

A headstart for the hills

A few sneaky lessons can help you make the most of your skiing adventure, writes Yvonne Gordon

'HOLD on to the bar and don't let go,' says Frank. I am standing, on skis, holding a black bar tightly with both hands and white knuckles as my ski instructor is about to start the giant roller.

The beige carpet under my skis is about to start moving and I have to stay in place. This is a ski lesson at the Ski Centre in Sandyford, Dublin, home to an indoor ski slope simulator.

The slope measures just 5m wide and 10m long, but because it's constantly moving, you can ski for as long as you want without stopping. I have skied many times on snow, so it takes my brain a few minutes to get used to the fact that while I am skiing, the ground is moving but I am not. However, I am soon ready to let go of the bar and ski on my own.

One of the niftiest things about skiing on a roller is that not only can you ski for as long as you want, but you never get to the bottom or have to get a chair lift back up. The idea is to keep pace with the roller, which the instructors control the speed and angle of with a remote control. The slope can be tilted at the angle of either a green, blue, red or black slope and the maximum speed is 22km per hour.

'Go backwards up the slope by doing the plough and digging your edges in,' calls Frank. I am soon whizzing backwards up the slope and skiing down again.

The Ski Centre has two slopes. On each, there's a bar at the bottom and a huge window so skiers can see their reflection while skiing. Unlike on real snow, with this the instructor can stand on the platform right in front of the person skiing and make comments to them



Slope progress: Yvonne, left, takes advantage of the Ski Centre's mechanical slope, main

to adjust their stance or movement, so it's really interactive – perfect for either learning or improving technique. There are seven learning levels and the lessons are a good workout too.

I ski along at a gentle 9km per hour – during lessons people usually ski for 30 minutes in total with two breaks in the middle.

As it's a harder surface to learn on than snow, people apparently find snow much easier when they hit the slopes after the simulator. As well as turns, lesson drills include learning J-turns, half-turns, switch skiing (skiing backwards) and jumping. The centre also organises a ski trip to France every March.

With the simulator, safety comes first. If people get out of control skiing, the instructors just press the 'stop' button before things get out of hand. Frank says the worst injuries would be carpet burn from a fall, rather than broken bones.

After just one lesson, I leave feeling relieved that I didn't break anything (of theirs or mine) and achievement at what I learnt. And who needs real snow when you can go skiing for an hour after work...

Adult ski lessons start from €49 and include all equipment. Tel: (01)2930588 or see www.skicentre.ie

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