

Boarding on wheels takes off

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Click, click, whiz, swoosh, YIPE! Walking to class, you are almost wiped out not by a mad bicyclist who insists on plowing down traffic, but by a skater. Not a rollerskater, but a skateboardist.

With spring fever in the air, skaters have pulled their boards out of the closets and have taken to the streets, er... sidewalks.

These skaters are the "new generation" of skateboardists — the products of the second incarnation of the skateboard.

Skateboards were born in the 1930s when daredevils tacked rollerskate wheels to the ends of two-by-four planks. These sportists often added an upright bar or orange crate to make handle bars that enabled them to steer.

These early "scooter boards" were later transformed into the wider model used today.

When skateboarding developed again in the early 1960s, it was a way for Southern California surfers to practice their moves when the waves were not cooperative.

During the 1960s, skateboarding, much like the hula hoop, had a short-lived existence as a fad. Like most fads, the craze died within a few years.

It suffered from both a loss of interest and an increased awareness of danger. In 1965, the National Safety Council issued an alert of the risks and injuries associated with the sport. Some cities banned skateboarding from the streets and prosecuted offending skaters.

Despite the risks it caused, skateboarding rose again in 1973, with improvements in the boards, trucks (the two-wheel chassis) and wheels contributing to its rebirth.

Frank Nasworthy, sometimes referred to as the "Father of Skateboarding," sparked the skating renaissance when he introduced the polyurethane wheel in 1973.

These wheels, though slower than metal ones, offered greater traction and better maneuverability. "The urethane wheel uses a rubbery compound which is more resilient than



Andrew Baxter(left) and George Jenne (right) show off their skateboarding skills in front of Greenlaw

DTH/Julie Stovall

metal wheels like roller skate wheels," said Andrew Baxter, a UNC senior who has been skateboarding since the age of 12. "It is a lot safer to use and gives more control. (Skateboarding) got popular again with it."

The sport also gained popularity because, like surfing and gymnastics, it involved more individual creative expression than organized sports, according to Baxter.

"In other sports, there is a coach or somebody telling you how to do it. Like football you have to run a play. But with skating, nobody tells you how to do it. You make up your own form. . . . It is more creative," he said.

After its rebirth, skateboarding became more widespread on the East and West coasts. Yet the fad died again. The cause of death? Unknown. In the early 1980s, skateboarding

enthusiasts changed the name of the sport to skating, and it began to thrive again. It is now here to stay, according to Baxter, who says skating is now more than just a fad: it's a sport.

This time skaters are using the "new and improved" wider board that gives the rider more control. The boards popular in the early 1970s were 20 to 30 inches long, 3 to 4

inches wide, and fish-shaped with kickback tails. The wider boards, while still about 2 feet long, are 4 to 6 inches wide and more rectangular in shape.

And this time, ask enthusiasts and they'll say skating is more than a fad. "The thing that I would most like to see is to have it portrayed seriously, because it is a sport," Baxter said.

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