

Race Report: Fast Times at Bonelli

Contributed by easyrider2004
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Spectators and the crowd of racers at the first rounds of the IGSA California Downhill Series were treated to sunny skies, warm weather and blistering-hot racing at Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park, in San Dimas, California on January 28th. Inline Skates, Gravity Bikes, "Classic Luges" (buttboards), Street Luges and DH Skateboard classes all ran, and ran fast.

The DH skateboard class included a full-field of 19 racers, plus two more in the Women's Division. By the time it was over, top-qualifier David Rogers took the win by pulling ahead of a pack running so tightly together that it took several minutes to figure out who'd come in second! Read on for our report.

The Scene. Set in the rolling foothills of San Dimas, the Frank G. Bonelli Regional Park contains a hilly area around a large, man-made lake. Miles of shoreline, picnic areas, mountainbike trails and curvy roads abound. IGSA comes here, every year, and racers know the aging, but relatively smooth pavement well. By the time the Silverfish Longboarding crew pulled into the pits, it was full of Gravity Bikes, Luges, Buttboards, longboards and crowds of leather-clad racers.

The morning was consumed with individual qualifying. Racers rode a U-Haul truck to the top of the course, and came back down the hill in a steady stream, racing to see who could break the light-beam at the finish line to become Top Qualifier and for seeding in the Heats. The inline skaters came down in the wide stance of speed skiers, the streetluge and classic luge (buttboard) racers swooped down and clattered over an unfortunate crack in the pavement, the grav-bikes were fast and utterly silent and the DH skateboarders were exactly what you'd expect: deadly serious on their timed runs, and then jostling and conning the organizers to allow "group freerides" anytime the course was vacant.

By the time Qualifying was done, it was apparent that some competitors were rolling down the hill very quickly. George Merkert was TQ for the inliners. Fermin Rodriguez rolled his deadly-looking 3/4 fairing bike down the course at blistering speeds and David Rogers swooped down the course to TQ the DH skateboard class.

Stand Up, Go Fast. 21 skateboarders competed in the Downhill Skateboarding event including two women. In the women's division, Judith Rogers outran Carly Richardson of Surrey, B.C, Canada to earn her first IGSA California Downhill Series victory.

The men's DH race was sponsored by GF Hurley Longboards who donated a \$250 cash purse and three skateboards. Mike Gorman raced with a cell phone taped inside his speedhelmet: his wife is 9 months pregnant and "due". If the phone rang, he'd just race down the course, blow through the runout and hop in his car! Best Wishes, Dad!

In the final, Dave Rogers passed his brother, John, a few yards before the finish line and held off the hard-charging Jimmy Flindt and Brent DeKeyser to earn the International Gravity Sports Association (IGSA) victory. Flindt, from San Clemente, California, rolled up on John Rogers at the finish line and earned second position by about one inch! DeKeyser finished fourth, trailing the other three skaters by less than three feet. "It was one of the closest finishes in the ten year history of the IGSA", said IGSA President Marcus Rietema. The four skateboarders were all traveling in excess of 50mph as they charged across the finish line in the photo you see below. If you'd like to see the progression of the racers to the line, go to the photo gallery.

Dave is the husband of Judith Rogers, so it was nearly a Rogers Family sweep of the Downhill Skateboarding podiums, and they weren't done yet!

The Rogers Speed Dynasty Rolls On. In the street luge event, it was John Rogers who was victorious over Rob Ruhman and Tyler Wendtland. Rogers from Orange, California, earned a dominant victory as he won all three of his heats enroute to the victory. Ruhman, from Westminster, California and Wendtland, who also resides in Redlands, followed close behind in second and third respectively, with Brian Lee of Salt Lake City, Utah finishing fourth. Wendtland had earned the number-one starting position in qualifying but was unable to convert his qualifying speed into gold. The vastly experienced Rogers was unbeatable in the race. Abec 11 Wheels sponsored the Street Luge class, donating custom trophies and wheels to the three podium finishers.

In the Classic Luge class, Tyler Wendtland won the first two heats but nearly "lost the race" when he failed to start the third and final heat. Riley Meehan of Glendale, California ended up tied on points with Wendtland after the third heat when he finished second. If Meehan had won the heat, he would have taken the victory from Wendtland. The tie was broken by Wendtland's faster qualifying time. Justin Tolman earned a well-deserved third place. In the Jr. Classic Luge class, Tabitha Collins earned her second gold medal of the day.

Tight Packs, Reach for the Line. The Inline Downhill class saw a real dogfight between Westwood, California's George Merkert, and 2004 IGSA World Cup Champion Dave Lambert of Castro Valley, California. After three heats of racing and numerous photo finishes, the two skaters ended up tied in points and the winner was determined by qualifying time. Merkert had a faster qualifying time so he was awarded the victory. Warren Focke of Palo Alto, California was third with Mark Henley of Redwood City, California finishing fourth.

Silent and Fast. Mike McIntyre of Glendora, California rode to a dominating victory in the Gravity Bike class. McIntyre is the defending California Downhill Series Champion in Gravity Bike and he picked right up where he left off last year winning all three of his heats. Noah Rutherford of Norwalk, California finished second with Redlands, California resident Daniel Rogers (another one!) finishing third. Nine-year-old Tabitha Collins of Glendora was victorious in the Jr. Gravity Bike class.

Four competitors took the green flag in the Fairing Gravity Bike class with 2002 IGSA World Cup Champion Fermin Rodriguez earning the pole position and the victory. In qualifying Rodriguez, from Norwalk, California, laid down a blistering 46.495 second run that was nearly a full second faster than any other competitor in the other categories! Frank Waterhouse of Lakeside, California finished second with Noah Rutherford in third.

The event was organized by the Bob Ozman and Marcus Rietema of the IGSA and was run at Frank G. Bonelli Park, about 30miles outside of Los Angeles. Competitors raced on a .6mile road that is situated inside the park. Top speeds for street luge were in the 55mph range. Marcus and Bob set the course in the middle of the night before raceday, tear down the course well after dark when the racing is over, and work hard to ensure the racing is fast, safe and fair.

The 2006 IGSA California Downhill Championship Series will be comprised of six events, held on two separate courses within Frank G. Bonelli Park. Each competitor's best five finishes will count toward their final season points standing. Series Championship trophies will be awarded following the final event of the season.

For complete rules and additional information on the IGSA and gravity racing sports go to <http://www.gravity-sports.com>. Special thanks to Marcus Reitema and Chris Chaput for analysis and race day photography.

Visit our Bonelli Gallery for over 250 photos of the racing and event.