenting with the first roller ski shock system.

Poles

If price is an issue, go right ahead and use any pole grip and shaft you would use on snow. If you have really high-priced racing poles, however, you might want to think about investing in some cheap, roll-dedicated poles. The best option we've found is to look into poles marketed for roller blading and sold thru a variety of outlets. They usually cost far less than XC ski-specific poles and they are usually a bit more durable which is nice if you take a tumble now and then.

The only real distinct feature of roller ski poles is the tips. Roller ski pole ferrules (tips)-- as well as diamond tipped sharpeners-- are available from any outlet selling roller skis.

Here's a few suggestions for applying and maintaining tips.

- ?? To take off a winter basket/tip...simply steam or boil the basket for a couple minutes over your kitchen stove. Use water soluble glue to stick on the roller ferrules and you are set for the summer.
 - ?? Take the time to sharpen your tips each time you go out. Five minutes of sharpening will prolong the useful life of a ferrule and help prevent the frustration of constant pole slipping.
 - ?? Keep in mind that colder weather makes for harder pavement. You'll want super sharp tips in the fall!
 - ?? Try to avoid dragging tips to "brake" on downhills. You'll damage tips and shafts and you are far better off walking down or getting some speed reducers.
-

Boots, Gloves, Protective Gear

Your normal winter boots and gloves will work fine for roller skiing although if you plan on doing a ton of rolling you'll go through equipment twice as fast in the summer. Light gloves are necessary otherwise you are looking at tons of hand blisters and soaked gloves when the weather is warm. Be forewarned: you'll probably get blisters no matter what the first few times--it does get better when your hands start to toughen up.

For protective gear we recommend that roller skiers use, at the very minimum: bright (reflective if possible) clothing, gloves, and some kind of knee protection. It is also a very good idea for beginners and all juniors to use bike helmets and elbow/wrist guards. Essentially every fall you've ever seen a roller blader take can and will be done on roller skis so keep that in mind!

Where And How To Roller Ski

Roller skiing's primary drawback compared to winter XC skiing is the relative difficulty for most folks in finding suitable locations. It can take awhile to discover perfect roller skiing spots but if you know what to look for (and when to go) you can discover a whole new dimension to XC skiing.

Where

- ?? Look for roads or bike trails with low traffic levels, wide shoulders, and good visibility.

- ?? Often moderate to high use areas can be safe to roller ski very early in the morning or just before dusk. Weekend early mornings are often ideal times for roller skiing.
 - ?? Always look into law enforcement protocol regarding roller skis before going out. If possible, actually take your skis into a police or highway patrol station and find out what your local Highway Patrol or Police policies are regarding roller skis. Ask if they have any suggestions for places to go and if they would prefer that you ski facing or with traffic.
 - ?? Look for gently rolling terrain or hills with plenty of run out and a moderate slope. Very few skiers have the ability to handle steep, twisting descents.
 - ?? Check the pavement. Chip-seal surfaces, lots of big cracks or potholes, and obstacles such as cattle grates and curbs can all ruin your fun.
 - ?? Forget about skiing in traffic or on bike paths with multiple traffic controls. Your ability to stop quickly is very questionable so traffic situations are not much fun. Stick to rural roads and dedicated multi-user paths.
 - ?? First-time skiers should practice in a safe area before venturing too far afield. Newly-paved parking lots on a Sunday morning are a good bet as long as they are flat. Practice getting the feel of the skis; how to turn quickly; how long it takes to come to a stop; and how to bail out to the side.
-

How

- ?? On narrow roads it is best to ski with traffic--on roads with wide shoulders--but large amounts of traffic--it is often safer to ski facing traffic.
- ?? Just about every technique you can do on skis you can do on roller skis--both classic and skating. You'll find that diagonal stride yields a "perfect" kick do to the ratchet in the wheel which is something to watch out for if you are aiming to improve your technique (you don't want to depend on that level of kick which is almost never there on snow!). Note: Most international class skiers rarely, if ever, practice diagonol technique on roller skis. When they use "classic" technique they almost exclusively double pole and double pole kick.
- ?? STOPPING--it can be a bit of a crap shoot. A snowplow wedge is only partially effective as is rapid-fire step-turning. They both can work but you wouldn't want to bet your life on them. A good quick-stop combination for intersections is to snowplow AND use your pole tips planted on the side of the pavement. The best thing is to roll in areas where you won't ever need to come to sudden stops so that

you can let speed diminish naturally before using a partial wedge or your poles to finally stop.

- ?? Keep your skis and poles in towards your body whenever passing or being passed by cars, bikes or pedestrians. The best option is just to double pole until you are clear to begin skiing again. Always check over your shoulder before skiing into a traffic path. NEVER ski two abreast unless you are on a closed roadway or a dedicated multi-user path.
- ?? Slow down well before hazards. You'll learn the hard way if you blast into a dangerous area and find you have to crash to save yourself!
- ?? Leave the daredevil stunts for Hollywood. Gunning down dangerous hills; running stop signs; weaving thru traffic--these kinds of behaviors force officials to create laws prohibiting roller skiing and lead to expensive (and potentially tragic) accidents.
- ?? When in doubt, walk down a hill. In "no choice" situations, you can always bail out to the side of the pavement. Try to aim for grass or sand areas and try to just "run" on your skis before giving up and crashing.

Training Tips

Roller skiing is a very effective snow simulation tool (and even a sport by itself) but you want to keep a few things in mind. First, if you simply can't get comfortable on pavement or around traffic you might be better off doing foot ski simulation instead. A terrified roller skier isn't going to be able to get their heartrate up (maybe via fright but not via training :-)) and is far more likely to take a dangerous fall. Secondly, if you are rolling in particularly tough terrain or high altitude you need to keep an eye on your heartrate. It is very easy to get swept up by the speed of roller skiing and forget to monitor your training zones. Finally, the biggest benefit roller skiing provides over bounding or running is in the development of technique and endurance strength. To yield the maximum benefit, roller skiing workouts must contain a great deal of focused time isolating specific technical areas and muscle groups. Many skiers (of all ages) go out all summer and fall on roller skis and can't figure out why they don't make a huge jump in improvement the next winter. The answer usually lies in too much time rolling with "lazy " technique; always skiing in terrain that is too steep or too flat; and/or generally just "going out" instead of going out with a specific goal in mind. Here are some ways to improve your roller skiing training next time out.

- ?? Try to avoid using diagonal stride when classic rolling unless you have a clear feeling for a late kick. Instead, concentrate on good double pole and double pole kick motions.

- ?? Use as much V-2 and V-2 alternate when skating as possible. Roadways almost always lack the abrupt transitions of ski trails so take advantage of the opportunity to really build your power gears.
- ?? Vary your terrain as much as possible. Seek out both flat and rolling terrain sites. Bike paths often offer the best technical choices.
- ?? Concentrate on complete motions whenever roller skiing. "Lazy" training will translate into lazy racing next winter! You don't always have to go hard--you just always want to ski well. An hour of focused training with excellent technique is far superior to two hours of sloppy technique.
- ?? Specific strength exercises such as skiing without poles, double poling uphill, and single poling uphill are best on gradual slopes with good visibility (for turning around) or one very long gradual slope. Aim for strong, snappy motions at moderate to high turnover.
- ?? Timetrials and intervals on roller skis are best on uphill terrain whenever possible or a very safe section of rolling terrain.
- ?? All out speed on roller skis should only be done by very experienced skiers with proper safety equipment. However, most skiers can benefit from 5-10 second "surges" thrown into distance sessions every so often. Concentrate on powerful motions at a reasonable tempo.
- ?? If you train in a group on roadways, try to have a support vehicle follow you with bright signs attached warning drivers you are on the roadway.