

History of Snowboarding

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The beginning

In 1964 a young surf freak called Sherman Poppen was dreaming about surfing the magic winter landscape of the Rockies. As a consequence, he built a surfboard for the snow. His first prototype was an about 1,20 m long plastic plank: two kids' skis bolted together. It was a present for his daughter Wendy which soon was a winner in the neighbourhood. One year later, in 1965, his idea was put into production: Carried out together with a bowling-ball manufacturer, the now called "snurfer" (=snow-surfer) found its way through toy-stores under the Christmas trees. For the unbeatable price of \$15, one million snurfers were sold in the 10 years following, and Mr. Poppen soon began to establish a competition series.

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But the snurfer as a mass phenomenon disappeared as quickly as he had emerged from the white surf of the Rockies. Nothing else but the vague memory of an uncontrollable toy stayed in most people's minds. It was close to be the end of a fantastic idea - surfing the winter mountains -if there wouldn't have been blokes like Dimitrije Milovich or Jake Burton Carpenter.

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In 1970, Milovich, an east coast surfer, had an idea while he was sliding around on cafeteria trays in the snow of upstate New York. He started to develop snowboards following the example of the new short surf boards. He even used rudimentary steel edges - an idea he soon gave up because he only rode in deepest powder anyway. He experimented with laminating glass and gravel on the board and also used nylon straps. His company "Winterstick" is to be considered as the first snowboard company ever. In 1975, they were mentioned in American magazines like Newsweek and Playboy, and already in 1976, he threw a swallow tail board on the nearly not existing market. In 1980, the company was broke.

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Jake Burton, a 23-year-old student back then, was completely into snurfing and kept on improving the toy,

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in order to develop it into a real sporting good. Foottraps for better control, fins for more stability...

Jake was always looking for new details to improve his riding. In 1977, he decided to found his own company in Vermont. Starting with a small edition of "snowboards" - flexible wooden planks with water ski bindings - the small turnover due to the "high" price of \$38 didn't look like this might be one of the biggest winter sport revolutions on our slopes, and the base for the biggest snowboard company today.

Exactly in the same time, mentioned former skateboard champion Tom Sims, addicted to snurfing as well, started to

produce snowboards. Bob Webber developed the famous "yellow banana" board in 1977, made of polyethylene. Chuck Barfoot invented fiberglass in the snowboard production in the following year. Most of the first Boards didn't have any bindings and were featuring a control-leash instead. Still not allowed on the public slopes in ski resorts, the first boarders had to come in at night, walk up the trails, and ride down secretly in order to avoid any penalty.

In 1979, at the annual Snurfer contest held in Michigan, pro snurfer Paul Graves performed a freestyle demo and made the crowd scream by showing four sliding 360s, dropping down on one knee for part of the course, and dismounting off his board at the finish with a front flip. At the same event, Jake Burton Carpenter tried to enter on his own equipment. There were protests about his non-Snurfer snowboard design. Paul Graves and others stood up for Jake's right to race and an open division was created which only Jake entered. He won.

In the same year, Mark Anolik discovered the Tahoe City Halfpipe while nosing around behind the Tahoe City dump. Bingo - this became known as the world's first snowboard halfpipe and not only attracted aces like Terry Kidwell or Keith Kimmel but also photographers from the skateboard mags.

In the early eighties, even in Europe the first prototypes were glued together. But more and more fans tried to import the US cult boards. One of the first was later president of the ISF, Jose Fernandes from Switzerland, who ordered a board from the USA in 1982 after working on own planks for several time. Later, in 1985, he would also be the first European to got to America for a contest - he got third in the North American Championships in Calgary. Other European pioneers were Tommy Delago from Oberammergau and Petra "Milka" Mossig from Konstanz, Germany, also a later world champion.

Ski technology materials improved the gliding abilities of the boards, and later on, the first high-back bindings were produced by snowboard pioneers Flite, founded in 1974. More and more riders took off the fins, and slowly but surely, the "snurfer" turned into a controllable "snowboard" and an accepted sporting good. Already in 1981, Ski Cooper in Leadville, Colorado, saw the first snowboard contest. One year later, the first National Snowboard Championships were held in Suicide Six near Woodstock, Vermont. Downhill racers were timed at 60 mph. In 1985, "Absolutely Radical" came out - fanfare for the first snowboard mag ever, later rebaptized "International Snowboard Magazine".

Also this year, models like Sims 1500 FE and Burton Performer finally brought the comeback of the steel edge! European board manufacturers like Nidecker and Hooger Booger quickly had made up their technical delay and in 1987, Jose Fernandes won the Giant Slalom of the "American" world championships of this year in Breckenridge, CO, with one of the first asymmetrical boards - a sign that the European snowboard industry didn't need to fear comparisons with the Americans anymore. German ace Peter Bauer and French guy Jean Nerva were also about to celebrate big successes with asymmetrical boards. In 1987, the first "European" snowboard world championships took place in Livigno and St. Moritz - and this event brought up a great brotherhood of snowboarders from all over the world.

A new sport was born. Snowboarding was newer, fresher, younger than anything else on the slope. Snowboarding was a revolution, a tribute to liberty, a new religion for young people. The year after, the international World cup tour was born, won by Peter Bauer just like in the year after. The evolution became faster and faster: rounded tails, hard boots, plate bindings... powder boards, race boards, free style boards... asymmetrical, twin-tip, carving... new disciplines like half pipe, modules and downhill... 1990 saw the foundation of the ISF, and nowadays the speed record for snowboarders is set to some mediocre 201,907 km/h, run by Aussie Darren Powell in Les Arcs in 1999.

Meanwhile, more than 6 million snowboarders are shredding down the mountains, and they are getting more and more. The "white rush" developed into an Olympic sport with a big but unfortunately divided lobby. Instead of banning snowboarders from the slope (in 1985, only 7% of the American resorts had permitted snowboarding!), ski resorts now are building half pipes and organizing contests and events. A creative hardware and clothing industry is setting new trends in aesthetics and function. Snowboard now is a mass sports. And a worldwide Pro-Tour with great performance can now be seen on TV every weekend. Snowboarders like Terje Haakonsen, Shaun Palmer, Daniel Franck, Martin Freinamedetz, Nicola Thost and, last but not least, the unforgotten Olympic champion of Nagano, Ross Rebagliati, are

world stars today. Mega events like Innsbruck's Air&Style attract 40,000 and more people, and snowboarding has set the determining trends of the last years in music and clothing style. Snowboarding is the youth-culture of the nineties !

More than 80% of the kids who practise winter sports choose snowboarding - no wonder snowboards still are the number one Christmas present. And for sure, one day the kids will ask the older generation: "Excuse me granny, but why did you cut your snowboard in two pieces when you were young?"

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