

# American Longboarder In Europe

Contributed by Augusto Lage  
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Malakai Kingston has been on the road a lot, lately. He's on the road to Pender Harbour as this story hits the 'Fish. In recent weeks, he had a social visit to meet his extended family in Europe. As you'd expect, he packed two shirts, a pair of underwear and room for four skateboards. He left with three, and picked one up in Cologne, Germany. Here's his report.

## American Longboarder In Europe Travels and Travails in Europe

Sometimes a change of scenery does you good. I found that out recently when I packed up some bags, grabbed the wife's hand and took off my shoes before boarding a flight to Europe. Now, before I go any further, this was not the "Longboarding in Europe" dream vacation any rider would wish for. This was more a matter of meeting as many of my Dutch family members in as short a period of time as possible. Although skating was not the prime impetus for this trip I did manage to get in some runs, met some awesome people doing so much for our sport and managed to catch a few shots of it all.

I don't remember much of the flight, really. That's strange, 'cause I never did manage to sleep. I think that would explain my delusional state which shanghaied me somewhere along the autobahn. I was getting up from one of the legs, the cabin was hot sweltering even, a grandmotherly voice tugs at my ear "son, your going to lose your passport". I look over and a woman still seated waiting to disembark the plane motions to my cargo pocket. I pat it and reply, "now you have gone and got me in trouble with the wife", my better half gives me a bit of a scowl having already chastised me for not securing my passport in a more secure location, I thank the woman sincerely knowing I will indeed get ragged on later, as the fore cabin begins to shuffle, the elderly woman reaches out an ET like finger and spins the NS wheels on my Fish. Still seated she smiles as if remembering something, she speaks "my son, he's about your age I would guess, he's 35, this year all he wanted for Christmas was one of those boards, they sure must be allot of fun, they're really quite popular these days!" I don't have a response the cabin was insufferably hot and all I kept thinking about was jelly beans for some reason, I tried to put on my Longboard Missionary suit but instead I weakly stammered "Yea they are a blast". Thinking back I think I should have said, "Yer about the best single serving skate mom ever!"

Within a short time in Germany, I had done two things which I had never done before--I try to keep track of these. As life itself runs out, I get to watch the lists of first's struck, gather. Some I am happy about, some not much so. I find it usually balances itself out the good firsts and the bad firsts. With any luck, this Europe trip would be full of firsts and I was scarcely out of the airport before my sharpie was out and two more firsts were struck. The Germans it is said, love their order, the manner of which they do things is important and it is some would say every Germans civic duty to maintain this standard of behavior. I was never one to have either the ability nor the desire to maintain any standards much less for my behavior.

The teller at the car rental place was in a heated discussion with my wife as to which car we would rent, I was getting itchy and the floor was too smooth, too slick and shiny. The sub-illuminated counters played up how even and fine the surface would be to skate on. I love skating in airports it's one of my favorite places to skate with all the heat on shoe bombers I have never gotten nabbed skating in an Airport, that is until I skated in Stuttgart Germany, I dropped and pumped silent I peeled off ninja lines as I rounded the desks for various transport agencies, I doubled back my first mistake and foot braked to a silent stop, my second mistake. It was a short minute before a very formidable woman walked up. I didn't need to understand the words that came out of her mouth, which is good cause I don't know German. She barked at me and I nodded and nothing more, she stomped off no doubt to find puppies to kill and a kitten with which who's whiskers she could pluck. The rental car attendant asked me what she had wanted, I mentioned that it was frowned upon to skate in the terminal, she laughed a genuine laugh and asked if I could skate in Airports in the United States, I responded grinning like a Cheshire cat "no prolly not but this was the first time I've been caught"

Have you ever wondered with those moving walkways what would happen if you skated onto one? I always have but I never had the chance to find out, usually in US Airports they are in carpeted airports. Sometimes I daydreamed that if I

skated onto one going in the same direction as I, my board and I would reach uber speed in no time and my skin would literally peel from my body. Well that's not what happens actually not much of anything happens unless you go up one that goes up a slight incline, In that case you slowly roll to a stop and then begin rolling backwards while the walkway continues unhindered up hill, the earth rotates around the sun and all the while your stomach churns. Pushing on one in the flats is quite like pushing any where else only you go slightly faster.

One of my few regrets about the trip is I did not get enough time to really get in touch with the other riders in Stuttgart I hear there is a decent sized core group of riders and one of the recent BBO winners was actually from there as well. As with all things considered I wasted no time managed to what I could but still on second thought I wish I had had more time there.

I did manage to take a few runs and apparently not only do Germans love their nature of order but they seem to love their cars as well, which is reflected quite obviously in the care they take of their streets, although decent conditions (barring cobblestone) were the general norm on the trip the roads I hit while I was in Stuttgart were nothing short of black velvet, smooth, silent and possessing the perfect amount of traction.

Another thing I found out was the respect or just sheer ability to avoid I the rider that drivers took, although I did a great deal of skating in traffic I never once felt that I was in a cars way or that I was obstructing traffic I maintained my lanes used arm signals and waited for open spots in traffic but seriously felt that they didn't mind my presence. Then again even if they were cursing me I never would have known.

Our drive to Switzerland was a fine one, or so I am told, somewhere between the moment I got in the car and the moment I went insane from delirium I realized I was in trouble it was right about then I hit the wall. I would awaken from a heated dream induced fever maddened with lack of sleep but eager to experience the ride, images of happy cows and blooming fields of yellow, gorges lined with tall furs leading in the cold depths to key lime creeks edged by moss and broken by granite. BMW's bearing down on us at ridiculous speeds and the myriad of methods of insanity that a silent mind can be conjured on a sleeping ride seeded with the words of other passengers. I awoke in a Puma Outlet store looking for a full body jump suit so I could dress like a Chav inspired hooligan, luckily they had nothing in my size so I ended up getting indoor soccer shoes.

The riding in Switzerland was unique; the scenery in Switzerland was beyond explanation. It was told to us at our arrival that we had literally brought with us spring, everything that could bloom, was. All growth was the most succulent and vibrant shade of the hue it would choose, never have I seen nature so simply imitate the art it has inspired. Rougemont in Switzerland is without a doubt a bastion for the halcyon days of a world I had until that moment known, I may be able to tell you of the Chateaus that date to the 1500's or the church which has stood to some religion since the 1300's but I can not in any way tell you why cows, hate &ndash; and I do mean hate longboards. I got a few solid runs, far more sketchy than the smooth streets of Stuttgart but wholly lacking the traffic, the streets are a large aggregate and some low points have steel drain grates which have to be dismounted, regardless of how short the runs or below my finicky standards the roads were the explosion of flora was awesome to cruise through. As I skated by a clan of cows they exploded in a fury bolting every which way and that terrified by my tranquil 4 wheels down aggression, if by chance those cow gives bad milk that in turn causes a season of cheese to be off &ndash; with all sincerity &ldquo;my bad&rdquo;.

Villa Nue is on lake Geneva, Montreux is not far from it, a short shoreside skate on what must be the oldest board walk I have ever skated, the surface switched from smooth sidewalk to aged lichen encrusted granite flag stones mortar flecking as my wheels peeled. I pumped and cruised by merchants with their stalls being the closest I have gotten to roma kind, swans bedding in driftwood by boats moored at the dock, the smooth push and glide with water by my side the sublime synch rider and nature can reach as waves brake and undulate, legs pump and foot presses to earth, momentum, rider and board foreword. Montreux was maybe a 20 minute skate from the point I started and my termination point was a Château de Chillon, some dude was incarcerated in the depths of the castle for a long time, scribed some words on a pillar and had a poem written about him. Killer to get famous for graffiti, guess Banksy ain't the first. This was a holiday weekend so the chance of actually skating in the heart of Montreux was out of the question although on a less crowded day I could imagine both the city streets as well as the sprawling sidewalks would have been a blast to carve, but for now Montreux was jammed to this gills with the best euro trash it could muster.

We drove north back through Germany, took rolling hills to the north west and into a vast expanse of yellow carpeted fields and stands of grape as vineyards lined the peripheries of the eyes, I was on a quest for the Pogo shop, not only did I need to get a hold of some baseplates I also wanted to meet the people behind the shop at longboardshop.de. I have to admit it was quite quizzical if nothing the village got all the more quaint as we drove into the heart of Löwenstein. Not the terrain I would expect to hold one of the most established skate shops in Germany, if not Europe. These sentiments were

expressed by my wife as well. "We are looking for a skate shop here?" as she mouthed the final query my eye caught the yellow and blue of the logo on an RV. I could hardly contain my excitement as I jumped from the car. I was stoked, I grabbed camera and pad and bolted.

Now I have to say and this has been mentioned many times, of many shops and many places of business. There is something magical if not wholly spiritually mythical of many skate workshops sawdust and filings are history the particulate in the air is the history and heredity of the riders and the dank pungent odor is the pheromone of an adrenaline driven body of action. The pogo shop is nothing less than pure unadulterated stoke.

The people behind pogo have a history that goes back with snowboards that goes back to '83 and longboards to '90. If that was not enough heredity to give them some solid cred the very house which houses all the works for the shop, warehouse and office has been in Martins family since the 1600's.

All around the shop stand the creations of the boys behind it Martin, Yogi and Pili. An amazing collection of speedboards showing their stickers, a collection of longboards snowboards of all shapes and sizes and even a sky board used by skydivers. The presses emma and berta standing at the ready. Martin and Yogi offered up much more than hospitality with a full tour showing their designs off and providing a great deal of information behind the Pogo Baseplates which I was so interested in and had heard so much of.

We got to munch on locally grown succulent apples as we conversed with the boys and met Martins Wife (although I have forgotten her name, she was quite nice) and his young son ben, who rides goofy just like his ole man. The warmth that was extended was amazing and it was an honor to be able to spend time with such amazing people. I admire them not just for the blessed lives they live but the simplicity of the pogo baseplate truly demonstrates that which I admire, in a world slathered with excess and waste the say something which truly had worth and they created it, not a gimmick a genuine technological advance. Although I am sure the same inspiration and creativity goes into their boards it is most aptly demonstrated in their drop through.

As we were to part Martin shared with us a few bottles of wine his father had made and a few tastes of sherry which we made locally by his father as well, one of our wine aficionado uncles would share with us later, it was truly one of the finest wines he have ever tasted and I would expect nothing less from a family this inspired.

In a world where supporting local shops is getting harder and harder due to the lack of inspired inventory, while online is becoming the primary point of purchase for riders looking for tech inspired gear it is good to meet some people behind a company so dedicated and grateful for that which they are a part of. Pogo is not just an online shop, no more than their office are merely a warehouse. Their shop is a museum, a distillery, an office, a workshop, a mad scientists lair, a testament to the generations and a full service skate shop and board manufacturing facility. Pogo above all things is a family. If you ever are in the area and are lucky enough to meet up with the crew for one of their 6km moonlit runs, then you are more than lucky, take advantage of it.

Ever since I first saw the boards made by Wefunk I have wanted one, not because I am a screaming downhill rider who needs a board that will sail like an eagles wing, or a slalom rider who needs that next edge to shave .0001th off my time to get to sleep at night. I have wanted a wefunk purely, for one simple reason. Decks that stand to the quality that Alex creates should be the norm. In a perfect world where our sport was no longer peppered with amateur hobby equipment we would truly have the variety we deserve. Wefunk and other builders like him truly are pushing the envelope and helping us to reach that point.

Our hobby has long been slave to the bottom line and the ridiculous over pricing of crap constructed creations, I personally feel this is changing the builders out there know who they are and it is with huge gratitude that I thank them for doing something that in the long run will do more for the sport than anyone else ever could.

Knowing I was gunna be in Germany I emailed Alex asked for my Speedbone and asked for it to be black, I wanted to put my money where my mouth was but actually picking it up is about the only way I could ever afford one, not that I am complaining I got to not only gain a Wefunk but meet a board builder I have admired for a long time.

I got to meet Alex at the school in Koln where he works, got to check out his shop and his gun case full of boards. Yes wefunks are so dangerous he has to keep them in a gun case. The design elements he described to me blew my mind but nothing really could truly ready you for the reality that is an actual wefunk, it's like the chocolate bar with the golden ticket it's all your dreams come true but you still gotta take the ride to believe it.

Sadly I didn't have much time to spend with Alex, he got to explain to me a bit of how Euros work and I got to

seem really confused, he really is quite nice and what he develops with his technology is just mind boggling. Please help to save our sport - Buy A Wefunk. Hell even if it doesn't save our sport you will be rocking a killer ride.

We rolled in to Arnhem and low and behold the house was on a hill, now this blew my mind for one simple reason we were in the Netherlands, and I thought the Netherlands were flat, well I was pleasantly surprised, very presently surprised. I spent the next day or so often trying to explain to everyone what I needed from the car and then disappearing for a few moments of speed induced satori.

The hill was a mellow half pipe down up even on both sides with a nice fat bike path, it was a very slick polished gravel material that floated my wheels just right, not the worlds biggest hill but it had a gradient and as any starved boarder knows, if you truly love it, any hill will truly do.

On a simple press down the hill I was passing a cross street and a convertible rolled into the intersection, the driver fully had the right of way and I made it known by pressing the left curb that the driver could pull out, the driver waved me on smiling and saying hello.

Sometimes it truly is the simplest things that can set all right.

If Arnhem was rolling hills Amersfoort was flat, flat as all get out, was the Netherlands of my minds eye. Windmills and dikes, locks and canals, flat very, very flat. So flat in fact that everything was on the horizon it was as if even the closest objects could very well be the farthest reaches of the vanishing point as all visual witness just unrolled in one long expectable plain. After skating in Amersfoort it was truly hard to believe the world was in fact round.

However the truly flat nature of the terrain made it a perfect for a LDP outing with the relatives on bikes or blades and I on my board. The very distance we covered would be in excess of 18 miles but would seem hardly that with the absolute lack of gravity pulling on much more than my very core, no direction just down.

The terrain changed vastly as we skated quaint neighborhoods opened to lush grasslands and manor houses, canals bisected our paths and the softwood forests and dank tilled soil slowly changed to sandy pine stands reminding me more of some of the Eastern Barrier Islands than anywhere in Europe. With the sun mottling the path ahead and the rhythmic pump and push I skated on.

This pattern was broken by only two things, the most insanely bad terrain I saw while I was in Europe, a brick cobble street that could well swallow a hamster in the split of the rocks even more so my wheel. As well as the insufferable moped gangs that seem to harass the biking trails of the Netherlands why it is appropriate for these mini mongel crews to careen along bike paths is beyond me.

Not withstanding the terrors of wheels swallowing cobblestones and mopedian meuraders the distance ride was awesome and some of the most relaxing skating of the trip. One of the primary reasons I longboard is the true intimacy it allows you when you are riding through terrain, although you are allowed a more escalated speed of ambulation you still feel in touch and available to perceive all of the environment around you. The wind carried me on and the willows shaded my ride and all was right.

I stood at the luggage check in, I was tired and the flight home would be a chance to rest. The man at the X-Ray machine motioned at my board and told me I could not carry it on the plane. I told him I had carried it on the flight here so why not home? He shrugged me off and scanned my luggage, when we reached the counter the statement was reiterated by the women behind the counter, to emphasize why exactly I was not allowed to take it on the plane she made the "Bashing in someones head" motion which I now realize is universally known. I was a little put off because not only was my Old Man Army bag entirely filled I had gone to a great deal to pack my new Wefunk with care. Another man walked up I again exclaimed "But I had it with me on the flight here?" the man replied in a tone wholly lacking any candor that I was in fact quite mistaken, I then spoke in the plainest tone while making full American eye contact "Are you calling me a liar?" No sooner had that retort left my mouth than the voices in my head wrote a quick memo informing me that I was in fact a horse's ass and to another end if I EVER wished to see my luggage or my beloved Wefunk again, I should cease this argumentative line of action post-haste. After reviewing the memo I agreed, thanked the man, and promised to wear my helmet more often. The official at the counter must have seen me deflate and I said not another word but unzipped my Old Man Army bag and somehow managed to slip my Fish in without a problem. Germany got one last laugh in though, on the way home we had a layover in "Hare which is without a doubt one of the best airports to skate in. So sans board I was just lookin and moping. So if you live in Stuttgart can you do me a favor when you get a chance can you bomb those spiral runs on the end of the airport garages? They look like a blast and I should have when I had the chance.

I have to thank all my relatives who put us up while we were in Europe and fed us so well, of sustenance and of the wealth of knowledge you shared of your home.

Big thanks to my sister in law, who was nice enough to not push me out of the car on the autobahn. Thanks also go to Eric who managed to get us lost for one hour in a city that takes twenty minutes to drive through, seriously though that chicken korma was well worth it.

Thanks to everyone at Pogo: Martin and Wife, Yogi, Pili and Ben who were so generous and welcoming at their shop. They really are a great group of people and I can't say enough how much I endorse their shop because of the quality of the people and their gear. If you are looking for some quality downhill skateboarding gear, visit [LongboardShop.de](http://LongboardShop.de).

Finally thanks to Alex at Wefunk, not much I can say that hasn't already been said. Save our Sport, buy a Wefunk! I took some pictures of my rides in Europe.