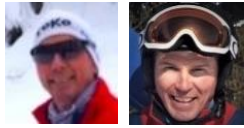


November 2024

Rob's Reflections – Braking Wedge or Half Wedge - Which is Better for Braking?

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Note: This article is the author's personal reflection and is not intended to be the official perspective of CANSI's technical committee (TC). It is written to share the author's perspective, his thinking and ideas and to generate discussion among members. If you want specific technical information, terminology or references, please refer to CANSI's Teaching and Technique guides, available to members at cansi.ca. If you have an opinion on the content of this article, please email communications@cansi.ca.

I was out skiing with my wife and other members of the Silver Hares ski group at my home trail system at Silver Star, B.C., when the group came to the start of a long series of downhills. The tracks were firm, as was the snow, and I watched how each person approached the hill. Some of us used a half wedge with one ski in the track, while others chose to use a full braking wedge in the middle of the trail.

Out of curiosity, I set out to test whether there was a difference between the amount of braking effectiveness one gained from one technique versus the other. I also wondered if one technique was easier to perform than the other over the long downhill sections of trail. Here are my findings:



Braking Wedge – Using the braking wedge, both skis skidded firmly over the surface. Once I got into a wide wedge with my skis on their inside edges, I found that I was limited to how much more pressure I could add to the skis to help them grip the hard snow. I also found the stance to be less stable on the hard surface. The skis would sometimes deviate left or right, depending on what the edges caught on the snow surface.

Eventually I found that if I made small wedge turns, instead of just applying the braking action, this helped to reduce my speed and I felt more stable.

In performing the braking wedge, I also found that I got a pinching feeling in my hip joints the longer I applied the braking wedge action.

Half Wedge – Using the half wedge, I found I was very stable with the one ski in the track and the other one on its inside edge. I also found I could rotate the braking ski (the one outside the track) more across the fall line and shift more weight onto that ski to increase the gripping (braking) action.



The half wedge stance was very comfortable (no pinching of the hip joint), and if a change of direction occurred, the ski in the track simply followed the arc. I could easily adjust the braking action as needed to increase or decrease my speed.

Another thing I found using the half wedge was that I could turn the braking ski parallel to the one in the track and rocket down the hill and around corners. The ski in the track gets edged against the side wall of the track and the ski outside the track provides me with a wider base of support (wider stance) so that I can manage a fairly fast turn with ease.

Conclusion

I have found that I use the half wedge much more when skiing down a steep hill with firm tracks. I have greater confidence in the braking action and when I want to, I can fly around corners with confidence. Try the test yourself. Let us know what your experience is like by sending your comments to communications@cansi.ca.