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Skiing better at 90: Vail resident uses lessons to improve his technique

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VAIL — When Harvey Simpson was 80, he started getting nervous about his future as a skier. Realizing that one bad fall could end his days on the snow for good, he made a decision to reduce the chances of that happening by becoming a better skier.

"I decided, in order to avoid that I'd better ski correctly," Simpson said.

Simpson is a veteran of both World War II and the Korean War. He started skiing in New York in 1954 after he got out of the Navy, and he skied hard.

"I used to be wild out there," he said.

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"The doctors say you gotta keep active. Well, I say you'd better keep moving. Skiing all day is a big part of that." Harvey Simpson

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These days, he's 90 years old, skiing on two new hips and he resides at the Sonnenalp as their only permanent resident. Skiing as a lifestyle is very important to his goals in longevity.

"The doctors say you gotta keep active," Simpson says. "Well, I say you'd better keep moving. Skiing all day is a big part of that."

LEARNING BY IMITATION

Also for Simpson, a robust social environment exists on the mountain. Simpson is easily recognizable for his compact posture on skis, and has many friends which he makes plans to ski with or happens to meet on the mountain.

Chris Anthony is one of those ski buddies. The Warren Miller movie star got to know Simpson through the Sonnenalp's ski club and admired him for his dedication to the sport and the routine it generated.

"Every day he walks from the Sonnenalp, up Bridge Street, goes up and gets his skis from Vista Bahn Ski Rentals, grabs his gear and heads out," Anthony said. "It's been quite a therapy for him, and I've actually watched him get younger as the years go on."

Simpson credits Vail ski instructor Gunnar Moberg for improving his technique throughout the years and contributing to that younger appearance on the slopes.

"He's light on the skis, with good rhythm," Moberg said. "He was a wonderful student."

Simpson said he learned by mimicking Moberg's movements.

"Talking to me was not working," Simpson said. "I'd ski behind him about 10 feet ... seeing what he was doing as we skied down the mountain, and if I didn't feel right I'd see where he has his hands, where he has his head, his knees and everything else."

Simpson had a few hundred day seasons while working with Moberg.

"I think the last time I skied 100 days I maybe took two or three falls the whole year," Simpson said. "And that made me feel pretty good, because I didn't want to break anything. The recovery when you get over 80 is a long time, and a lot of people quit after they get hurt. And I didn't want to quit."

'IMPROVE YOUR TECHNIQUE'

Simpson did catch an edge and take a bad fall a few seasons ago. He broke his helmet, broke his glasses and received two black eyes.

"But I didn't break any bones," he said. "And I was very thankful for that."

The incident made him think about his form.

"I just felt, hey, improve your technique and don't fall," he said.

Improve his technique, he has.

"The technique became so good, I felt a lot more comfortable," he said of his time on snow with Moberg.

Simpson has skied more than 50 days so far this season and plans to get as many more as he can. He often takes top to bottom ski runs on Vail Mountain without stopping. In the summer, he tries to go on hikes as often as possible.

"I swim every other day at the Sonnenalp, I use the gym there," he said. "My legs are good, for my age."

Anthony says he expects Simpson's foundation and technique will keep him on the snow for years to come.

"If you're doing it correctly ... there is no stress on the body," Anthony said. "But it's really important to have that lesson, and just go look and see on video how you are skiing."

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Ski Resort	24 HR	48 HR	Base
Vail Mountain	0"	1"	44"
Beaver Creek	0"	1"	50"
Breckenridge	0"	3"	59"
Copper Mountain	0"	4"	67"
Keystone	0"	5"	53"
Arapahoe Basin	0"	4"	63"

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