

Alexander Luxat the WEFUNK interview.

Contributed by Augusto Lage
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[It can be simply stated that Alexander Luxat the mastermind behind wefunkSkateboards "SpaceTime Bending Machines" has done more for the high performance board building craft. As an industrial-designer by profession this is the man dropping the knowledge that is helping skate technology catch up with the time, these babies ain't your papa's Nash. Silverfish brings you an exclusive look at the man behind the boards and gives some insight into the future of skateboarding, the technology and wefunkSkateboards.]

Stephan Risch, pic by Yorck Dertinger

[SF] What got you interested in skateboarding?

[WF] My first skateboard was a rainbow colored plastic-banana bought at a flea market around 1978. I had fun with it for one summer and then forgot about it. My first "real" board was a G&S Doug Saladino "Pine Design 2" with Gullwings and Kryptos. That led to different ramp decks of the 80's. I lost interest in skateboarding when all the Gator and Vision Streetware hype started and I encountered snowboarding in 86. When I came back from my first snowboarding trip skating was like "Damn hellip; where is the glide? Those hard wheels and vibrations just suck!". In 94 I spotted a Powell 44 "Diamond Logo with red Kryptos in a skate/snow shop and instantly knew that I would have fun with that. I think this started my quest for the ultimate riding experience...

Alex Luxat, pic by Dominik Kowalski

[SF] You have a long history on the fish of creating some of the most amazing boards, where did this all get it's start, when did you first get the idea to build boards? / What inspired you to begin fabricating your own skateboards and at what point did high strength composites and the more complicated principles of engineering become involved?

[WF] After the Powell I owned (and still have some) 1st and 2nd gen Sector9 decks. One was a wood/glass Cosmic 2. Best ride I had so far. A very versatile and fun deck I also used to ride in bowls and snakeruns. Later I shortened it for faster response. At some point I wanted something "better" and different. Ordering a Pocketpistol or Ick from the US was out of my budget. So my friend (and former co-partner) Arne and I decided as design students we could build what we wanted on our own. One summer evening we had some beers and were listening to wefunkradio.com webradio. Their show opener contains a sample from Parliament's "P-Funk"; "WEFUNK - the mothership connection - the extraterrestrial brothers" - that was us and couldn't fit better. I did some research and the next day got the .de URL and built the logo.

Alex Luxat, pic by Mr. Bookwood

[SF] What is the background in your life that led you to utilizing the materials you use? [WF] I'm a professional industrial designer and since I suck at drawing / rendering I always had to compensate this with model-building. Also I HAVE to see if an idea actually works. With wood, foam and composites you can build nearly everything from a chair to a space rocket (well, at least Burt Rutan does it).

[SF] What is the scene in Europe like? / Is there anything about Europe that influences the way you build out your boards or the materials you use? [WF] I can answer this for our local Cologne/Düsseldorf builder scene: With Kaliber and later Pavel we had a constant almost always friendly arms race in slalom-deck building. This led to an explosion of new shapes and ideas.

Stephan Risch, pic by Yorck Dertinger

[SF] Obviously to create high end products you have to have high end testers, who are the people that ride your boards and provide feedback that help you design such high end board, who is your testing team.

[WF] Boris Schinke and Marco Althoff are both fast guys and we mostly trip together. The close contact and actually seeing them ride gives the fastest and pure feedback I could wish for. The Topbone was built after their specs they wanted to see in a deck for our technical runs. Felix "Mr. Bookwood" Buchholz rides a totally different style,

takes super pics that are a good means to control our style and is a party animal. Had to have him on the team. Stephan Risch of Munich is the nicest guy you could imagine. With his long experience and standing in the european DH scene (organizer Almabtrieb) I'm glad to have him in the team. Pro photographer Yorck Dertinger is the latest who got on wefunk. He actually shoots his killer pics riding a board at full speed. He just got a bigbone – smooth ride while taking pics.

[SF] Where did you draw the inspiration from to create the triple-torsion box core on the speedbone? [WF] The first Nidecker Proto GS racing snowboard had a similar construction. Best racing snowboard I ever owned. I tried to transfer some of it's construction principles and incorporating some of my ideas (the recessed stringer for the non-linear flex pattern).

[SF] Where do you see composite skateboarding technology going next?

[WF] It's an arms race with no ends. There are so many ideas still to be tested and transferred. Ski and snowboard construction has to cope with similar problems: Traction and vibration dampening at high speeds on changing surfaces. If a construction works well on fresh powder, hardpack and ice it would be interesting to see WHY it works so well and HOW this could be incorporated in a plank that races down a road with rough surface and cracks in the pavement.

[SF] Do you see the things you're doing in fabrication have any applications outside of the racing side of skateboarding? Vert for instance? [WF] I bet that even Danny Way would benefit from a light and strong deck when flying it for insane distances. I love the decks NLC Hawaii builds – pieces of art. (I save my NLC -- handpainted by Ryan -- like a rare wine for THE epic session, maybe my 40th birthday or so).

[SF] What is your favorite type of pie?

[WF] Is there something like a sushi pie?

[SF] What place will CAD/CAM technology take in skateboarding manufacturing in the future? / What kind of applications do you think parametric modeling software will find in the skate and snow industry? [WF] As core construction gets more technical and precise so do the tools and means of design.

The bonecore foam-part is so filigree at the tips that it can't be routed by hand. Also the fit of the carbon-wrapped stringer had to be very precise. The design outlines were drawn on a vector based software (Freehand). The outlines imported into SolidWorks (parametric CAD). From there to MasterCAM to the CNC.

[SF] To what extent do you think you have investigated the generative possibilities of using force vectors to govern skateboard design?

[WF] I have just seen the peak of the iceberg. I think with professional composite layering software like used in airplane construction you could predict the behavior of the laminate when put under varying stresses. To be honest I guess it will never happen that a software-company goes the way to get telemetric data on flex-curves and vibrations in a skateboard. However I think that an intuitive approach also can work with amazing results. Bucky Fuller is one of my big idols and I try to integrate his principles of Tensegrity and Synergy, trying to convert/deflect pressure into tension which is the force enforcement fibres are meant to deal with.

[SF] How do recycled and low environmental impact materials fit into your skateboard manufacturing? [WF] First of all I think that ANY skateboard has a better eco-balance than any other means of transportation (even better than a bicycle). Even if I would build a bamboo skateboard the bamboo has to be harvested, processed and transported halfway across the earth before I could lay my hands on it. In my case using European ash and Baltic birch already is eco-friendly. Of course the composites are not but there is no substitute with the same constructive strength. On a small scale I recycle also for economic reasons: The soaked and hardened breather cloth used in vacuum production becomes part of the shipping padding. The huge cardboard sheets I get the foam in are used as packaging for the boards. I even used it to make punk-rock-style banners for the DH worlds (and will pack boards in it later on).

[SF] How do you think silverfish is doing in it's quest to help create new board builders?

[WF] It is the worlds biggest resource for anybody who wants to get into building and is capable of the English language. In the last three years there was enormous progress in the quality and construction of homemade boards. The build-offs really push people to show their best, to really put their skills to use. It is for sure an inspiration for the whole industry. SF and the feedback I get here also was the reason for me to continue and to constantly progress. The community also helped me and motivated me when I really had some depressing bad times. I thank you (the whole SF community) for this.

[SF] Where do you find your unobtainium?

[WF] Remember the mothership connection and the extraterrestrial brothers?! =)

[SF] Would you ever want to team up with an American company to make wefunks in the US? [WF] Yes, this now becomes a possibility since the demand outgrows my capabilities and I have to rethink my "business-structure" (if there would be one) really soon.

[SF] Is it possible that we will ever see a larger availability of Wefunk Boards in the US by any other method? [WF] Maybe. I hope so.

[SF] What is your favorite board design so far? [WF] For DH depending on the course Speedbone and Topbone. The Speedbone is versatile and great for fast sweepers and bombing. The Topbone I love for the additional pressure I can put on the rear truck railing tight hairpins. Boris and Marco just ride the Topbones at the moment. However the most ridden board in my ten completes quiver is my "Lil' Ripper kicktail" - not as fast to pump as my TS foamy but sooo much fun in the city and in a banked park.

[SF] What do you plan on doing in the future?

[WF]Doing lobbying work to allow skateboards on public streets like in Switzerland. German traffic law defines skateboards still as toys which is clearly BS. If a bicyclist crashes (or has a traffic accident) while downhill he has insurance - a skater is #####! I want at least the same status inline skaters gained a few years back allowing them to use bicycle lanes.

Of course I'll try to continue progressing my designs and constructions. I never said I built the ultimate ride but that I'm on the quest for it.

[SF] Anything you would like to add?

[WF] Thank you for all the support during the last years. SF is my 2nd family.

[SF] Thank you Alex, not just for being a master of your craft but sharing it with us. Much respect.

[You can see the full lineup of boards which Wefunk produces as well as some custom pieces on his website located at Wefunk.De you can contact Alex at alexatwefunk.de you can often find him helping other builders in the Board Building Forum]