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turn initiation. The smaller the waist the quicker you can roll the ski from edge to edge. Conversely, as you go wider the weight increases, quickness decreases, and it takes longer to roll from edge to edge.

- ◆ Narrower waists provide better edge grip since the edge is under your foot in the middle of the turn. In other words, the closer the waist width of the ski is to the sole width of your boot the more the edge is under your foot in a turn. The wider the ski the longer it takes to roll onto the edge, and since the edge is farther away from your boot sole it takes more leverage/energy to keep the ski on its edge.
- ◆ As the ski width increases there's obviously more surface area, which allows the ski to float higher on the snow. Skis in the realm of 102–145 millimeters can be wide enough to actually let you skid or pivot on top of soft snow just as you would on the groomed.

Recognizing the close relationship that exists between waist width, turn radius, and rocker, ski manufacturers have come up with some general performance guidelines regarding waist width:

- ◆ 68–78 millimeters: These skis are carve-oriented, thanks to the combined edge grip and quickness of a narrow ski. Carving- or race-inspired skis usually have a traditional camber or, at most, a small amount of tip rise to allow

the tip to play an active role in pulling the ski into the turn and creating power and energy through turn completion. This category is home to the highest-performance groomed/hard snow carving skis, requiring high performance, high energy, and high mental and muscular output.

- ◆ 80–95 millimeters (mid-fat or all mountain category): Rocker skis in this category make for easier turn initiation since they are more steered than carved. You give up some edge hold and carving performance for all-mountain

versatility. Those who favor these skis can still lay down some tracks but, with a turn radius of 15 to 20 meters, they mostly have a medium to long turn shape. Generally the wider the waist the longer the turn radius.

- ◆ 100+ millimeters: The emphasis here is on off-piste skiing where flotation and smooth turns are the order of the day. The larger and more pronounced the rocker the more the ski floats—at the expense of the tip pulling through the turn. With these skis, turns are more guided and shaped versus carved, except for long-radius turns where you can potentially lay them on edge. The width, combined with reduced edge surface due to rocker, makes for less edge grip in harder snow conditions. Turn radius goes from 21 to 40+ plus meters, since in this category you don't really want to make quick turns—or have the ski tip “hook up.”

SUMMING UP

Today's skis represent a very good blend of performance, forgiveness, and versatility, so it's hard to make a poor choice. The decision should be based on what terrain conditions you want the skis for. Are they your main ski or are they for more specific conditions? Selecting waist width and rocker profile is as much a matter of function as style and image in many areas.

A general trend I'm starting to see is less emphasis

AS FOR WOMEN AND JUNIORS...

The information in the accompany chart generally applies to women as well as men, except for the fact that women-specific skis have flex profiles, sidecut dimensions, and mounting points that do make a difference for female skiers. Within lines of women's models, skiers have the same options with regard to construction (metal or no metal), ski weight, waist widths, and rocker options.

Skis made for the junior market may feature similar rocker choices, but it depends on the manufacturer. There will be less choice of waist widths relative to the type of rocker. That said, the waist widths in the chart are quite close to the offerings in junior skis, which run from 65

millimeters underfoot to approximately 100 millimeters.

The logic holds true of narrower waist widths being quicker, more responsive, and lighter. The wider you get the better the float and more all-mountain versatile the ski is—with the 100 millimeter waists being more off-piste driven.

The skier's weight plays some role here but, in reality, juniors like the wider skis more because they are cool, not because they boost actual performance. Tuning is very important. A good tune and proper wax makes more of a difference than actual waist width, except for carving/race situations, where a narrower-profile ski is a definite advantage. —Mike Porter