

# Just a Little Patience

Most media outlets celebrate the spontaneity of skateboarding. At its best, they say, it supplies a steady stream of immediate thrills. No wonder that it attracts so many young people, especially devil-may-care boys, and among them so many with parents', teachers', and doctors' diagnoses of attention deficits and hyperactivity. The riding itself is not the only source of minute-by-minute excitement, according to the majority of print and online coverage. Magazines and websites, particularly ones that cover shortboard street riding, present road-tripping to new cities, blasting their ledges and rails by day, and trashing their bars and cheap hotels by night, as the definitive skateboarding experience. Random occurrences like fleeing from the police, fist fights with skater-haters, hooks-up with hot girls, and other assorted mayhem emphasize the unpredictability of the skateboarding lifestyle: you never know what'll happen next, and that's the way we like it. There is certainly some truth to these images; across the country and around the world, skateboarding often means flying by and landing upon the seat of your pants. The media and some skate companies are happy to exaggerate this quality to grab viewers' attention and help move product.

A recent video interview with Steve Caballero reminded me of another characteristic of the skateboarding life, perhaps contrary, but just as true. When asked what allowed him to continue ripping on vert with his fiftieth birthday not far out of sight, Cab replied first and foremost, "Patience." What he seemed to mean was a don't-rush-it attitude toward pulling certain tricks; if one attempt feels off somehow, better to bail gently and try again than to hold on in vain and likely slam hard. Cab laughed as he made these remarks, probably recognizing the change in his outlook since his younger, hungrier days.

I would like to argue, though, that patience is an under-appreciated virtue among skaters of all ages and styles. Beneath the right-here-right-now, "extreme" veneer laid thick upon skateboarding by the worst marketing agents, there lies a lot of wait-and-see, try-and-try-again, long-term reflectiveness.

Without a doubt, riding a skateboard demands tremendous patience. No one learns to roll, turn, and stop confidently in a single day. A skater could spend a lifetime just exploring and mastering these basic skills, as many vintage sidewalk surfers and contemporary longboarders do. Some street and vert tricks come quickly, but others demand days, weeks, or months of practice with only slow, incremental progress. A trick might be elusive like a minnow; just when we think we grasp it, it darts away. Or a trick might be stubborn as a mule, in need of pushing and pulling from every direction before it yields. The satisfaction of finally taming one of these hold-outs may be greater than any spontaneous trick pulled here or there. A large number of young people, turned on to skateboarding by photos and video of apparently effortless tricks by top pros, quickly tune out when they discover for themselves the stick-to-it-iveness that the art requires. Riding a skateboard, in fact, may be the best teacher of patience to children who have the greatest difficulty focusing their attention and channeling their kinetic energy.

Huge reserves of patience are also necessary to manage the circumstances that surround skateboarding. First, skaters need to wait upon the weather, finding ways to occupy themselves indoors when rain or snow covers the pavement. Even when the climate cooperates, skaters may have to wait until the optimum time of day or night, when auto and foot traffic have thinned and authorities have left the area, before they can shred certain spots. The seemingly endless rounds of political negotiations necessary to construct of a public skate park test the endurance of the most stalwart skaters. Even at a private pool, ramp, or park, everyone has to wait his or her turn to hit the transition.

And all of these delays presume that the riding afterward goes well. Every skater knows the greater agony of waiting out an injury. Often the sudden, sharp pain of the initial slam pales in comparison to the lingering, dull ache and reduced mobility that follows. Even if the recovery period does not hurt so much, sitting still for days, weeks, or months and watching a board gather dust tries every skater's patience. Once an injury has healed, a skater must continue restraining him- or herself, lest he or she try to rebound to top form too quickly and wind up back at the hospital. Other than the terminally ill, few people are likely more familiar with the waiting games created by America's broken health care system than skaters.

Social situations, though, may cultivate the greatest patience in skaters. Many parents disapprove, and until a rider reaches age 18, he or she has no escape from life at home; the same battles with Mom and Dad over whether, when, where, and with whom to skate are likely to rage again and again. Only the most persistent sons and daughters survive them with their skateboarding intact. Often schools provide no shelter and support, and young skaters must bear with the repeated discouragement of poorly informed teachers, administrators, and cliques of classmates. Many skaters have to roll past the familiar harangues of other town folk too.

For the majority of non-professional riders, adulthood requires new stores of patience, this time set aside for employers and co-workers ready to ask, "Aren't you a little old...?" Long working hours delay the next neighborhood cruise, pool party, or downhill run until the weekend, at best. Having a family of one's own postpones skating until after household chores are finished, the kids are asleep, and the in-laws have left town. Like the recently injured rider, the ol' timer needs to climb back to his personal peak slowly, if he can reach it again at all. If not, learning to let go former glories and finding new ways to continue loving skateboarding are long-term projects.

Patience. No one skates far without it, during every session and throughout an entire career. We might reserve one final bit of it for those who wrongly insist that skateboarding is only a momentary thrill without a noble history and lasting value.

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