

Suffolk Vikings Ski Race Team

Information Sheet 7: Equipment

The equipment needed for dry slope racing splits into two categories, namely skiing equipment and safety equipment. Like all sports, you can spend an almost unlimited amount of money on equipment, but fortunately you don't need to as most of the equipment needed can be purchased relatively cheaply, and there is often good quality second hand equipment available.

Clothing

The matting used on the dry slope is very hard, and if you fall over, it can cause nasty scratches. It is therefore advisable to cover as much of your skin as possible. To this end long sleeves and full length trousers are obligatory, you won't be allowed on the slope in a t-shirt and shorts. Many dry slope races take place in the summer, and therefore you are unlikely to want to wear any regular ski clothing you may have. Jeans are also a bad idea as they tend to restrict movement too much. A pair of tracksuit trousers and a long sleeved t-shirt or sweatshirt are usually ideal. As always the weather can be unpredictable, waterproofs and sun cream invariably come in handy from time to time.

Gloves

Gloves are essential for dry slope use, you will not be allowed on the slope without them. The gloves are to help protect your hands from injury when you fall over. The most common type of injury on the dry slope is to fingers and thumbs as they easily get caught in the matting, gloves help to protect your hands and must be worn even on the hottest days.

Helmet

A helmet is an essential piece of safety equipment, and you will not be allowed to train or race without one. You can borrow one from the ski slope, or buy your own. Any ski helmet is acceptable but if buying their own most people choose a racing helmet. These are specially designed to cope with the rigours of slalom racing and have an option to fit a chin guard. The chin guard helps protect your face from being hit by one of the poles.

Skis

Skis are available to hire from the Ski Slope, there is no cost to hire skis as it is included in the cost of the slope usage. Whilst the ski slope have a good range of skis available, they do not have many race skis, and most people soon prefer to get their own. Race skis tend to be firmer and narrower with a better turning radius more suited to Slalom racing, popular brands include Atomic, Salomon, and Rossingnol, although most ski manufacturers have race skis in their range. Second hand race skis are often available and a good place to start, the Vikings hold periodic bring and buy sales, and often it can be worth asking around at the club to see if anyone is about to change their skis. Alternatively specialist websites such as www.skizog.com are worth checking out. If you want to buy new race skis, there are several local ski shops, including the shop at the Slope, or try one of the vendors that regularly attend the ERSA races. Before you buy take some advice on skis and lengths to make sure you get a pair that are right for you, your coach will be happy to give you some advice. If you buy second hand skis and are not confident about setting them up – it's vital that the bindings are correctly set – make sure you speak to someone to help you. Most ski shops will assist with this.

All skis need some maintenance, especially when used on the dry slope. They will need regular waxing and the edges will need sharpening. Keeping skis in good condition really does help with race



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performance. Fortunately waxing and sharpening are skills that are relatively easily mastered, although if you prefer many ski shops will also do this for you for a small charge.

Some ski racers have several sets of skis, practice skis, race skis, and different lengths for different types of race, however, don't be concerned if you've only got one pair, equipment is only one part of the equation, technique and practice are equally as important.

Poles

Poles are available to borrow from the ski slope, but if you have your own skis you may want your own poles. It is important to get poles of the correct length, coaches can advise if you are unsure. If you are using your own poles it is important to fit rubber bungs to the ends, to help prevent injury. Bungs cost a couple of pounds. Secure them on with duct tape or similar otherwise they have a habit of falling off. If you race without bungs on your poles you can be disqualified from the race.

Most people also fit hand guards to their poles. This saves you from bruising your knuckles if your hands hit the poles. However, hand guards are not a mandatory piece of safety equipment, buy them when you feel you need them but don't feel you must have them.

Boots

Good ski boots will make your life much more comfortable! The ski slope have boots to borrow, again included in the slope use fee, but most regular skiers soon want their own boots. Racing boots tend to be slightly firmer than regular ski boots, but any pair of ski boots that fits you well is going to make a big difference. You'll get used to how they feel and how they respond to your movements. Although it may be tempting to buy boots on line or through websites such as Ebay, we always advise you try on boots before you buy. Boots are often available at the Vikings' bring and buy sales, especially in children's sizes.

Shin Guards

Shin guards are not essential. Like chin guards and hand guards, they are there to protect you from poles. When you start out you may well feel that you don't need any, and that's fine, once you've had a few bruises on your shins go out and buy a pair.

Snow Equipment

Most of the equipment you'll use on the dry slope is exactly the same as you'll use if you race on snow. The skis, poles (take the bungs off, but don't lose them), helmet and protection can all be the same. It's obviously going to be colder if you are skiing on snow, so you'll need appropriate clothing depending upon the conditions.

A Final Word

Don't be put off by the amount of equipment needed. Dry slope skiing can be as expensive or low cost as you want it to be. Don't feel you have to buy all the equipment at once and don't feel that second hand equipment is somehow inferior. It is possible to get kitted out over time for a very reasonable amount of money. And please ask for advice, all the Vikings – racers and coaches – will be very happy to advise you and help you find the right equipment within your budget. Don't forget they were all beginners once. If you can only buy one thing – buy some boots. After that you probably want your own helmet and skis, once you've got those, it's really down to personal choice, buy what you feel you need when you feel you need it.