Skateboard Encyclopedia Article

Skateboard

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Contents

Skateboard Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

Skateboard.....3

Skateboard

Skateboards have their origin in the scooter of the 1950s, a popular pre-teen toy constructed from an orange crate, a two-by-four board, wooden steering handles, and rollerskate wheels. In order to practice in bad weather, Californian surfers reduced these four pieces to two elements--the board and the wheels--so that they could "sidewalk surf."

Skateboarding became fairly popular in the 1960s, especially when rock stars Jan and Dean rhapsodized about the sport. However, enthusiasm waned quickly when people realized the skateboard's wheels--made of steel, clay, and rubber--wore out fast, snagged easily, and permitted few stunts. Frank Nasworthy, however, introduced a new type of wheel made of durable urethane. In 1973, he formed a production company after discovering that, while these wheels were useless for rollerskaters, they were perfect for skateboarders. On asphalt or concrete surfaces, these wheels offered much better traction and maneuverability. Within one year, Nasworthy's company sold ten thousand sets of the "Cadillac Wheels" and they were trademarked in twelve countries.

Other subsequent innovations helped improve the skateboard. Henry Larrucea researched the skateboard's shape and increased its flexibility by extending the wheel out beyond the axle nut. Bearings were refined, the wheel assembly was improved, and the skateboard became more streamlined.

Once associated only with children, skateboarding is now considered a challenging, highly skilled sport for people of all ages.