

Preparing your skis for the Coast Outdoors Payak.

So, you've been training to participate in the Payak since December or earlier.....maybe since the day after last year's Payak. Your body's ready, but are your skis? Here are some quick tips to help you get the most help from your skis. Knowing the work that goes into helping junior Nordic athletes' skis perform at the top level, I am always shocked how little effort some masters racers are willing to put into their personal skis, how unwilling they are to invest a bit of extra cash in their race day performance. At Coast Outdoors, we hear statements like, "I'm just in it for fun, I don't care how fast I go", or "I'm not that good, it won't make a difference" or "I don't want to invest that kind of money to buy high end wax."

What does Good Glide do for you?

#1 Your skis will accelerate faster downhill and will respond more quickly to your power input.

#2 You can maintain gliding speeds with less effort, as your skis will run more freely.

#3 When you hit the hills you will travel further uphill before you slow down with each stride. In rolling terrain, you will carry your speed up and over the little hills.

"You don't know what you don't know"

Unless you have experienced how nicely a well waxed pair of skis glide it's hard to appreciate the benefits. Once you have had nice running skis it's hard to go back.

Rules of Thumb

In general, try to wax your skis as frequently as possible. That means once every 10 - 30 km. Some people think one wax job a year is enough. This is not the case. Skiing on unwaxed skis is like riding a bike with flat tires.

Rule of Thumb #2

Generally, the easier the glide wax is to apply, the less durable it will be. Vauhti liquid waxes have come on the market with new and improved liquid waxes, but these are meant as a supplement to hot waxing, not as a replacement.

Getting your skis race ready

I'm not going to go through all the steps of glide waxing your skis, brushing, ironing, scraping, brushing. This is just an overview of the wax recipe.

SWIX Wax

Swix is a great wax brand. You will always see it as the status quo in wax rooms at big provincial and national races. Certainly, there are many other brands that work well, and waxing nerds will have their favourites and will refer to various obscure brands as you would refer to a fine wine. However, these rare waxes are not always easy to find, sometimes costly and the benefits of one brand over the other can be measured in fractions of a percent.

CH, LF and HF

Every brand will usually have three different qualities of wax. We'll carry on with the bike tire analogy.

CH = "Hydro Carbon" is the basic, least expensive wax. If you are interested in saving money, you will achieve this, but you are not going to see anything special. CH is like your beach cruiser bike tire.

LF = Low Fluoro. Fluoro carbon is what repels moisture and helps your skis glide. LF is a great wax for training. LF is like your commuter bike tire.

HF = High Fluoro. This is your race wax, and will help turn your skis in to rockets. HF is like your carbon road bike tires.

Temperatures Ranges

The numbers following CH, LF or HF refer to the temperature ranges for Swix the numbers go from 4 for the coldest temperature to 10 for the warmest. For example, Swix LF8 is +4 to -4 Celsius. Other brands will have varying temperature ranges and grading systems. Toko uses colours.

Base Wax Swix LF 5

For a 15, 30 or 50 km race you want the wax to last as long as possible. Assuming you have kept your skis waxed on a regular basis, make your skis race ready by first applying a colder base wax. Let's say race day temperature will be -6 Celsius, a suitable base wax would be something like a Swix LF5 -8 to -15. Waxes for colder conditions are harder, and gives your "Wax of the Day" (WOD) something to stick to and using this harder base wax will dramatically increase the durability of your WOD. Obviously if temperatures are colder you will use a base wax for colder conditions.

Wax of the Day - Go HF

Yep HF waxes are expensive, but they will really increase your gliding speeds. People have a hard time coughing \$90 for 40 grams of glide wax, but I like to rationalize it this way - 40 grams will cover 10-15 pairs of skis. That's \$6 - \$10 per wax job. You've spent a lot of sweat-equity preparing for this race. Treat yourself to a pair of great gliding skis that will reduce your time on the race course. Doing the Payak is fun, but let's face it, you suffer out there. Waxing your skis with HF will reduce the suffering and increase the pleasure, especially as you blast by somebody who just used a basic CH wax. (Oh Yeah! Once you have put all this wax on your skis, you want to take it all off. Scrape first, then brush, brush, brush.)

Selecting the temperature range

Again, assuming race day temperatures are -6 Celsius, you could shoot for a Swix glider like HF7 for -2 to -8. At Whistler Olympic Park I have found that the snow tends to be coarse and often I will use the next coldest temperature range, like HF6 for -5 to -10. But you can also keep it simple, race day air temperatures should fall within the middle of your selected wax.

Top Coat

If you are going "all-in" you need Top Coat. Whereas fluoro glide waxes have a percentage of fluoro-carbon, Top Coats are "pure fluoro". Think Tesla's "Ludicrous Mode." Top Coat comes in 3 forms. Liquid, Solid and Powder. Remember Rule of Thumb #2. Forget about liquid as it is mostly used for sprint races. Solids are not cheap but they are economical because a block will last for 50+ pairs of skis. Solids are great for events up to about 10 to 15 km. If you are doing a 30 km or 50 km race, you want to use powders.

The Full Meal Deal

Structure will be the creme de la creme. In wet moist conditions structure can be hugely beneficial. This is done with a structure tool that imprints a pattern onto the base. It's good to have a friend with the tool. In short, the wetter the conditions the coarser a structure you want to use.

This is obviously a quick overview, I'm always amazed how good skiers will use lousy or even no wax. If this is all too overwhelming, bring your skis to us and we'll do the full meal deal for \$100. Or feel to call and ask questions.

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