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Austin Healey: On the chairlift with...

Austin Healey, the former England and British Lions star, talks to Hugh Morris about his skiing experiences



Austin never risked his rugby by skiing during his playing days Photo: BT Sport



By Hugh Morris

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Austin Healey, the former England and British Lions star retired from rugby in 2006. He's since competed on Strictly Come Dancing and is

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You were famed for versatility on the pitch – would you describe your skiing technique as equally versatile?

My technique is always improving, although my ability doesn't match my courage – yet. I have a company, Super Skills Experiences, along with [former England rugby colleague] Will Greenwood, and we run a holiday each January – which is open to anyone – with sporting legends like Ben Kay, Darren Gough, Paul Nixon and [former British ski racer] Konrad Bartelski. He teaches me and is very patient. I'll be back in Ste Foy, France, for the trip in January, which always involves long nights and great days.

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As a professional rugby player you weren't supposed to ski in case of injury – did you ever sneak off for trips?

I never risked it – rugby was way too important.

How competitive are you on the slopes?

I'm very competitive on the slopes, always buying new gear, much to the amusement of Konrad, who says I should wait till I'm as good as my kit. I always have the newest Salomon skis, which leaves little room for excuses, unfortunately.

You skied the Vallée Blanche in France in 2008. How does standing at the top of a daunting off-piste run compare to facing 15 men charging at you?

I love being on the top of a mountain knowing I'm really not good enough to ski down the route we've chosen. That fear is just like playing – only I was a pretty good rugby player.

How does a wipeout while skiing compare to a big hit?

Ski crashes vary. I had some bad ones this year. Falling while skiing is just like rugby most of the time – your safety is in the hands of the gods. You just have to do all you can to fall as well as possible, and then just hope for the best.

Have any rugby injuries affected your skiing?

I have bad arthritis in my left knee from my playing days that prevents it from bending enough to get low, and it gets very tired very quickly. I wore a brace for the first time this year, but the pain will never stop me. The pain is a by-product of the exhilaration.

Do you ski with your family?

Yes. It's an amazing holiday – my five-year-old twins Betsy and Bibi-Dee have been twice now and love it. They're both able to do red runs so we all ski as a family. My eldest two, Ellie-Mae and Daisy, are nearly better than me now – they are 12 and 10.

What's your favourite resort and why?

Ste Foy is the best resort in Europe. It's quiet, has great off piste and the guide we ski with, Julien, is amazing. He makes sure my children are safe while enjoying the best pistes.

Powder or piste?

Both, depends on the conditions.

What's your ideal day on the slopes?

Bombing around with mates in the morning, a good lunch, then trying to follow my daughters through the trees in the afternoon, ending with cake and a beer in the hot tub.

If you could ski with anyone for a day, who would you choose and why?

Konrad and Julien – they take you away from the real world and help you discover moments that last forever with your family.

Austin Healey is part of the BT Sport rugby presentation team. BT Sport is the exclusive broadcaster of Aviva Premiership rugby