

## **A female slant on tackling the slopes**

A flirtatious instructor might make learning to ski more fun, but there's a course in Colorado that takes women skiers more seriously

*By Rhiannon Batten*

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It was like something from a cheesy advert. Icing-sugared pine trees prickled in the mountain air. Powdery balls of cloud, backlit by the sun, bobbed in the sky and, on the ground, were great foamy carpets of snow. As I wobbled on skis, for almost the first time, the local ski-god swooshed past. With time for no other greeting than a cheeky smile, he sped off downhill at a frighteningly fast pace.

"Wow! Now, that's how I want to ski!" I enthused to my companion, Herta Van Olssen. But Herta, who's been skiing for 45 years, knew better. "No you don't!" she scolded. "He may be fast but wouldn't you rather look good than go fast?"

Which is, apparently, what most women skiers want. And Herta should know. This tiny ski instructor, probably the oldest on the slope and certainly the only one not wearing shockingly snug ski pants, was nothing short of an inspiration. I'd come to Beaver Creek in Colorado to learn to ski and, after a couple of days in standard ski school, I booked a lesson with Herta.

Herta is part of the "Her Turn" ski programme at Vail Resorts. For around £45 you get three hours of excellent instruction, alone or with a group, specifically tailored to women. Clomping across Beaver Creek's heated pavements and through its sugary alpine architecture to meet Herta, I wondered whether "Her Turn" would really just mean "Skiing For Softies".

Thankfully, it didn't. Although Herta couldn't have been more pleasant, it was made very clear that I was here to learn and not to catch up on the latest in ski fabrics. The basis of "Her Turn" is anatomy; put brutally, women tend to have big bums and therefore sit too far back on their skis.

The solution starts with equipment. The first thing a "Her Turn" lesson involves is a trip to the local ski-hire shop to try on skis and find those that best suit your physique and purpose. If you are really sitting back, you can even get special ski boots that are cut lower and have insoles to help nudge your weight forward.

Next comes technique. To help me put a hint of style into my skiing, Herta told me to imagine wedging a tomato between my shin and the ski boot. As I practised turning, I had to imagine gradually squeezing the tomato and, finally, squashing it altogether. Glamorous? No. But effective.

From focusing on the balance of weight on my toes to skiing without poles (but with embarrassing arm movements), Herta ran through lots of other techniques that explained, in feeling, the point she was making with words. By the end of the session, my skiing had improved dramatically.

Herta's patient explanation had done a lot more for my skiing than the strong, silent (male) instructor I'd met the day before ("The snow's really soft here, so don't worry about falling, just follow me!"). As did the fact that there was no flirting to get in the way of teaching and learning.

If you're a woman with cash, the amenities don't stop on the slopes. From the Allegria Spa at the Hyatt, which offers a £50 "For Women Only" workout, designed to prevent osteoporosis and PMT, to the free tampons provided in the lavatories on the slopes, female skiers are encouraged at Beaver Creek.

Of course, you don't really need female-only instruction to get fit or to learn to ski. But, if you want to look good while you're going downhill fast, I'd recommend them.

- Rhiannon Batten travelled as a guest of Seasons in Style (0151-342 0505; [www.seasonsinstyle.co.uk](http://www.seasonsinstyle.co.uk)), which offers seven-night packages at the Hyatt Regency in Beaver Creek from £1,030 per person, including Gatwick-Denver flights on British Airways, transfers and accommodation. For more information on Her Turn, call (001)970.476.3239