

Course Setting for Telemark Races

By Tory Hauser, USTSA Events Director

There has been a major change in the way that modern alpine race courses are being set due to changes in equipment and the use of more shaped skis. This change is also affecting the way telemark courses are set since most setters have an alpine background. Unfortunately the difference in the turning radius of alpine skiers and telemark skiers has grown farther apart with the use of today's skis and utilizing modern alpine courses does not make a telemark racer look proficient as they skid, steer and chatter down the hill. It has become much easier for an alpine racer to load the tips of their skis and utilize that pressure to initiate a clean, tight arc. Even though telemark racers are using the same racing skis as their alpine counterparts, the inability to generate the same tip pressure and the need to keep the body position farther back to maintain a proper telemark, makes carving the same arc impossible. Therefore a telemark race course should be set with less offset than an alpine course given similar hill characteristics.

How to set the turning section of a telemark race course

The GS courses and GS sections of the Classic and Sprint Classic should follow the basic rules for gate to gate distance as is used in alpine courses. The distance between gates should be 22-28 meters vertically with 25 meters being ideal for telemark racing. I always measure when setting a course and have found some of the best setters also measure. Course setting is an art unto itself and it takes lots of practice to become good at it. I have witnessed some very excellent course setters who are so naturally talented that they never have to measure, but these people are the exception, not the rule. I set a GS course using my 183 skis and use 14 ski lengths to come up with a 25 meter set. As a general rule the offset should be 5-7 meters horizontally. Last year at some of the World Cup races we were seeing offset as much as 9-10 meters without extending the gate to gate distance. This causes huge chatter marks to develop as racers struggle to get across the hill and in many cases racers fall down or lose a ski in the process. These sections were typically set on the steeper pitches or just as the course changes from a flatter to a steeper section. A course set like this also makes the telemark racer look bad as they struggle to hold the telemark turn and not get a penalty. These were some of the best racers in the world, not novices with little course inspection experience or tactical prowess. A well-set course will allow the racer to push their limits while still maintaining the elegance and fluidity that the telemark is known and judged for. The offset should always vary depending on the pitch of the hill and should still be enough to challenge the entire field. It should also be used to control speed so that a course is not deemed dangerous. It is important to set rhythmic sections as well as changing the rhythm to match the terrain.

For the telemark coach, it is important to measure the courses that are being set and watch what the different sets do to your athletes. That way the telemark racer will become more aware of what they can do tactically at a given race section, become more confident by understanding the set and attack the hill.