

## A Snowboarder's Survival Guide to Riding the Bumps

Text and photos by K.C. GANDEE

“S eriously? We’re going to ride down that?” I could barely hear my buddy Josh’s words over my own heavy breathing. It was 1998 and we were staring down Couloir Extreme at Blackcomb, British Columbia. We peered over the edge where the slope changed in a heartbeat from flat as a board to 45 degrees and littered with moguls.



Huge moguls, small moguls, medium moguls . . . all moguls. It’d been a week since fresh snow had fallen on this pitch and it was a death zone of bumps and troughs. 1,000 vertical feet of them, with no break in the madness.

“We didn’t come all this way to ride blue groomers, did we?” I called back as I scoped my line.

Neither of us talked about how terrified we were, but in our home shredding grounds of Virginia, moguls were optional. That is, if there were moguls to be found at all. In fact, the closest we usually came to moguls was a big “crowd pleaser” jump in the spring when the landing zone turned into a series of bombed out craters.

We looked over the edge of the couloir for 15 minutes, though it felt like an hour. Finally, we dropped in. I’ve never taken such a beating as I did that day on that slope. A newly minted Level I instructor at the time, I didn’t have any idea what would happen when I dropped in . . . nor that I could have prepared for that terrain at my home mountain, even if I didn’t have moguls.

Luckily, this doesn’t need to happen to you or your students. Heed the following advice from some of the best in the business and you’ll be dialing the bumps—whether off-piste, in the woods, or down the zipper line—in no time flat. Or, at least not flat on your back. By the way, this article addresses tactics that

As part of a solid bump run, Joe Jones has lined up his snowboard with a banked line through this section of moguls.

two different riders use in the bumps. As conditions change, tactics may change. Remember that there is no single way to ride. Different strokes for different folks, conditions, and situations.

#### THE BANKED SLALOM LINE

Moguls can form anywhere on the mountain, so riders need to be prepared for them. "The glades create some of the best bump riding because of multiple people taking the same lines to avoid trees or other obstacles," says AASI Snowboard Team member Eric Rolls. "Oftentimes the bumps in the woods are actually a series of banked turns."

To ride this type of bump, Rolls uses an edge angle that nearly matches the bank of the snow. But the success of the turn happens in the approach. "With full, C-shaped turns in these banked areas, it's best to approach slightly across the fall line to line your board up to the entrance of the curve," he advises.

Once your board is lined up with the curve and matched to the snow, you just need to get your body inside the bank and hang on. Line is critical for this kind of bumped banked slalom.

An easy way to practice this type of bump riding is to find a section of steep, groomed pitch. Lay down a nice round track for your students to follow. Begin with easy, wide, long turns. Then have the riders focus on matching their board's line to yours, specifically at the beginning of the new turn. As you progress down the hill, make the turns tighter, especially at the beginning.

To match your turn shape, the riders will need to move their hips farther and faster into the new turn. Be sure to look for these movements and provide adequate feedback. On the groomed slope, the rider should tip the board higher and higher from the snow to create the sharp turns. Another option

Photos 1-3: Ted Fleischer has aligned his upper body with the direction of the fall line in the belly of this turn. His body and board complete the turn, then he rotates his shoulders into the new turn/direction of the fall line from a flexed stance.



## SNOWBOARD



is to keep the edge angle low and skid the turns around.

Once you take these movements into the woods, the riders will make similar movements with the hips, but the board should match the slope of the banked turn. Though the same focus on line and movements work, the turns end up being much quieter as the riders now guide the slide through the banked turn instead of creating big angles between the board and snow.

The sound of the turn can be great feedback for riders at this point. Let them know that a loud turn means something isn't right and they should ask you for feedback. A loud turn likely

**By extending the legs through the turn, the rider will be able to flex again at the end of the turn to absorb impact.**

means they're getting on their edge late.

Just as you did before on the groomed pitch, set up in the bumps by laying down a line for your riders to follow. "Having loose ankles will allow the board to flatten to the banked surface" says Rolls. On the groomers, riders will need to stay strong in the ankles

to make the turns happen, so be sure to keep an eye for this difference once you move into the bumps.

### THE HIGH AND OUTSIDE LINE

Tom Vickery, who coaches AASI examiners in Eastern Division, also enjoys riding the bumps in this manner—



**Shaun Cattanach hammers through these bumps by absorbing—letting his legs flex as they contact a bump.**

To practice this skill, help riders first master “softening” both legs at the completion phase of a turn, as the board points across the fall line. Although many riders travel through the bumps by actively loading and releasing the board, Vickery lets gravity load the board (a more passive option) as he moves downhill and into the bumps. By letting his legs soften, his hips move downhill over the board and into the new turn naturally, with little or no effort. This movement blend is more nimble than the active and powerful “load and release” approach.

The best terrain on which to master this skill is a small spine or mini-pipe often found in terrain gardens. Have the students try to keep their head and shoulders at the same distance off the snow while softening their legs and letting the board come up over the spine or the lip of the mini-pipe.

As the riders become comfortable with these movements, instruct them to add a slight rotation of the upper body into a new turn at the peak of the spine, when their legs are the shortest. This move will align the rider’s shoulders with the fall line and create the tension with which the rider turns his or her legs and board through the next turn.

Remember, this is a subtle movement—you’re not trying to have riders fully separate their upper and lower bodies. Rather, you want the riders to create a tension in their core, which will assist the start of the new turn and allow the lower body to catch up.

#### **TAIL SHIFT**

Another key to Vickery’s success in the bumps is fore/aft movement over the board through the turn. “I like to put a lot of weight on the tail of the board by extending my legs while moving my mass back over the tail,” he says. “When I do this, it allows for an easier recovery if I end up becoming late and crashing into a bump.”



what he calls the “high and outside line.” For Vickery, it’s important to find a more neutral body position in the control phase of the turn. “That way, if I need to make an emergency move while my board is pointed down the fall line, I have it (i.e., the necessary range of motion),” says Vickery.

To make this happen, Vickery focuses on rotating his upper body into the new turn as he quickly retracts both legs at the close of his old turn. Once he begins extending his legs into the new turn, his lower body catches up, allowing him to attain that athletic stance in the middle, control phase of the new banked turn.

## Some stories require *no* embellishment *whatsoever.*

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## SNOWBOARD



1

Shaun Cattanach blends all of the techniques together beautifully. As he finishes this banked turn through the bumps, he is lining up his board in the direction of the next banked turn. In photo 2, Shaun is flexed, changing edges, and has rotated his shoulders to the direction of the fall line. In photo 3, Shaun has turned his board using his legs as he has extended them. He has moved his center of mass over his rear foot and is preparing to flex again to close out the turn.



2

With his body lined up over the tail of the board, it's easy to see how he can recover. Imagine a rider sliding through the bumps with his or her weight over the front foot. If the rider slips into a mogul from above, all of the momentum will be smashed into the pile of hard snow, likely resulting in the rider coming to a stop quickly, possibly with the front knee hitting his or her chin!

Now imagine the same line with the rider's hips stacked over the back foot of the snowboard. He or she will still need to absorb the impact, and momentum may just be re-directed as the tail of the board comes to a stop while the nose is allowed to continue and most likely drop downhill. This permits the rider to recover and continue without coming to a dead stop.



3

To help riders dial this move, teach them to tail press anything at anytime! Try coaching riders on flat terrain in straight runs, or on easy boxes in the terrain park. Ask them to do a wheelie or tail press by quickly shifting their hips toward the tail of the board. Once their hips are back over the back foot, ask them to give a push down on their back foot. It's the push on that back foot while their hips are over the tail of the board that will really help.

Since this movement sequence can be especially difficult on the heelside at the close of the turn, try coaching riders through a series of turns and ask them to do this tail press at the end

of each heelside turn. The focus here should be on separating the end of the heelside turn from the beginning of the toe turn. In the bumps, riders all too frequently begin toe side turns by hyper-rotating their upper bodies into the turn, which causes their hips to rotate, extends their back leg and prevents them from effectively pressing the tail of the board. Coach riders to complete that heel turn and tail press to gain speed control before going into their toe side turns.

#### LOW CHANGE

A major key for both Vickery and Rolls is changing edges from a lowered stance (one of the more critical aspects of riding bumps). In order to make any of the moves described here, a rider must have the ability to change edges with flexed legs and lower hips. If a rider is tall, with legs extended, it's going to be difficult for him or her to make the extending moves necessary to get the hips inside the new turn early, shift the body of the tail of the board, or absorb terrain variations in the moguls.

"I'm focusing on controlling the skid with extending moves, not rotational moves," says Vickery.

There are many different ways to practice this skill, but my favorite involves beginning at the top of the hill on flats, before moving down the hill. Ask riders to get low in a neutral stance, then dive forward onto the snow off of their toeside edge. If they try it from a tall position, they'll end up with some pain from the landing. If they are low and extend into the dive, it won't hurt a bit!

After a couple of practice dives, divide the group into pairs with a "diver" and a "spotter," both of whom will participate without their boards. Ask the riders to hold hands so the spotter can prevent the rider from falling over. Have the rider start the move from the same low stance, but instead of diving his or her entire body, to try to push the hips in the same direction before the shoulders. This is what the move should feel like while riding. Have the partners switch roles, then go through the same progression on the heelside.

Trying this in the bumps is much more dynamic (as both legs will have to

work independently), but from this edge change position the rider will have more options for speed control. "By extending the legs through the turn, the rider will be able to flex again at the end of the turn to absorb impact," adds Rolls.

#### LINKING IT UP

No matter how well we plan our lines, Murphy's Law always seems to rear its ugly head. In fact, most bump lines change with pitch, snow conditions, and traffic. Banked turns, abrupt steep moguls, and even gaps will often present themselves. A rider who has mastered changing edges from a low and flexed position while lining the board up with the path of travel and fully separating the upper and lower body will be the most versatile and, therefore, the most successful.

By practicing the techniques used by AASI Snowboard Team member Eric Rolls and Eastern Division Examiner Coach Tom Vickery separately, riders will be able to put them together, changing their style as the terrain demands. Like most other aspects of snowboarding, these movements can and should be practiced by students all over the mountain before you aim them down the steepest bump run at the hill.

I know this lesson from experience. I returned to Blackcomb in 2001 with Josh and several others. Over the three seasons leading up to my redemption, I had practiced diligently. I rode the trees and banked turns of early snowboard cross courses, honing my line choice and board placement. I found terrain features to absorb. I pressed boxes and rails like it was my job.

It didn't take long until we were again standing atop Couloir Extreme. Josh and the others peered over the edge, wondering if they were actually going to ride the pitch. While they were talking and thinking, I wasted no time. I strapped in and dropped without hesitation. ☒

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