

Feel the Carve, Ride "The Norm": Part I

By Jack Michaud



photos courtesy of Chris Chabot

As it is in snowboarding, the hardest part about learning anything physical is starting without already knowing what it feels like to do it right! So how are you supposed to figure out this "carving" business if you don't know what it feels like when it happens? "The Norm" is a practice tool to help you realize the sensation of carving the edge of a snowboard, so you'll be able to work towards that same feeling every time you ride.

This skill is best practiced on a well-groomed, wide, unintimidating yet moderate green-circle slope that will allow you to generate enough speed to make a well leaned-over turn. It is intended for intermediate snowboarders on the brink of the carving revelation. It is not intended for "never-ever" beginners. Basically, the idea is to get the edge to carve without actually doing anything aside from simply putting the edge in the snow. This is achieved by standing straight and tall on your snowboard and making a turn without bending a single joint in your entire body. The turn is created solely by leaning to one side or the other while maintaining a rigid beam-like body perpendicular to (i.e. 'normal' to) the plane of the snowboard.

Start down the trail and prepare for the norm by assuming a stand-tall position with your arms stuck down at your sides, your knees straight but not locked, ankles rigid, and your body aligned with the angle of your bindings. This position is to be maintained at all times throughout and between each turn while practicing the norm. The object of this little game is to remove any steering, skidding or sliding tendencies you may usually have from your turn. Remember, a carved turn happens when the nose and tail of the board (and hence your front and back feet) travel along the same path.

After you have built up enough speed by heading straight down the slope for a short distance, initiate a toe-side turn simply by leaning toward that edge and pushing the edge down into the snow with your toes. Have faith that the edge will hold and not slide out. Let the turn take its own path all the way until it self-destructs by eventually pointing back uphill. Maintain the norm position as long as possible, bending only at the last moment to catch yourself from falling on your face. Once you stop moving, kneel down and look back across the hill at your track. If the track is skinny and the path is round, behold! You have just carved. If not, you probably allowed yourself the luxury of bent knees or a bent waist. It is also important to turn your head and look towards where the carve is going to go while you practice this, both for technique and for safety.



Now turn around, point the board downhill and repeat this process on your heelside edge. Continue making toe and heel carves by carving all the way to a stop then rolling over, etc. Once you feel comfortable doing this, it is time to start linking these norm-carves together.

The next most exhilarating skill the norm teaches you is that if your snowboard is carving across the trail, you can actually change edges before you point the board back down hill, thereby carving the downhill edge! This is because if the snowboard is moving strictly in one direction, you can change edges and continue traveling in that direction. When a snowboard is sliding and not carving, it can be reasoned that the snowboard is moving in a composite of two directions: across the hill and down the hill. Never try to change edges while sliding; the downhill edge will catch if you try to put any weight on it. When a snowboard is carving, it is moving only in the direction it is pointing.



Changing edges before the board points downhill is exactly what must happen when linking norm-carves together. Instead of letting the carve turn up the hill, lean out of the carve when you decide it is time to change edges. Let your body come over the board and proceed to lean towards the other edge. Your body should remain rigid in the norm position, and cross the board much like the mast of a sailboat at anchor, rocking in the waves.

It may take a few runs practicing the norm before you are able to execute clean norm-carves one after the other without sliding. But once you are able to confidently link carves like this, it is time to incorporate carving into your all around riding. We

shall cover that in the next chapter, stay tuned.

Carving really only happens when we allow the board to do what it was designed to do. Whenever you feel like your riding has turned into one big argument with your snowboard, take a breather on nice green cruiser and practice the norm. Strip away all the unnecessary wasted motion and get back to basics. After you feel the board carving for you, you'll know what to look - and feel for in your everyday riding.

[Part 2](#)