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Spring shopping for bargains in ski equipment

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By Bob Cox

Looking at the racks of skis available for demo or rental at Killington, Vt., I was struck by the changes in the way we make decisions about skis and other equipment.

The width of the ski is a starting point, but hardly the only consideration. Since the advent of shaped skis, we have been given more and more options. Twin tips or Rockers? Wide underfoot, or a more hourglass shape? Super wide in the shovel?

Free ride or freestyle? Do you plan to spend the day in the terrain parks – that rarely includes those with shades of gray in the hairline – or are you looking for an all-mountain ski?

My first question to the shop employee is always the same: What would you recommend for the conditions on this mountain today?

I figure the shop employee has been out on the hill in the last day or two, knows the mountain, and knows what most folks are enjoying. He knows that the snow is primarily man-made, the surface will become hard as the day progresses, and that any storm will produce only a couple of inches. In short, we'll be happier on a ski that offers a solid base in typical eastern conditions. In this case, the recommendation of a Rossignol Experience 88 was a good one.

Even on trips around the West, asking the advice of the shop employee is a good start, although weather might be more likely to produce the need for a wider powder ski if you happen to be in British Columbia when the skies open for a major dump.