Tech Tips - Summer Gear Hibernation or A Little TLC Goes a Long Way

Contributed by Jack Moore

Summer storage and tuning tips from Jack Moore, founder of Tognar Toolworks.

For most, the backcountry ski season has slowed to a trickle or drawn to a close. In a sport where the performance of your equipment can literally make or break your day, proper maintenance and care can prove critical.

Tweaking and tuning throughout the season is a no-brainer but setting up your gear for summer hibernation is often overlooked. Here’s a checklist to help ensure top-flight performance when you take it from storage to the slopes next season.

Check binding mounting screws to make sure they haven’t loosened up during the season. These usually require a #3 Pozidrive screwdriver on ski bindings, and a #3 Phillips and/or Pozidrive screwdriver on snowboard bindings.

Check ski and snowboard topsheets for dings and nicks. If large enough to expose underlying fiberglass layers or core material—such as wood or foam, fill them using a two-part epoxy or urethane glue (to which you can also add color pigments to better match topsheet cosmetics). Slightly overfill any dings or nicks, then let the glue set up and dry thoroughly before removing any excess with a small flat-blade chisel. Finish up using 220 to 400 grit sandpaper, along with a sanding block, to blend the repair in.

Apply a layer of paste wax (offered by all major wax companies) to ski and snowboard topsheets and sidewalls to protect them like car polish protects the finish of your auto. This can also help deter unwanted snow buildup on topsheets, and provide faster glide along sidewalls as well.

Inspect sidewalls for dings, cracks or delaminations. If you see dings, repair them the same way as topsheets. If you see cracked sidewalls or edge delaminations, consult with a shop, since hidden structural damage may have been sustained.

Check bases for gouges and scratches. If they’re deep enough to be easily detectable with your fingernail, fill ‘em with base repair material (small wood burning-type irons and p-tex string or ribbon are available to make very durable repairs at home), or go to a shop for help. This is especially critical when underlying fiberglass or core material is exposed, since water can then penetrate and cause deeper damage when it freezes.

Check bases for flatness and appropriate structure. Snow can be unmercifully abrasive—especially icy corn and glacial snow, and grind away base material like sandpaper. Use a true bar to check base flatness (there should be little or no concavity/convexity), and check the base structure. If you can't detect it visually or with your fingernail, it may need refreshing. Likewise, if you've switched to a coarser structure for wetter spring snows, you may want to re-establish a finer structure for next winter's cold snows. There are several hand base-flattening tools and structure tools to handle these tasks at home, or take your gear to a good shop for a stonegrind.

Snow abrades steel edges as well as base material, so check to make sure your base edge bevel angle hasn't increased due to wear, and that the side edge bevel angle is still correct. Both base and side edge surfaces should be clean, deburred and polished. You can do this at home with a bevel guide, file, and stones, or have it done at a shop.

Your bases pick up a surprising amount of dirt during the season; especially in spring when accumulated dust, cinders, pollen, grooming machine lubricants and other gunk in the snow resurfaces with a fury. Dirt creates drag and robs you of speed, so it needs to be cleaned out. The best way to clean bases is by hot-scraping. Use a wax iron to heat a liberal amount of hydrocarbon base prep wax (offered by all major wax companies) into the base, and then immediately scrape it off using a plastic scraper. This pulls out dirt and old wax from the deepest recesses of the base. Repeat this process until no discoloration or darkness is visible in the wax scrapings, then use a soft brass brush to clean out the base structure. Now your base is truly clean.

Hot wax bases by applying a generous coat of hydrocarbon base prep wax using a wax iron, but don't scrape it off. It's okay if some wax dribbles over side edges since this helps deter rust. Come next winter, you'll scrape this storage wax off to reveal a clean, well-nourished base that's ready to ride.

Safely stow your gear for summer hibernation by strapping skis securely together and storing skis and snowboards in a bag or clean area where they'll be safe from dirt and handling abuse. Avoid extremely hot or cold storage if possible…room temperature is ideal.

Boot Maintenance

Pull liners and footbeds out of boot shells and let everything dry thoroughly before reassembling. Check buckle mounting screws or rivets for tightness. Buckle boots snugly to maintain good boot-shell form and store them in a clean, dry place—also out of the reach of mice or other critters who might otherwise nest or dine on liners!

Over the course of the season, tools get dirty and worn. Now's a good time to inspect, replace or clean them (see below).

Properly used and cared for, most tools will deliver a long life of trusty service and precise tuning performance.

A Clean Tool is a Happy Tool

- Ceramic Stone: scrub gently with a brass toothbrush, using Ajax or Comet cleanser with water (or vinegar and water) to cut away grime.

- Diamond Stone: scrub gently with a nylon toothbrush and a splash of wax remover or lighter fluid until shiny clean.

- Steel File: clean teeth frequently with a steel or brass brush. Some tuners also rub a little chalk into file teeth occasionally to help deter residue build-up.

- Plastic Scraper: frequently wipe away any excess wax build-up and resharpen using a flat pansar file, drywall sanding screen, or scraper sharpening tool.

- Steel Scraper: occasionally file the cutting edge with a flat file, deburr with a stone, then impart a fine uniform burnish along one edge using a burnishing tool.

- Base Repair Iron or Pistol: clean the application tip (warm, not hot) with an old scotchbrite pad.

- Riller Bars/Structure Tools: clean out teeth and ridges on structure bars/blades using a bronze or brass wax brush.

- Hot Wax Irons: wipe off wax and dirt from the bottom of warm iron (not hot) with a soft clean rag, shop towel or fiberlene paper. Store in an upright position.

- Scotchbrite, Fibertex, Omni-Prep Pads: Rinse pads under hot water (180°F.) to melt away old wax.

- Wax Brushes: Clean away old wax build-up with hot water, or let stand briefly in a shallow pan of base cleaning solvent.

Note: Jack Moore is the founder of Tognar Toolworks, a worldwide purveyor of ski & snowboard tuning tools & waxes.

He welcomes your ideas and feedback at tools@tognar.com.

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