

Carving Practice Drills

Compiled By Jack Michaud

This was a popular thread in the forum. Below are some practice drills to help you hone your carving skills. Note that these are not methods of normal every-day riding, but special challenges to isolate particular aspects of carving.

● [The Norm](#). If you're new to this whole carving thing, start here. The norm is a skill to help you feel the edge and sidecut working to execute a clean carve for you.

● [The Norm Part II](#). Try this next.

■ **Heelside carves:** Rear hand grabbing front boot cuff: With your rear hand (right hand for regulars, left hand for goofies), see if you can make a heelside carve such that your rear hand can easily grab your front boot cuff. Don't simply bend over or sit down and reach for the cuff - assume a poised carving position and get low by making a deep carve. Bend your knees only enough to provide suspension, and angulate sideways at the waist to maintain a more upright upper body. Grab your boot cuff and hold it for the duration of the carve. This "freezes" you in this position and allows you to feel it working throughout the carve. **Variations:** rear elbow touching front knee; rear hand grabbing board edge near front foot (see above picture). Below is a picture of a very nice heelside carve. As you can see, the rear hand could easily be placed on the front boot cuff from this position.



■ **Toeside carves:** Like the grabs described above, but for toeside. Front hand grabbing rear boot cuff: make a toeside carve such that your front hand can grab your rear boot cuff with your arm going behind your butt (not between your legs!). Again, do not simply crouch down or bow your chest towards your toeside edge. Make a clean, angulated turn with a mostly upright upper body, looking where you are going, and knees bent for suspension. Practicing this will lead to well-balanced toesides like this one:



■ **Bamboo:** "Borrow" a bamboo pole and ride with it. Hold it with your fingers only - don't wrap your thumb around it, you can sprain your thumb if you fall while holding the pole like that. The object of this drill is to keep the bamboo pole perpendicular to your board, and level to the snow at all times while carving. This is trickier than it sounds; it's good to have someone watch and tell you if you were actually doing it. This helps you to keep level shoulders, and to break the common habit of "opening up" on heelside and facing downhill - you want to maintain consistent alignment with your board.

The above drills will help you learn to face more towards the nose of the board. It is common for new carvers to start with a more sideways body position where they tend to face their toeside edge. This can lead to many bad things, ultimately a loss of balance. Facing sideways usually results in bending over and

reaching down for the snow on toeside, and "sitting on the toilet" on heelside - excessively bending the knees and hanging your butt off to the side of the board. You want to keep your butt over the edge, and bend your knees to absorb terrain, not just to get low. As you get better at carving, you may find that you will be more comfortable aligning yourself with your binding angles, rather than the nose of your board. Either works fine, but trying to face the nose can really help break bad habits.

● **Look ma, no hands:** Ride with your hands on your hips, or with your arms crossed, or hands in your pockets - basically anything to take your hands out of the equation. Sometimes we rely too much on our hands for balance, and sometimes we wave them around for no reason. So get rid of them. Realize that a quiet upper body is the key.

● **Pencil Pinching:** This is something to imagine happening when you angulate at the waist to keep your shoulders level to the hill. When you make either a toeside or heelside carve, pretend that you are trying to hold a pencil in the crease that forms at your waist. No, not under your gut, on either side, just above your hips.

◆ **Triple turns:** Between each carve, instead of making just one edge change, make three quick cross-under* edge changes in a row as you traverse the trail. (i.e.: make a regular gs carve on left edge, then in the transition quickly go right edge, left edge, right edge) If you have room, go for five. This teaches you feel for your edges, and teaches you that upper body gesticulations are unnecessary for changing edges. *Lowell Hart* adds: This requires a rider to apply knee and ankle angulation to engage and release the downhill edge, and to make larger hip angulation/inclination moves when cutting a hard turn at the trail's edge.



***Cross-under** turns are described in [this article](#). The picture to the left shows a nice sequence of a cross-through turn, which blends cross-over and cross-under techniques. The rider is low in the carve, then rises up *only enough* to bring the knees up and flick the board onto the new edge. The board crosses under the hips while the hips cross over the board - hence "cross-

through". *Smooth.*

■ **Boots:** Try riding with your boots in walk mode. Try with your boots in walk mode and unbuckled. This teaches foot and leg balance. You may be relying too much on your hard boot shells for balance... are you? Also riding in walk mode can help you get forward and attack the nose at the beginning of each carve. Sometimes the stiffness of hardboots can be hard to overcome when attempting the forward weight shift.

◆ **Fakie Eurocarve.** Do this by making a toeside carve, and in the transition spin 180 and make another toeside carve going backwards. (use caution! only on well groomed uncrowded slopes!) This is another balance skill. If you are in good balance, a fakie eurocarve will happen with surprising ease!

● **Heads up:** just before the finish of one carve, before changing edges, turn your head and pick a spot on the other side of the trail to aim for (a tree, pole, pile of snow, etc). Make the edge change and the next carve all while looking at this spot. Our body is built to follow our eyes. We can't carve very well across the hill when we are looking downhill.

● **The G Spot:** *jtslalom* writes: I became a true carver when I asked a 17 year old FIS ski racer what he thinks about when he is about to come into a GS gate. He pointed to 6 inches in front of his binding and said, " I concentrate all my energy right there." Since then I've learned to model my riding and training after GS skiers and it has worked for me.

Lowell Hart writes:

■ **Up the Ladder:** Isolate each one of the possible movements to tilt the board on edge, starting with quick movements of the ankles. After a bunch of repetitions, move up to the knees, trying again to isolate the movement and not using any other movement to tilt the board. From there move to the hips, then incline the whole body to tilt the board. This works especially well as a warm up exercise, as each of these movements will be used when carving. Performing each one of the movements will warm up the surrounding muscles, oxygenate blood, and lube joints along the entire kinematic chain, rather than only in one area of the body.

■ **Singletrack:** Ride exactly in the track of a rider ahead of you, or your own track (on subsequent runs) if you are a loner. Requires subtle movements of knees and ankles to fine tune edge angle, quick fore/aft adjustments to further adjust the shape of a carved arc, and develops perceptual skills as a rider is forced to look ahead to see--and follow--the track.



■ ♦ **Runaway Train:** Ride a track one foot to the right (or left) of the track preceding you. If you are lucky enough to ride with a posse, have the entire group try it with each subsequent rider riding one foot to the left (or right) of the preceding track. This increases the challenge as later riders have to make big turns toeside and tight arcs heelside and vice-versa. Develops similar skills as Singletrack, but with the additional 'big turn, small turn' challenge.

● **Shadow Slalom:** On a sunny day, ride a slalom course around chair shadows under the chairlift. Develops further application of edging and fore/aft movement options, and perceptual skills (looking ahead and choosing line).

● **Pierce the Pile:** Pick out shadows, small piles of snow, or other objects and 'pierce' them with your carving edge. Works on controlling your line, not the board controlling you.

♦ **Air Change:** Carve off small bumps and rollers and change edges in midair. Land softly, carving on your new edge, maintaining the integrity of the carved arc throughout. Further develops pressure management, edging, and fore/aft movements, plus balance and perceptual skills.

■ ♦ **Suck Ups:** Perform carved retraction turns off knolls, on individual bumps, or along a spine. The opposite of Air Changes - make the edge change off something that would give you air, but keep the board on the ground by absorbing the terrain.

■ ♦ **Combos:** Mix up carved extension and retraction (cross-over, cross-under) turns so you can perform either on command. Develops the ability to extend or retract the legs to better manage forces through the finish of a carved turn.

♦ **Turbulence:** Make long radius carved turns through small bumps and 'harbor chop'. Progress to larger bumps when your legs feel youthful. Develops pressure management skills and 'de-couples' flexing and extending movements from edging movements.

Boostertwo writes:

■◆**Cat and Mouse:** Ride with a partner. One is the mouse, the other the cat. The mouse tries to shake the cat while carving turns. The cat rides a safe distance behind and tries to match the mouse turn for turn. After a while, switch roles. Good to develop the ability to instantly make turns of different shapes and sizes, and for looking ahead.

■**Human Giant Slalom:** Ride with a group, the bigger, the better. The object is for the entire group to ride through a GS course made up from the other group members. Start by having each member of the group position himself (stopped) on the trail so that the entire group makes up a GS course. Alternating 'gates' hold one arm to the right/left to indicate the direction on which to pass. When everyone is ready, the rider at the top of the course goes first, with the following riders starting as soon as the 'gate' above them rides by. Thus, several riders are on course at any given moment. Safe passing is allowed and encouraged, but no hitting gates or others on the course. As soon as a rider 'finishes' the course, they set the next gate, which they do by stopping and holding out the appropriate arm to indicate turn direction (dictated, of course, by the rhythm of the turns immediately above him.) Leapfrog in this way all the way down the hill. Develops the ability to make carved turns of different shapes and sizes, and choosing line.

■◆**Retraction Boosters:** At the very end of a carved turn, use a quick movement of the ankle/knee to tilt the board even higher, rather than reducing the edge angle to start the new turn. This sudden increase in tilt tightens the turn radius and creates an even faster retraction (cross-under) turn. *Jack notes: this is like the practice of "counter-steering" on a motorcycle - turn the bars left to flick the bike under you and to the left, resulting in leaning the bike to the right for a right turn.*

◆**Skid/Carves:** Alternate between skidding and carving on a single traverse and on single turns. Extend the rear leg to break the tail out of a carved arc, then retract it to realign the board so it points exactly in its direction of travel. Develops sensitivity to both skidding and carving, and the ability to regain the arc if the board starts to skid.

◆◆**Lock-Ons:** Unweight and make a change to the board's steering angle (pivoting it through the initiation of the turn) while it's light. Come down and immediately "lock-on" to a carve on the new edge, carving the middle to the finish of the turn. Start with small steering angle adjustments and make larger steering movements as you develop proficiency. Develops the ability to make a big steering angle adjustment when the course demands it or to regain a better line while on course.

photos courtesy of Jack Michaud, Boostertwo, Chris Karol