



Becoming a mature mogul masher

By DAN LEETH

Updated 6:11 pm, Friday, November 4, 2011

- ASPEN, Colo. - Atop Aspen Mountain, we clip into short, fat skis. Just over 3 feet long, these twin-tipped skiboards would look trendy on a teen, but that's not us. We're a group of gray-heads for whom the term "hip" is usually followed by the word "replacement." For two of the next four days, we old dogs will use these squat skis to learn a new trick - how to navigate Aspen's bumpiest mogul runs.

"In four days, you'll eagerly be looking forward to skiing bumps," promises [Joe Nevin](#), founder of Aspen's Bumps for Boomers program. "I actually think skiing moguls is easier than groomed runs."

Nevin starts us on a series of training exercises. We make zero-momentum turns from a dead stop. We practice drifting. We turn atop targets and stop on others. Slowness, Nevin insists, is the key to getting blue hairs off blue groomers.

"If you're driving down a street, and you see a speed bump, unless you're in a rental car or had too much to drink, you're going to tap the breaks," he explains.

"In this clinic, we teach you to ski in slow motion."

We head for some small moguls and spend the rest of the day employing these slow-and-go techniques one bump at a time. By day's end, we've become fast learners at learning slowness.

Since I'm taking a clinic for oldsters, I splurged and booked accommodations at Hotel Jerome, Aspen's venerable hostelry. Opening in 1889, it rivaled the Ritz in Paris, and its lobby and rooms still exude Victorian elegance. I stop in its historical J-Bar for après-ski refreshments. Favoring local microbrews, I order a Brown Bear Ale, the only beer they carry from the nearby [Aspen Brewing Company](#).

"I'm sorry," the waitress tells me. "We're out. We'll have it tomorrow."

On our second day, we split into two groups. After reviewing techniques and tactics on easy bumps, we spend the day descending steeper and gnarlier terrain.

"This seems counterintuitive," I suggest to instructor [Alan Bush](#), "but with slower reflexes, shouldn't we grizzled geezers be skiing greenies with grandkids instead of bashing bumps?"

"Not at all," Bush argues. "Bump runs are less crowded and safer because you don't have those screaming nee-nees coming down at you. The snow is usually better, and if you ski them slowly, it can take less energy."

That seems true. After bumping it up for two days, I feel fresh enough to run a marathon, or at least saunter six blocks back to the J-Bar for a brew.

"Sorry. We'll have Brown Bear Ale tomorrow for sure," the waitress promises.

On day three, we jettison the midget mogul mashers and use our own real skis. After a review on baby bumplets, it's off to full black-diamond divots. Like a white [Buick](#) in the passing lane, I slowly work my way down the runs. Yes, old skiers never die. We just keep going downhill.

"In 1962, there were something like 4 million skier days. Lately, it's been roughly 60 million. That growth was fueled entirely by the baby boomers," Nevin argues.

"Ski areas are worried that we're getting old and going to quit, so they've turned their eyes toward younger generations. But we're not ready to hang it up yet."

Ending the day at the J-Bar, I once again order a Brown Bear Ale.

"Nope. Sorry. Tomorrow."

During the first three days, we only skied partway down Aspen Mountain. On day four, after some warm-ups, Bush asks if we're ready for something more adventurous. Of course we are.

He leads us down a black-diamond trail, crosses a blue groomer and stops at the edge of oblivion. Below falls Face of Bell, a double-black-diamond plunger some consider Aspen Mountain's signature run. The descent looks steeper than an Olympic ski jump, and the exit at the bottom looks like Greenland seen from the space shuttle.

Bush leads the way and we tailgate behind. Taking it slowly and staying in control, we over-the-hillers take the face, drifting, banking, pivoting and turning bump by bump. All too soon, we're at the bottom looking up.

"Wow, I did a double-black!" someone exclaims, beaming like a kid at Christmas. We ride the gondola back up and do several more laps down the face. At day's end, Bush's altimeter says we've covered 14,340 feet of downhill. To celebrate the feat, we adjourn to the Ajax Tavern near the gondola.

"I'll have an Aspen Brown Bear Ale," I tell the waiter.

"Sorry," he says. "We're out."

Dan Leeth is a freelance writer.

More **Information**

IF YOU GO

Bumps for Boomers Clinics

Three- and four-day Bumps for Boomers clinics are held from mid-December through mid-March with most beginning on Mondays. Both feature two full-day sessions on skiboards, which are furnished, followed by one or two days on your own skis. Cost is \$972 for the three-day clinic and \$1,296 for the four-day. Lodging, meals, equipment rental and discounted lift tickets are extra. bumpsforboomers.com

When to go

Arguably, the best time to go is early in the season, which allows participants the most time to practice and employ the techniques learned before season's end. Mid-December offers uncrowded conditions and the cheapest lodging, but snow conditions can be iffy. January typically is uncrowded and generally features good snow. February and March can be more crowded with families on spring break.

Getting to Aspen

Continental Airlines (continental.com) offers nonstop winter jet service to the Eagle County Airport from Houston. Cars can be rented for the 75-mile drive to Aspen, or Colorado Mountain Express (ridecme.com) can provide van shuttle service.

Denver International Airport is served by a host of major airlines, and vehicles can be rented from there. Follow I-70 to Glenwood Springs and take Colorado 82 into Aspen. It's a 220-mile drive.

Accommodations

Rooms at Hotel Jerome (aubergeresorts.com/hotels-resorts/hotel-jerome) start at around \$300 per night during the winter. The Aspen Chamber of Commerce (aspenchamber.org) offers a list of lodging options, and Aspen Snowmass Central Reservations (stayaspensnowmass.com) can be used to reserve lodging in Aspen. In addition to government taxes, most major Aspen hotels also hit customers up for an additional gotcha "resort fee" that can hike bills an additional \$30 per night or more.

Skiing

Aspen offers four areas, all available on the same lift ticket. The bumps classes are all held on Aspen Mountain. It features 673 acres of skiing, not one run of which is rated easy.

Snowmass is in the Roaring Fork Valley, off Colorado 82. It features 3,312 skiable acres, half of which is intermediate rated.

Aspen Highlands lies off the Maroon Creek Road. It offers 1,028 acres of skiing, and is still considered something of a locals' area in spite of the massive Ritz Carlton Club now anchoring its base area.

Buttermilk is off Colorado 82. Its 470 acres sport a bipolar personality. On one extreme, its gentle slopes provide ideal beginner slopes. On the other, it's the home of the ESPN Winter X Games with one of the top terrain parks in the country.

DAN LEETH

© Copyright 2015 Hearst Newspapers, LLC

<http://www.chron.com/life/article/Becoming-a-mature-mogul-masher-2249194.php>