

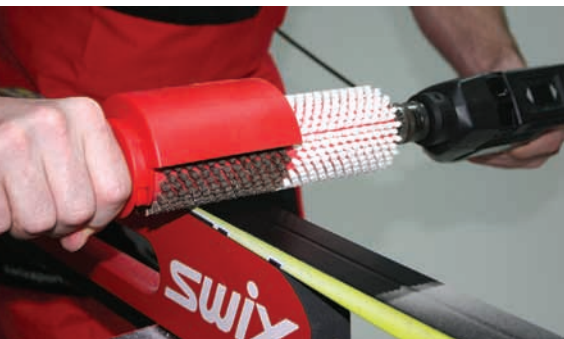


# get in

**A**RE YOU MISSING AN opportunity to make money? Ski tuning accessories seldom get much discussion during the sale of a ski package. Not only is it a lost opportunity for add-on sales, it reduces the likelihood of building a base of repeat business. A well-stocked selection of waxes and tools can help your customers enjoy their equipment more—skis turn better, slide easier, last longer—and will keep them coming back for advice and supplies...not to mention browsing the rest of your store.

Many recreational skiers, both alpine and telemark, as well as snowboarders, are intimidated by the perceived complexity of waxing bases and tuning edges. Meanwhile, veteran skiers are still using a cheap clothes iron for waxing, old files and other mediocre edging tools from days gone by. Both of these groups are prime candidates for purchasing or upgrading to newer technology that makes tuning fast and simple.

While some stores may fear that selling



tuning accessories will reduce the work that goes through their shop, the reality is they are probably capturing lost sales, making customers happier and still keeping shop techs busy. Here is a look at some of the newer products that make ski tuning less intimidating—and increase store profits.

## HOME SHOP

Everything is easier with the right tools. In the case of tuning skis, that starts with a decent bench and vise. Homeowners with



Capture *add-on sales* with the latest ski tuning accessories.

# tune

BY CLYDE SOLES

the luxury of a workshop will likely build their own bench, though you might suggest they install a T-track from a woodworking supply for easy attachment of ski vises.

For those with limited space, a portable waxing bench is a good option. Pro models from **Holmenkol**, **Swix** and **Toko** aren't always ideal because they are on the heavier side (30 to 50 pounds) and a bit spendy (\$330 or more) for most consumers. The Swix consumer model (T75, \$120) is narrower (only 12 inches), but still weighs 24 pounds.

A solid option is the Terminator Tuning Stand (\$150) from **Tools4Boards**. It weighs 13 pounds and folds small enough to stash in a closet, yet it's quite sturdy as is (optional cross braces make it totally rigid). The Terminator is a modular system, so consumers can choose from several ski vises and, if needed, supports for bike maintenance.

There are numerous ski vises with jaws available, and the biggest difference between brands is often just the color. Two-piece sets, like the Swix T0146 and Toko Universal, do not hold skis securely (important for filing edges) and may not hold skis with tapered sidewalls. Three-piece sets, such as the Swix T0149 and Toko World Cup, are a much better option and don't cost much more. Keep in mind that most vises with jaws will not fit wide powder skis, and extra platforms are required for Nordic skis.

Although they may look simple, vises that use a string to hold the binding work remarkably well with all types of skis and even snowboards. Several styles are available, including the Tools4Boards Retractor (\$90), which has a sturdy construction.

For anyone who is getting serious about track skiing, a waxing profile is an excellent investment, although it is a bit pricey (around \$140). You lay the ski on top of this form and attach it with a clamp that works with all current bindings, so the ski won't flex while tuning. Many wax companies offer it and, again, the biggest difference is the color choices.

## EDGE TUNING

Keeping steel edges in shape is one of the most important chores for skiers. For most who ski in the Western states, edge tuning is mostly a matter of repairing the damage resulting from hitting rocks. On the East Coast, skiers must also contend with so-called "packed powder," so sharp edges are also essential.

Even skiers who prefer to have shops do their ski tuning will benefit from owning a

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diamond stone. When a ski edge hits a rock, the impacted steel becomes work-hardened and is much harder than a normal file. A coarse (150 grit) diamond stone is ideal for knocking off these hard spots prior to filing. A medium (220 grit) diamond stone works well for removing burrs after sharpening. Other grit densities are for racers. DMT has the best-known diamond stones, but companies like KUU and Swix also offer their own with different patterns.

A file can be a dangerous thing for ski edges when in the hands of the inexperienced. Most laymen are better off using a specialized tool that maintains the desired angle and makes it difficult to take off too much metal. The Toko Ergo Plus (\$40) is superb for sharpening edges. Why? It fits the hand nicely, is compact enough to carry in a gear bag, and does both side and base bevels.

More advanced skiers will want one tool for sharpening the side edge and another for the base edge. These allow greater precision than any combi tool can offer. For side edges, the devices with steel roller bearings, such as the Holmenkol Ergo Profi and Toko Ergo Multi Guide (\$72), work the best and can hold either a file or a stone.

Base edge filing is much less frequent (after a stone grind and occasionally for touch-ups) and is best accomplished with a quality file and a guide to set the angle. Anyone doing their own base edge tuning should invest in a medium chrome-hardened file. For best longevity, advise customers to keep files in the case when not in use and never use for any other purpose. For consumers, the Race Place's Beast file guides (\$20 each) offer the best value. The drawback to inexpensive carbon-steel files is they're not hard enough to cut the steel edges on skis, so they wear out quickly.

For any type of filing, a file card or brush is essential to remove the gunk between teeth. A nice luxury for frequent edge work is a sidewall cutter (about \$80) that removes the extra ski material above an edge, which can clog up files.

BASE REPAIR

Rock gouges are inevitable. Melted P-tex candle wax does an adequate job on minor scrapes, but for the big rock hits that skiers can really feel when skiing,

P-tex repairs seldom last and can be unsightly.

A better solution for consumers is the KUU Pro Fix Base Repair Kit (\$40), which consists of a modified soldering iron and P-tex strips. The strips are nearly as hard as the original base material, so repairs hold up well and the clear won't have carbon residue. This system has proven to be easier, faster and less wasteful than the old school P-tex candles.

Prior to repair, ski bases need to be thoroughly cleaned—one of the few times that solvents should ever be used.

While old wax removers used harsh chemicals, citrus cleaners, like KUU's BioCitron, have become the modern alternative.

WAXING

In recent years, liquid and paste waxes have grown in popularity due to their tremendous convenience. In particular, the low fluoro waxes (typically 2 percent to 3 percent fluorocarbon content) work remarkably well in a wide range of conditions and are reasonably priced. Offerings like Maplus P2-S, Swix F4 and Toko Express are ideal to carry in a gear bag for quick wax jobs that

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Remember to share this caveat with customers: The easier a wax goes on, the faster it wears off. The low fluoro spray or paste waxes tend to last a bit longer than plain paraffin (hydrocarbon) equivalents that rarely stay on for a day, but they don't compare to a proper hot wax that penetrates deep into the ski base. Tell customers these easy-on waxes are a great way to extend the time between hot waxes, but are not a replacement.

There's the possibility that your customers will be befuddled by hot waxing, particularly if they look at a rack of multiple colors with lots of mumbo-jumbo about fluorine content. For the vast majority of recreational skiers, the basic paraffin universal waxes do a commendable job. To step them up a notch, suggest low fluoro universals for improved performance (wider temperature range, better resistance to dirt, etc.) at a minimal cost increase.

Surprisingly, a number of people continue to wax their skis with inexpensive clothes irons, arguing that they work just fine and anything else is a waste of money. Not so. Compared to a true waxing iron, a clothes iron has higher heat output

(typically 1,000-1,500 watts versus 400-800 watts), thinner bases that don't spread heat as evenly, and less accurate thermostats.

For less than \$60, skiers can purchase a proper waxing iron for skis that will more evenly heat bases without oxidizing the P-tex, won't melt structure they paid to get from a stonegrind, or put out hazardous smoke. Better yet, consumer models, such as the Holmenkol Smart Waxer and Toko Wax Mouse, are compact for travel and greatly reduce the amount of wax used due to the smaller size and lack of holes.

Pro irons for racers who use high-fluorocarbon waxes, like the Holmenkol Racing and Swix T73, have thicker bases and more sensitive thermostats. Ranging in price from about \$110 to \$265, they work great but are more than most recreational downhill skiers need.

One of the best investments a dedicated skier can make is a Toko Scraper Sharpener (\$30). It seems superfluous at first, but plastic scrapers soon lose their edge and fixing them with a file is easier said than done. Do your customers a favor and sell Plexiglas scrapers that are 4 mm or 5 mm thick. The 3 mm (1/8 inch) scrapers are

poor substitutes due to flex.

After scraping, the last step to prepping skis is using a brush to remove excess wax and open the base structure. This isn't just for racers, everyone benefits. The bigger the brush, the faster this goes. For most skiers, a 5-inch-by-3-inch rectangular nylon brush (around \$20) is adequate for all their needs. If someone is maintaining a quiver of skis for the family, a larger oval brush with a hand-strap will make life easier. KUU Hand Brushes (\$40) are particularly nice due to the adjustable hand-straps.

Serious skiers who place a premium on time will want a roto-brush that attaches to an electric drill. The Red Creek Single Axle Handle and a Toko Nylon Grey Rotary Brush (\$110) make a great combo for most non-race applications. Swix offers a similar system (\$120) that allows slightly easier swapping of brushes.

Armed with this information, you're ready to ramp up your accessories section and make your register sing.

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