

GOSKATZBOARDING

INTERNATIONAL SKATEBOARD CERTIFICATION PROGRAM/SKATZ

HISTORY & POPULAR CULTURE OF SKATEBOARDING

Skateboarding can be described as the act of rolling on or interacting with a skateboard. Someone who skateboards is called a skateboarder or skater. Skateboarding can be an art, hobby, sport or a method of transportation. Because of its creative aspects, it can also be seen as an art form. Skateboarders throughout the years have influenced and continue to influence its development.

It is widely accepted that the first skateboard originated sometime in the 1950s and coincided with the popularization of surfing in California. The idea appears to have its roots in the surf culture with surfing enthusiasts, who were frustrated with inclement weather conditions. We do not really know who made the first board, and it could be that several people may have had the same idea, within the same time frame. Several people have claimed to have invented the skateboard, but we have no clear evidence that one specific person did so. It is possible that skateboards may have evolved from "crate scooters" which preceded skateboards and were similar except for having a wooden crate attached to the front, which formed rudimentary handlebars.

Skateboarding was originally referred to as "sidewalk surfing" and early skaters mimicked surfing style and moves. In the mid 1960s skateboarding took off as a craze. Manufacturers of surfing equipment, such as Hobie and Makana, started building skateboards that resembled smaller surfboards and began to promote their products. The popularity of skateboarding at this time gave rise to a national magazine called Skateboarder Magazine and the 1965 International Championships were broadcast on National Television. The growth of skateboarding at this time was exponential.

It is not really known, why over the next five years, skateboarding's popularity dropped off and remained low until the early 1970's, but only hardcore enthusiasts would continue to ride during this time.

NEXT GENERATION

In the early 1970s, a skateboard wheel was developed made of polyurethane. This improved traction and performance so much, that skateboarding began to grow in popularity again, and many companies started to invest more in product development. Some companies started to manufacture trucks (axles) especially designed for skateboarding. As the equipment evolved, skateboarders were able to gain more control. Deck widths reached 10 inches and over allowing more control for the skater. Some manufacturers started to experiment with more exotic composites like fiberglass and aluminum, but the common skateboards were made of maple plywood.

A few years later, a new breed of skateboarders, most notably the Z-Boys, began to emerge and started to skate the vertical walls of swimming pools that were left empty from the 1976 California drought. This started the 'vert' trend in skateboarding. Skateboarding was also transformed in 1976 by the invention of the first modern skateboarding trick called the ollie by Alan "Ollie" Gelfand. At first, none of Gelfand's companions believed it was possible to perform a trick like this, and he thought he was somehow attaching his feet to the board. Given the creative edge many skaters had at this time, and improved handling of skateboards, skateboarders began to invent new tricks. With increased control, skateboarders could skate with greater speed and accuracy, and they began to perform many, more dangerous tricks. As a result, concerns of liability and increased insurance costs caused many skate parks to go out of business. By the beginning of the 1980s, skateboarding had died again.

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560 Hensall Circle Mississauga, ON, CANADA L5A 1Y1 • Telephone: 416.272.6888

info@iscpskatz.com • www.iscpskatz.com • www.goskatzboarding.com



In 1981, the ollie was reinvented by Rodney Mullen and evolved to freestyle skating. Mullen invented the kick which allowed the skater to fly from one place to another while the board flips one rotation. The development of these more complex tricks transformed skateboarding from the vertical tops of the half pipes, to stairs and handrails in the streets.

THIRD GENERATION

From the mid-eighties to early nineties, the third generation of skateboarding began through strong industry support. The focus was initially on vert ramp skateboarding. The no-hands aerial (later known as the ollie) by Alan Gelfand in 1976 made it possible for skaters to perform huge airs off of vertical ramps. This made vert skating the dominant style of skateboarding. Coincident to this, decks became wider still and acquired larger and wider wheels. But as time progressed and skate parks became fewer in number, street skateboarding gained popularity, causing a change in both deck shape and wheel size. Street skating became skateboarding's most popular form. The third skateboarding generation nearly ended by the global economical recession in the early 1990s, but there remained some interest and it continued, giving rise to the fourth or current generation.

CURRENT GENERATION

The fourth and current generation of skateboards has mainly been dominated by street skating, although in the past few years many more skate parks are being built, both indoor and outdoor. Most boards are about 7¼ to 8 inches wide and 30 to 32 inches long. The wheels have an extremely hard durometer (approximately 99a), and tend to be fairly small, providing an overall faster ride. This, coupled with lighter-weight boards are making tricks much easier to perform. Today, modern wheels are currently around 43 to 58 mm in diameter and advances in technology have made them extremely light compared to the wheels of the eighties. Most decks are still constructed out of Canadian maple, with 7-plys being the industry standard for strength and durability.

Board styles have changed dramatically since the 1970s but have remained mostly alike since the mid 1990s. The contemporary shape of the skateboard is modeled mainly after the freestyle boards of the 1980s are largely symmetrical and narrow in width. Currently, skateboarding has become a fusion of ramp, street and freestyle techniques. Skateboarding has heavily influenced today's core street skating culture and while the ollie remains the base for many tricks, the flip has become the essential foundation of the most popular of current skateboarding moves.

CULTURE

Skateboarding had its roots originally in the culture of surfing. As skateboarding spread across the globe to places that were unfamiliar with surfing or its culture, it developed an image of its own. For a time, skateboarding culture was linked to a punk subculture, but over the last few decades skateboarding has broken from even its loose cultural ties with punk to form its own subculture. Currently, skateboarding has its own music, fashion, and slang. More recently, skateboarding is considered by many, to be a sport, and no longer associated with the negative stereotype it once was.

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