

## Interview With Pogo

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[On a recent trip to Germany, Malakai Kingston was almost beaten to within an inch of his life because he was caught smuggling his longboard onto a plane. His verbal accusation was not smiled upon and his self preservation kicked in but that is another story all together. Way before he managed to infuriate the local authorities, he met Yogi and Martin at Longboard Shop . These two are the team behind the Pogo Baseplate as well as one of the most established European online skate shops and maker of fine quality longboards and snowboards. With the 'fish in touch with Pogo, we 've got an interview for you.]

[SF] When and how did you all become active in the sport! [PG] To be able to start skateboarding, we had to build our first skateboards ourselves. That was in the mid seventies. At that time, it was almost impossible to purchase boards in Europe. Our journeyman pieces of work were quite ugly. We had to cut these old rollerskates in two and mount them on a piece of wood. They had tiny little black wheels with worn out bearings and riding them faster was quite a threat. Concerning the snowboards, we had the same problem. We built our first snowboards in 83. [SF] What is the history behind Longboardshop.de, why did you start a webshop? [PG] From the late 80s to the late 90s, the longboard-onlineshop was part of the Pogo website. Then, with more and more people starting to longboard, the independent webshop became a burning necessity. There was barely any sportshop selling longboard material in Europe at that time and when you found one, it didn't have a big choice to offer. Longboardshop.de in Germany besides Sk8shop.ch in Switzerland, were the only address for many years, before other shops came settling in.

[SF] Did you ride ramps and pools a lot in the 70s?

[PG] The walls in our bedrooms were plastered with posters of US skateboard mags, showing guys like Stacy Peralta skating in giant Pipelines and steep swimmingpools none of which we were able to find around where we lived. We were stuck on flatland freestyle, slalom and downhill. Poolriding came a lot later. The only ramps we could ride were poor selfbuilt wooden quarterpipes, so we often preferred to bomb down some vinyard roads in the Lionstone mountains (Which are rather hills than mountains).

[SF] Is that how you got into the standup-downhill racing? [PG] Yes and No. Yes because it gave us the virus for raging down mountain roads and No, because the european downhill racing scene only came up two decades later around the late nineties. In the 80s and 90s we happened to train and test snowboards at the Kaunertal glacier in Austria. The mountain road going up to the glacier was quite a challenge to go down on a skateboard. Friends of ours and one of our pro snowboard riders kept charging it on streetluges. We started to try this road in stand-up style with high friction wheels to be able to carve some speed out, but the respect steadily vanished and when the world championships came to Kaunertal these days, we knew, this was our thing. [SF] What kind of professional training have you had? [PG] We both have a bachelor of technology diploma in mecanical engineering. Part of the studies, we did at the IUT d'Annecy, the french twin college of our german University.

[SF] Have you ever worked for other companies? [PG] We have both been working for ski factories in France and Switzerland, designing snowboard shapes and bindings. [SF] Why did the two of you decide to build boards and equipment after your studies of mecanical engineering instead of opting for a promising engineers career in the nearby german car factories Audi, Porsche or Mercedes? [PG] Both of us have been hanging around too much in daddies workshop in our youth, conceiving and building things we needed for pleasure. We loved bringing our ideas all the way to reality. In the industry, you mostly have to solve tiny problems of a big project that often don't really give you pleasure and when you are done, you can't feel the pride to say: I built this! This is why we choose the harder but more interesting way to make a living. Since we spend most of our lifetime for work, it is important for us to do something we love to do.

[SF] So, when you have brought a product to the point where you can sell it, do you just grab the next project out of the drawer? [PG] Sure, in the first place, we are pretty happy, when something is done to our satisfaction so we can build it in series. But nothing is perfect. Often we improve our products over the years. The POGO-Raceplate is a good example. Now that we have brought the 36° version within two years to a point that quite some racers use them in the worldcup, we did some more finishwork on them (additional holepatterns, so you can change the wheelbase), and come out with an additional 48° geometry next month.

[SF] What's the turnover or work ratio between your snowboard- and skateboard-building activities? [PG] Until about the change of the century, snowboarding was a lot more important to make up for our living, but today, things have equalled out. There's quite some pioneer developpment in the skateboardscene going on, most of which is over in the

snowboarding business. So the skateboards need more input on this side. As far as production is concerned, however our snowboards are stuffed with so many special parts, that this takes way longer than the fabrication process of our longboard-skateboards. So we spend about the same amount of time for the two activities.

[SF] The drive to run the shops obviously involves a number of people who all is involved?

[PG] We try to keep the structure small nowadays, so there's just a few freelancers working for Pogo and Longboardshop. Normally there's the two of us, Martin and Yogi working in the production and the shop. Pili ships out all the parcels and our secretary Angelika comes twice a week for half a day. Dawn, Martins wife (US citizen), does the handdrawings on the boarddesigns. The structure was way bigger during the boomtime of snowboarding, when we had between 6-8 people working on the boardfarm, building up to 1200 boards a year. Nowadays we are back down to around 300 snow+skateboards a year with very steady snowboard sales and slightly rising tendency in the longboard sector.

[SF] What is the history behind the building the shop is based in?

[PG] The building is an old farm built around 1600 in the lionstone mountains, the foothills of the black forest and the Alps. It belongs to Martins parents who have more or less retired except for some wine and Schnaps distilling business. We installed our office and warehouse upstairs, downstairs the building is stuffed with board production gear, such as giant presses, milling-, grinding-, cutting-, sawing-, silkscreening-, lacking-, and other manufacturing machines. . Moreover, there's a board-museum with a tablesoccer and the old chicken coop as a kitchen and meeting room.

[SF] How are you about sponsoring? [PG] Well, I don't think there's any longboarder in Europe, that hasn't got some longboardshop.de T-Shirts in his wardrobe. We sponsor every World Championship and most Worldcup Races and Freeride Events with a T-Shirt for each participant. This is not only a way to do publicity, but also a means to give back something to the longboard community, we live from.

[SF] What other sports are you involved in?

[PG] Surfing, Kiteboarding, Skydiving, Skullboarding, Freeclimbing, Motocross, Judo, Swimming, Soccer,...

[SF] What was the deciding factor behind deciding to build boards? [PG] The main reason at the beginning was the sheer impossibility to get a hand on those things when we were young. Later on, it was the search for better products than what was on the market. We never built any products, that we didn't have the need and fun to use ourselves. Riding the products regularly ourselves for us is a key to be able to build good products, progress, and stay competent.

[SF] How would you describe the boards you build?

[PG] Functional in the first place, perfect in handling and performance. Design is another important priority. All our snowboards and now also some longboard models have a unique design. So every board is different. Most are handdrawn or airbrushed, others have different wood finishes, stringers, or inlays. Our boards sure are not the cheapest (snowboards around 1250\$, Longboards around 400 \$), but taking their long lifetime into consideration they most certainly are!

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[SF] Have you seen an increase in boarder activity in Europe recently and are you happy about the way, it develops?[PG] Yes, numbers certainly increase. Not as much as many declare, but steadily and sane. And it is exactly the way, we want it to grow. We are still in the pioneer days of longboarding. All racers know each other, when you see another longboarder in town, you go chat with him. We still are a big family. Youth is the nicest time in life, also in the life of a sport. Once the big mainstream fashion comes along, it will sweep all that away. Then the sport will mutate into a pure money thing. It will be other people than the keen people directly involved into the sport, who will take profit. Everything will be produced in China and you will get giveaway longboards at McDonalds, when you buy a full meal. We have lived these developments in many other sports in our many years of experience and enjoy this state of longboarding hopefully for another few years.

[SF] Where in Europe do you sell to? [PG] All over the place. From Finland to Spain, but France and Germany are particularly strong. [SF] How do you handle all the different languages when people call for technical advice? [PG] We speak fluently German, French, English, some Spanish and a little Italian.

[SF] Sales on the web are quite impersonal and dynamic. Is there other reason why people go to see you instead of other webshop?

[PG] We always try to have a strong personal relation to our customers, many of them have become close friends over the years, ordering their stuff at the farm is almost getting kind of a cult thing for them. The races, freeride events and the sponsoring differentiate us from other webshops. None of them are into that yet. Authenticity is an important thing you cannot buy, and that you have to live up to every day.

[SF] What are your local sessions like? [PG] Apart from poolriding, fourlevel-carpark riding, and hairpin sessions in pedestrian parks in the nearby cities of Heilbronn and Stuttgart, we live each month towards fullmoon. This is when we get together with Huge, Bassi, the Lang Bros and other boarders from the region. We always meet at the Pogo soccertable in the evening playing until around midnight. Then we bomb the main road going down 6km with hairpins and smooth asphalt all the way to our farm. Since the road is too busy during the day, we have to go between midnight and 05:00 in the morning. [SF] Don't you have problems with the German police? [PG] Unfortunately people who cross us, - often logging truckers-, call the cops with their cellphone. The cops are getting aware and start giving us a hard time instead of a gentle hug as in the old days, so the sessions start getting another thrill, sort of like a cat and mice game. We do hit and run bombing now, always changing slopes after two or three runs. Fortunately we are blessed with several nice runs nearby.

[SF] What has the advancement of you products been like, what evolution have your boards gone through?

[PG] Once the testing of prototypes is done, we generally start building the products in a smaller series. Normally at this state, as well as over the years, small changes are still being made. Thus a product that we have been selling over several years is perfectly adapted and hard to beat. Our snowboard shapes are a good example. There is hardly any breathtaking new development in the boardshapes since several years. Although other companies come out every year with different new shapes. We just ask ourselves if last years shape of theirs have not been satisfactory. But in most cases the new boards have just undergone some cosmetic changes. We are proud to say, that our shapes have barely changed within the last years, ...because they are perfect.

[SF] What was the inspiration behind Pogo Baseplates?[PG] As for all our products, there was a need. The need of a simple, low baseplate without a drophthrough, that you could step on, to get your weight on the front truck and reduce wobbling. During the last years that the world championships took place in Kaunertal, we built the first prototypes of a baseplate that was so low, that the board hit the hanger in the inclined position. Impossible to get lower! Dropfoot braking suddenly was a lot safer and pushing at the start a lot easier with the lowered deck. And still it was possible to put the front foot on the truck. The approach was pretty revolutionary. Today many pro riders in the worldcup circuit ride our Pogo Raceplates.

[SF] Any chance you will get US distribution for them?

[PG] The plates are still manufactured in small quantities by CNC milling. Now, after having them protected at the Patent Office, we are looking for a way to have them molded in bigger quantities. Once this is done, we will be looking for a distributor in the US.

[SF] Any plans to make hangers to match the pogo baseplates?

[PG] In the long run, we might produce hangers as well, but for the moment we try to find agreements with other companies. It was always possible to buy Comp2 or Luge floating axles separately, but next season, we will have a complete raceplate-truck offer with Holey hangers.

[SF] What do you think about the advancement in materials and precision trucks, how do you think it is effecting Longboarding?

[PG] In the past years speedboard riding has become a lot faster, but also a lot safer. Truck and wheel technology has advanced and the enemy called Johnny Wobble lies in chains. And still, we are sure, there's a lot of new developments to come.

[SF] I just read you got back from an IGSA event, what is IGSA in Europe like?

[PG] IGSA events over here have always been well organized events. The world championships in Austria and at the former Almbtrieb site have been the best example. Three kilometers of very steep road and a nightmare to secure. But no major accidents due to security faults. Gerry Lanz, Yorck Dertinger and Stefan Risch have all our respect for that! We have been to quite some local non IGSA races on poorly secured roads with car tyres in the turns and non protected obstacles along the racetrack, you would never see that at an IGSA race and we also dearly appreciate what IGSA Tech-Inspector Marcus Rietema does for us.

[SF] What influence do you think the European race scene has on the North American Scene and vice versa?[PG] Downhill Racing in the Alps has always been very technical, with hairpins right after fast sections. Starting with french Manu Antuna, raging down steep circuits without braking, longboarding literally slid into a new dimension. For a long time europeans have been dominating on technical courses in standup. US riders were better at speed finesse like riding position, bearing and greasing, aerodynamics such as helmet and fairing technology. But that is all history now. We see all of that on both sides now.

[SF] I think it's common thought that Americans tend to be more obsessed with their gear than Europeans, what are your thoughts on that?

[PG] That might be true, and part of the reason why Americans were faster in the straights.

[SF] What type of pie do you guys like?Yogi: Black Forest Gateau, soaking wet with cherry Schnaps from Martins Dads Distillery.Martin: fresh strawberries from the garden on homemade biscuit and whipped cream

[SF] What similarities differences do you find in the snowboarding / skateboarding markets? [PG] The surf feeling was the reason why we were longing for something similar in the snow and why we started snowboarding. It was something we that we had found in skateboarding too. It is the pure surf feeling that unites these sports. The markets of these two sports are just as similar as well. It is the same vendors, that sell the boards to the shops, often the same distributors, that sell skate and snow, and so on. Even the public image of the two sports has equaled out since the destroy factor in skateboarding has vanished.

[SF] Where do you see yourselves in 10 years?[PG] During 25 years big expansions never have occurred in our plans. A lot of things might change within 10 years, we have lived through several tough times in the business and hope we will still be able to do the things we love, and hopefully still make our living of it.

[SF] What changes do you think skateboarding will go through in the next five years?

[PG] We think skateboarding is already a lot more common than it was in the first and second wave. It is not that freak thing any more. Longboarding will add its touch as well. Anybody can cruise on a longboard. It is easier to learn than riding a streetdeck, so skateboarding will be open to a wider public. In the long run, skate/longboarding will take a strong place in public transport, maybe almost as strong as inline skating.

[SF] What do you think about skateboarding (Slalom, DH, Freestyle) in the Olympics?

[PG] Once our youth has grown into deciding positions at the IOC, and Sammeranch and his fellow concreteheads have died away, skateboarding will take the place of shock putting in the Olympics and the testosterone fed ugly kaukasian females with their bold heads and sumotory bodies will be exchanged for skinny, young skateboard girlies with dreadlocks.Worth looking forward to, isn't it?

[SF] Anything you guys have learned about the business side of things that you would like to add?[PG] Take the time to do what you love.

[SF] Words to live by.

Silverfish would like to thank Martin and Yogi at Longboard Shop for their time and the creation of the Pogo Baseplate.

See the whole Pogo Collection at <http://longboardshop.de/>