

Longboard Buyers Guide

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Buying your first board can be and is a huge step. There are lots of decisions to make. This guide is meant to help the uninitiated understand what they should consider. There are many awesome products out there, and the aim is to give you the foundation for making a good decision. After all you want to start your collection of right.

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So let's consider what board length you want?.

Your desired length should not determine too much which board you choose. There are more important decisions to make first that will narrow down the length choice. So let's split up board length into two factors, wheel base, and stance.

Wheel Base- Board length is closely tied to wheel base, which is the measurement from the back wheels to the front wheels, so wheel base depends on how long the board is and then where the trucks are mounted on the board. The length of your wheel base directly effects how tight your board will turn. The longer the wheel base the less tight (or larger turning radius) you'll be able to turn (your trucks are also a large factor in how tight your board turns). Besides making u-turns and being able to maneuver through obstacles, having a board that turns tight is important for downhill carving. When you are riding downhill (assuming you aren't sliding yet) the major way to keep yourself from going faster than you are comfortable is to carve out your speed by making S turns (like when you are snowboarding down a steep run). The tighter your board turns, the steeper the hill you can ride and still limit your speed. The only drawback of having a tighter turning radius is that your board becomes less stable once you do take it up to a high speed (More on this under `Trucks')

Stance- Beyond wheel base, you want to consider stance width and deck room. The longer the board the wider the stance you can sport. Your stance width is largely affected by your height. But once you get up to 42 inches or so, the board is pretty much wide enough for anyone's stance. Past 42 inches, and now you are talking about how much room there is to move around up there. Boards above 42 inches increasingly give you some room to play around, kind of like a surfboard.

Boards above 50 inches (see the 57" Ed Economy Bank Rider and Street Rider by Gravity) are pretty much used for either serious downhill speedboarding (remember: a long wheel base means more stability at high speed) or for people who want a really mellow board walk cruiser so they have a lot of room to move around, and a lot of stability so you can totally relax while "hanging ten" and checking out the scene.

A board that's really short (34 inches or less) means you are increasingly sacrificing some stance comfort for really tight turns (a smaller board is also easier to carry around and store). This is slalom board range. A really tight turning board can be very fun for tearing about as it'll be super responsive, and can let you carve REAL tight downhill. (Check out the Loaded Fish, Gravity GS, and Landyachtz lil'gaffer!).

...Alright so now you should have an idea of what range you wanna be in for length, or at least what to consider...Length is a characteristic of the overall deck shape. Here are a number of other factors to consider:

Deck Characteristics...

Concave/Flat/Convex - The vast majority of boards are either concave or flat. Concave means that when you are looking at your board head-on from the front at street level, the right and left edges of the deck curl up slightly so that it looks like a very subtle `U' shape. People that like concave will tell you that they get better grip on a concave board because it helps you "lock" your feet in while carving because the walls of the `U' help keep your feet from slipping off the deck. Also, concave helps gives you more carving leverage for quicker turns, because more of your weight is transferred to the outer edges of the board as you lean into a turn. Another benefit is that you can feel where the edges of your board are without having to look down. The only real draw back of concave is that it's a little harder to move your feet around on top of the board, so you might want flat for a big long board that you want to cruise and play on.. There are only a few convex (opposite of concave, rising up in the middles, down at the edges) decks I know of, one is the Carveboard Bubbler, the other is a turner slalom board.

Flat/Cambered/Rocker - Just as in surfboard terminology I use camber for a board that rises up in the middle so if you are looking at it from the side, with your eye at street level, it makes a slight arch. Rocker is the opposite, with a slight upside-down arch lengthwise (some people say 'concave' for rocker and 'convex' for cambered, but for clarity, I prefer to use those word only for describing the shape width wise). A board with rocker has a lower center of gravity (like a Barfoot) which is important for stability in a deep carve or transitions in and out of turns. A rockered board tends to feels like it's cradling you as you go in and out of turns as it sort of `swings' from side to side (see hammocks). Cambered boards tend to be the type that have more flex, and Flex is characteristic that deserves it own heading. So the only thing I will say here about camber is that it doesn't sag down as far as a flat board of equal flexibility because the deck starts from a higher point, and cambered boards tend to have more springback.

Flexibility - Flex is measured by the amount a board will 'give' when you put weight on it. There are boards that range from totally stiff and don't flex at all (a Tierney rides or Flowlab/Flowboard DCS is totally stiff), to boards that if you jump on, you can get the deck to touch the ground (Take a big bounce on one of the flexier Loaded Vanguard). Flex gives you a softer ride as it can absorb some of the impact when you go down a driveway lip or off a curb. It's also nice if you are jumping on and off your board a lot. A stiffer board is generally preferred for higher speeds as it tends to be more stable (at high speeds, you want to absorb any bumps in you knees, you don't want the board bouncing you up and down after going over a bump at 40mph+). Some people consider a stiff board more precisely controllable, because your feet and body movements are directly transferred to the trucks without being muted, exaggerated or distorted by the flex of the deck. However, an intelligently shaped deck that fits well with the trucks you are riding on can really increase the amount of precision and control in your ride (again, see the Loaded Vanguards, Hammerhead DCS and Fish).

Springback or Quality of Flex - No no, you ain't the flex masta' yet my brotha'. Fo' Sho' you gots ta considera' the QUALITY of the flex...or Springback. Some boards have pretty dead flex. This means the deck doesn't rebound and push you back up as you un-weight the board a bit.

What do I mean `UNWEIGHT'? Damn glad you asked. Well if you are standing straight up on a scale and you quickly bring your legs up, you will weigh less as you begin to `fall' or move downwards. This is unweighting the board. Then when you start to slow your `fall' and then begin to stand up straight again, you will weigh more as you are pushing into the scale to slow down and then accelerate your body up. This is how you weight your board (seriously, go practice for a sec on a scale, especially if you have the old non-digital kind with a needle, practice moving up and own on the scale to make yourself weigh less and then more, so that you are controlling the needle and making it swing back and forth. This stuff is really important later when you learn to PUMP).

A board with a high quality flex and a lot of spring back will store energy when you weight it and it flexes down, and then spring you back up when you unweight it a bit (by, for example, picking your legs up a little) . If you are doing some big hard pedaling (kicking off the ground with your food to gain speed), a deck with quality spring back will lower you closer to the ground as you weight the board going into a pedal, and then when you transfer weight to the foot pushing off the ground, thereby un-weighting the deck, it'll spring you back up. Most importantly though, and most fun, a board with quality spring back or a high-rebound will spring you out of a turn and into the next one. When you are riding, you weigh more when you are in the middle. of a turn and the G force pushes you into the deck, and then as you come out of a turn, you can unweight the board and let the board spring you up. You can then use that upward momentum to fall back into the next turn, and tranferring energy back into your deck. Now we're talking about good times! Overall, even before you get this unweighting and weighting stuff down, and are bouncing in and out of turns, many people just find a flexy deck with good springback to be a lot `livelier' of a ride. (the first time I hopped on a Loaded Vanguard I literally felt like I was riding a live beast compared to alot of other decks which felt either dead or asleep). Good springback is also important for Pumping, which is when you propel yourself forward without kicking, simply by throwing your weigh from side to side. Learning to pump is certainly a bit challenging, but you'll eventually want to do it (for a good how-to-Pump, click here)

while it is possible to pump a totally stiff board, I personally find it more enjoyable on a board with good quality flex (however too much flex can sap your energy and slow you down) .

Materials- so what makes a board have "good quality flex"? Great question. Largely, the deck materials are responsible for the quality of flex. Your most basic board is made of simple plywood. When a piece of plywood is concave, it tends to have more rebound or springback... But to get some really good flex takes composite materials like fiberglass (Sector 9 Cosmic Rider series, FibreFlex, Flex Dex, Comet skateboards, Loaded, and Landyachtz are all example of composite boards that use some fiberglass) Boards with fiber glass are more expensive to make though, so you are looking at paying a bit more. A further improvement in flex seems to come with the use of vertically laminated wood cores (normal ply wood is horizontally laminated, as the layers, `plys, ' are laid one on top of the other, while vertically laminated means the plys are placed side by side in thin strips next to each other, so you can see the different `layers' when you are looking at the top or bottom like stripes going down the length) in conjunction with fiberglass, which is basis for the technology that Loaded Boards and Comet Skateboards use.

So you've got, length, wheelbase, and deck characteristics (i.e. camber, concave, rocker, flex...) all figured out. Now its time to talk about deck shape.

Deck Shape...

O.K., if you understand this next stuff, you will understand the basic issue of skateboard design and consequently be able to look at a skateboard and really tell what's going on there. Skateboards started with roller skate trucks, which barely turned, they veered slightly to one side as you leaned, and were very very narrow. Then they started making trucks a bit wider so that you could make the boards wider than a water-ski without the thing tipping over. But the trucks still couldn't get you around a corner, and in order to make a fast turn, you had to kick the back of the board up. This describes your average eighties board and your 90's new school shortboard. But if you really want to simulate surfing (and snowboarding) and don't care so much about tricks, but rather for the feel of the ride, then you got to make trucks that really turn, so you can carve hard and lean into it. Now the problem is, if your trucks turn a lot, and you are riding larger wheels, that means the wheels are gonna hit the deck as you turn hard, which is called `wheel-bite, ' and immediately causes the board to stop in its tracks while you get a face full of street. Longboard design is largely centered on how to deal with this problem: how do you make a board that turns well but doesn't get wheel bite? And each board has its own strategy. Most of the boards being sold today (Sector Nine, Gravity Boards (most), Dregs, Vision Skateboards, Fluid Longboards) use a two or three pronged strategy?.

TRUCKS...

1. They use trucks like Tracker B-2's or the Sector Nine `Pivot Trucks', which don't turn very tight, and 2. they mount the trucks on the board with a riser so that the deck is raised up a bit which affords the deck more clearance over the wheels, and 3. sometimes, the deck is shaped so that at the point where the wheel might hit the board in a turn, the deck is narrower or there is a piece cutout. Notice how a Gravity HyperCarve has little half-moons cut out above the wheels (called wheel cutouts) in the front, and the deck gets narrow above the back wheels. Or picture the classic longboard shape, a Pintail. The front trucks are mounted way up on the nose where the board is still thin and way back on the tail where it gets thin again. The drawback of using a combination of these approaches is that you end up with not-so-turny trucks, and when you use a riser, you are making the board less stable than it could be as you raise the center of gravity. Another strategy is to make the deck shape so narrow above the front and back truck that you can use really carvy trucks with no riser, and you still don't get wheel bite. I'm talking of course about a Loaded Vanguard, and that explains why the board is totally cut away at the back and front ends, so it can use the Randal R-2's which turn a lot sharper than your Pivot truck or Tracker B-2. Another option is to use REALLY wide trucks like Independent 215s which stick out past the deck. (what you want to know about truck width is that the wider the truck, the more stable the ride but the slower the trucks will react in a turn). And yet another strategy is to make trucks that turn sharp and quick, but have a built in turn stopper to stop the truck before the wheels hit the deck, like the Exkate and Baku torsion trucks (Bakus only come on Barfoot and Hobie completes).

So let's review the 5 strategies for preventing wheel bite, so the next time you look at a board you can tell which ones it uses:

- trucks that don't turn very sharp
- riser pads that raise the deck up higher for more clearance
- deck shaping that gets narrower or is cutaway above the wheels
- wide trucks that extend past the edge of the deck.
- trucks that are set to not turn past a certain point like torsion trucks.

Other deck shape features... The wider the board is where you put your feet, the more turning leverage you will get. Also a few decks like the Loaded Vanguard have rounded-stand pads for multi-directional leverage that help you control the

board by pushing on it from different directions. And of course you know what a kicktail is, and what it's for, and some board like the Gravity Concave Maple Series have a `nose tail' too. Then some decks like the Barfoot NoseRiders are built with a wide spot to stand on in front for some Longboard surf-style stuff.

Finally, you want to think about wheels. Most completes come with wheels attached, and most skate shops, don't stock enough components and decks to let you custom build a board. But if you order online, you can choose wheels from a big selection. So take a look at the Wheels section for a comprehensive explanation of longboard wheels, that way if you are buying a complete, you'll know what your wheels are good for, and if you are having a custom board built, you'll get a better idea of which wheels to pick.

If you have any questions or want some help in figuring out which deck is right for you, feel free to email theguys@palermolongboards.com. Thank to Bucksaw87 for all the images, well some of the images, all the cool ones at least.