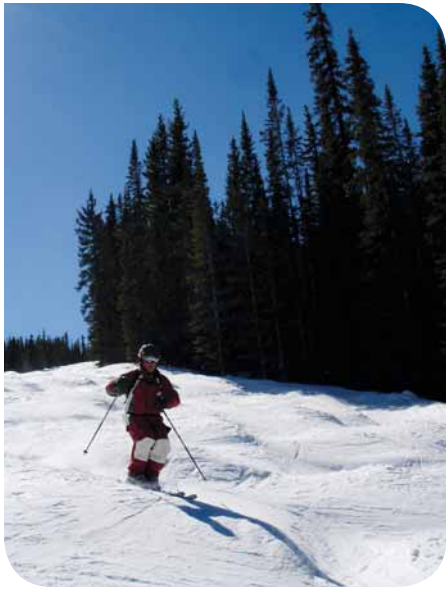
An aerial photograph of a snowy mountain slope. The snow is covered in numerous small, rounded bumps, creating a textured surface. Several skiers are visible, scattered across the slope, some appearing to be in motion. The overall scene is bright and high-contrast, with the white snow and the dark silhouettes of the skiers.

A NEW PERSPECTIVE on bump skiing

Or why I'm taking up
bumps again after officially
swearing them off >>

by Kimberly Nicoletti



I've always had a love-hate relationship with bumps: At age 16, I ordered vanity license plates that read "Moguls 2" (living in Chicago, "Moguls 1" was taken, most likely by a high-powered corporate exec, but apparently nobody in Illinois wanted to be a No. 2 Mogul). Shortly thereafter, I moved to Breckenridge and realized how perfect my license plate really was: In the Midwest, I could "do moguls," but when it came to bumps at Breck, I found myself at a loss, hence, my goal turned toward learning to ski (Colorado) moguls, too.

My only stumbling block: I joined the Breck Freestyle Team to learn and compete in ballet skiing, and as a result of

peer pressure, I swallowed my pride and showed up for moguls training one day. But, that day, our coach proclaimed that if we competed moguls seriously and long enough, we'd all eventually blow out at least one knee. Needless to say, I bowed out. I may have hit my head one too many times learning how to flip over my ballet poles, but I was smart enough to know I wasn't in love with bumps enough to sacrifice my knees.

For the next decade or so, I picked and turned my way through bumps, well enough to fake my way down, until about age 33, when I decided I was officially old enough to basically give up bumps, with the exception of Pali laps. Instead, I dedicated my ski life to powder — the deeper, the better.

Fast-forward a few years, and in walks Stephen Karp, aka Karpy, who introduces his BumpBuster Mogul Camp to me. I was at a party, and I could've sworn he said something about Zen and bumps, which caught my attention. It sounded like an easier, softer way to ski, and everyone raved about his classes, so I signed up.

MORE INFO:

Next Bump Busters program: 10 a.m.

to 3 p.m. Feb. 12-13 or March 12-13

Skill level: If you can ski a groomed blue run, you're in (must be 16 or older)

Cost: \$238 (\$276 with lift ticket)

Check out: www.bumpbusters.com



The BumpBusters experience

I was pretty sure I hallucinated the Zen description of Karpy's mogul camp clinic, because when I showed up Saturday morning at Copper Mountain for day one of the two-day experience, he explained his philosophy of coaching: He's not here to coddle; he's here to point out weaknesses and develop strengths.

"We're a little bit on the hard-core side," he said.

Hmmm.

Yet, his personality was so welcoming and fun loving, it was hard to feel intimidated. It was clear his mission involved giving us the most information in the best way possible to help us love moguls (again, or for the first time, depending on your situation).

"I'm going to throw 28 things at you, and I want three to stick," he said. "The others are just planting the seed."

And from the minute he began busting equipment myths (for bumps, poles should be lower than a 90-degree angle, and your boots should be as soft as possible), it was clear he knew his stuff.

Without much ado, he rattled off a few of his qualifications, which include: competitive mogul skier on the USSA Eastern and Far West Mogul Tours for four years, going to Nationals twice, skiing on the World Pro Mogul Tour, Toyota Mogul Tour, Budweiser Mogul Tour and Red Bull Mogul Tour over nine years and now, as a certified ski instructor, dedicating himself to creating one of the best ski schools in the world.

After quick introductions of the approximately dozen people in the group — divided almost evenly between men and women ranging from their late 20s to “senior” years — we hit the flats and began dissecting the elements of a solid turn: poles forward (“Poles are 40 percent of mogul skiing,” Karpy said), upper body quiet and hips moving down the fall line (ladies, Karpy has a great saying for this one, but I’ll let him tell you). We practiced finishing our turns so as not to brace against the fall line with side rotation, tail braking or both. We learned more about balance, athletic stance, boot flex, mental focus and patience. We skied down one by one, as Karpy and his teammate Brent Brown told us what we were doing wrong and what we needed to do to correct it.

While this kind of spotlight attention and constructive criticism could feel intimidating and even discouraging, the environment Karpy set up from the start had nothing to do with feeling bad about yourself or your skiing, and it certainly didn’t have anything to do with comparing yourself to others (I’m pretty sure this is where that Zen thing comes in, especially as he mentioned something about “present-moment appreciation” and “flowing like water”). He treated us like athletes in training; we all have something we can improve upon.

While he threw skiing tips that would double as wise life lessons into the mix — such as, “if you’re looking where you’re going, you’re acting; if you’re not, you’re reacting” — he also embraced the art of laughing and making fun of our mistakes. Take, for instance, the potty award, given to the skier who sits back

too much. Luckily, Karpy’s humor was just as fun loving and nonthreatening as his personality — because during lunch, he paused and slow-motioned our turns, using chopsticks to analyze our posture and shamelessly replaying our bobbles and backseat jerks. The day ended with a “bump off” on the flats of Halleluiah.

By Sunday, Karpy and Brown focused much more on our strengths than our

‘He has an amazing personality for this, and he’s not afraid to tell you what you’re doing wrong, but he also tells you what you’re doing right, which is nice.’

weaknesses, and if I hadn’t taught skiing for a year and known a bit about form and skills, I may have thought they were just trying to make us feel better and prove they were great instructors because “we had come so far.” But as I watched my classmates, it was true: The day before, we wouldn’t have pounded out zipper lines or made such smooth, rounded turns around the moguls. We all really had improved, and our confidence levels had risen as well.

What the bumpers had to say

Being somewhat of a journalist, I wanted to check my instincts out. Karpy said he had taught 6,800 people in his mogul clinics, and only two told him they didn’t like it — pretty good odds. Still, I did my own research by pulling participants aside and asking their honest opinions.

Rebecca Collier came in from Minnesota for Bump Busters. At first, she felt intimidated by being videoed and then watching it, but through it she learned: “A lot of us have similar issues — maybe more pronounced — and it helps your confidence when you realize that you’re not alone and it just takes doing it more.”

Denverite Laura Humes took the workshop with her husband, and Sun-

day morning, when Karpy mentioned we’d be going off cornices, she stiffened up and was pretty much ready to jump ship before she jumped any cornice. But Karpy introduced her to a benign cornice, where she gained confidence. By the time he led Humes through the trees on a balance exercise, she was rippin’ down steep, bumped pitches. She said everything he taught her made her “a better overall skier,” who no longer feared cornices.

DeWitt Harrison, who described himself as a senior citizen from Boulder, also needed a nudge to reach the next level.

“It just pushed me so hard, and that’s what I needed,” Harrison said. “I was stuck in a big rut, and now I’m learning how to turn and (maintain a good) stance through moguls.”

Everyone seemed to love Karpy’s charisma. As Katy Friedrichs, from Denver, put it:

“He has an amazing personality for this, and he’s not afraid to tell you what you’re doing wrong, but he also tells you what you’re doing right, which is nice.”

Harrison didn’t mince words when describing Karpy’s character:

“I love his enthusiasm,” he said. “He’s a little bit like a sailor — just kind of rough around the edges — but it works. He always gets his points across. I love his energy.”

The bottom line on bumps

“The bottom line is that if you don’t ski bumps, you’re missing 40 percent of the mountain,” Karpy said in a story the Summit Daily News printed four years after he founded BumpBusters.

And after completing his program, I’ve given up my official “I’ve quit bumps” stance, not because, according to Karpy, I’m missing out on 40 percent of the mountain, but because he reminded me what I intuitively knew at age 16, when I purchased those vanity plates for my car: Learning to ski moguls, too, spills over into the rest of your skiing technique, making you stronger and more solid all around.

Plus, bump fields are always the last to get skied up on a powder day. •