

HARALD HARB'S PRIMARY MOVEMENTS TEACHING SYSTEMS SKI CLINIC
Submitted By Jerry Garwick

I attended the Harb Primary Movements Teaching System (PMTS) Blue/Dark Blue Clinic at Copper Mountain Colorado from Dec 4th to the 8th 2006. I believe that one-week clinics are the best way to improve your skiing. I have over the years attended two other (non Harb) one-week clinics and I liked them because my instructors got to know me and could build on each new day from the previous one. Conversely, when I took one-day lessons spaced weeks apart I rarely got the same instructor. In addition, I have found that each instructor has a different approach on how to get his or her point across. I have been confused by this variance.

So just who is this Harald Harb guy? I suggest that everyone check out his extensive web site at harbskisystems.com. In it you will find out that Harald has just about done it all in the world of North American skiing. He has raced, taught and coached at all levels in both Canada and the US, been on the PSIA Demonstration team, and during this entire time devised his system of teaching skiers of all levels how to ski better. I became acquainted with him when my wife won his book (Anyone Can Be An Expert Skier) at our Club's monthly door prize drawing.

It made so much sense to me that I followed that up with several years of Maria Fermoile's PreSki Conditioning classes and a private lesson with her. Maria is one of Harb's instructors and a Fresno Ski Club member.

[\[editors note: articles written by Maria Fermoile can be found under "instruction" on the Fresno Ski Club web site.\]](#)

Now let me explain what Harb's Primary Movements are. The first is the proper tipping of the skis. The second is the appropriate flexion of the legs. The third is properly moving the skis back and/or forth under your body. In addition, there are a number of secondary movements regarding body movements and balance. Note that the operative word is "Movements" and not "Positions." Harb believes that during skiing the body constantly moves through dynamic changes and if a skier assumes a static position at any time, the game is over. He emphasizes that with these proper movements the new carved skis will turn themselves. All physical stress should be off the skier by not attempting to force-turn the skis with any part of the body.

About 30 other skiers throughout the US joined me during Harb's Blue/Dark Blue Clinic. We were split up in groups of no more than 6 according to our abilities and previous experiences with a Harb Clinic. I ended up with five other skiers of "expert" ability. We all had the same goal of skiing black slopes when conditions were "gnarly". Only one in my group had taken a Clinic before. Our ages varied from early 30's to late 60's. Not to my surprise, our instructor started us on the flat snow at the bottom of the mountain. But much to my surprise, the most advanced group who all wanted to boogie the moguls and go off-piste was right next to us going over the same basics.

Let me say a few things about Harald's instructors. There is only a hand-full of them in the world and Harald carefully selects all. They all have been thoroughly instructed in the PMTS method by Harald and all teach exactly the same way. They generally have a vast experience in coaching racers on the Canadian and US nation level. Another common thread is an extensive background in biomechanics. Through this knowledge they all know how each part of the body effects the movement of the skis. They all teach through positive feedback rather than by criticism. Each of them carried a video camera to permit every student to visually observe what they are doing, both right and wrong. By sharing these videos, the instructors got to know every skier in the Clinic. This is important, because each group got a new instructor on Thursday.

My first two mornings were spent with our instructor, Maria, essentially with drills on either flat snow or green slopes. I needed to undo some very bad habits that I had developed over the years and to get familiar with the Primary Movements. It required me to forget my skier's ego and begin as if I were a beginner skier, which I really was with the PMTS program. We worked on balance on the uphill and downhill ski and on both the inside and outside edges. We forced our bodies into twists and turns that I had forgotten since kindergarten. I was constantly forced to avoid two of my worse habits of leaning into the slope and being on the flat of my inside turning ski which created a knock knee position.

Each day began around 8:45 and we were off the mountain at 12:30. But the class did not end at that time. We joined our instructor after the class to observe the videos of ourselves. By the end of the third day, we could really begin to see what we needed to do to get with the program. And by the end of the week each of us could "expertly" critique the other skiers in our group. That skill may not been a good thing, because we became "little instructors" to each other!

On Thursday we were blessed when Harald, "The Man," joined us. He let Maria continue instructing and took each of us aside for individual lessons. He has the gift of synthesizing a solution for every problem. His techniques for correction are always in the form of positive change and never a comment on what the skier is doing wrong. He is so charismatic that I could only compare the experience to dreaming about taking batting practice with Ted Williams when I was a kid. One guy in my group commented that he felt that he had just joined a cult! This was the day that I made the big breakthrough in just what I was suppose to be doing and how it should feel.

As an aside, I had been skiing on new boots that had been giving me a constant pain. I had previously seen three boot fitters and had five adjustments. When I came in to the lodge after the class on Thursday I commented to Maria that my right boot was still killing my metatarsal bones and I still needed to have the boot stretched. Marie called Harald over for his opinion and in about one minute of observation he stated that the problem was not with my boot shell but with my boot's foot bed. He told Marie to build up the metatarsal support and soften the instep and then, and only then, would I have instant relief. She had that done and, like magic, the boot was cured. I could not believe Harald's ability to instantly spot the problem and know the cure. Harb is a huge believer

in custom fitted foot beds and correct canting of the boot's soles to match a skier's legs. Read about this on his web site. In the future when I buy a new pair of boots I am going to go to his shop in Colorado and have the boots fitted by his crew (and get in a few days of skiing!). My advice for serious skiers is to pay the few extra bucks and have it done right. World Cup skiers do exactly this through their faith in him. The best, and cheapest, time to do this is during a clinic.

On Thursday our new instructor, Max, joined us. He had seen the videos taken by Maria and began with us, once again, on the flats at the bottom of the mountain. Max has spent his life as a racer on the Canadian Junior National team and as a coach for various Canadian teams. Through his background with racers he had a slightly different perspective on feedback to each of us. Frequently a simple comment like "force the cheek of your butt uphill" helped me get into a more positive balanced position. He emphasized that he wanted to see nothing but the bottom of my skies as I carved through my "high C" turns. I worked on my balance by simultaneously turning my upper body and leaning forward to keep my body over my skies rather than leaning into the slope. I kept working on staying on the outside edges of both skis (hard to imagine and harder to do) as I transitioned during the millisecond required into each turn. I began to suck my feet up to my body during the transition and not to rise up during this phase. When Harald joined us that morning and gave me praise, and when Max "high-fived" me I felt like my chest would burst with pride.

When the clinic ended on Friday I stated to Max that the week with the PMTS crew was the best \$500 I had ever spent. My other expenses were group tickets for \$30 a day and my share of a two-bedroom condo at \$280 each. We ate about half of our meals in the condo. The week turned out quite reasonable, especially when compared to similar clinics throughout the world. Of course I fell in love with a new pair of skis that Harald let me demo, but that is another story. I really did need new skis, didn't I?

Two other members of the Fresno Ski Club joined me for the Harb Clinic. Ask Dr Jim Walters and Robert Heisdorf about their experience. Incidentally, "Dr. Jim" was in my group and when Harald joined our class on Thursday he immediately began calling him "Jimmy." Talk about an instant new friend! Dr. Jim was beaming with pride over his close friendship that had just been made.

What is the future going to be for me? I will spend this winter skiing with Dr. Jim, Robert Heisdorf, and Pat Mayfield (who is also very familiar with the PMTS method) and constantly request feedback. I do not want to drift into any old habits now that I have improved to where I am. I am going to IMMEDIATELY sign up for the next year's Harb Blue/Dark Blue Clinic at the same time/same place as this year's. This class fills up so fast that if you do not act early, you will be on a waiting list. I invite everyone who can get a week off in early December 2007 to join me in what will be the greatest week, GUARANTEED, of your skiing experience!