

Cool Running: We Review the Railz Cascade and Roadkill

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Fresh ideas are what make the skaters in The Longboard Consortium happy. Sometimes, a "fresh idea" is just wacky, and creates material for jokes. At first blush, we thought that the brainchild of two Arizona skater/snowboarders was a little wacky. You may have seen the Railz boards discussed in our Forums: the Cascade is a "46" deck, rocking skis and blades instead of wheels. It uses Randal trucks and a set of 4 gnarly rubber bands to stabilize the skis. Obviously the product of some thought and endeavor, the Railz Cascade is claimed to be a one-of-a-kind snow slashing, ice-carving longboard. Is the ride itself as unique as the system that would provide the ride?

Once we figured out that Railz sells a nearly identical board, with wheels on it, as the Roadkill, we developed a plan. We'd send a the board to Colorado for test riding in Breckenridge on the resort slopes, and in Denver with the rowdiest longboard scum we could dredge up. In one week, we put the board through its paces on snow and in a frozen parking garage in Colorado, then brought her back to the Coast for a run through fresh powder in Big Bear and the SoCal streets. This is our report.

An organic, yet techno look. The Railz deck is shapely, with gently sloping wheel wells and a voluptuous nose and tail. Mild concave is softened by the velvety black neoprene foam "griptape" laid in stripes along the length of the board. The deck is decorated with flowers and a logo on its belly, somewhat in contradiction to the aggressive looking ski plates. Translucent, ruby red, skis are mounted on each side of the trucks, looking like snow hungry claws on this otherwise docile beast. The Randal trucks are mounted on a plate with hooks for two thick rubber bands per ski. The straps keep the ski skids at a level. The deck is sealed and the press looks good. The makers have included a hole on the nose, to connect a leash to -an important detail if you'd like to take this board up a ski resort lift! Overall, we found this to be a clean design but, as with all decks, the review is more about function and less about pretty looks.

Length: 46" Width at Widest Point: 8.5";
 at F. Axle: 6.5"; at R. Axle: 6.5";
 Thickness: 1/4"; Concave: 1/4";
 Plys: 7 Ply Maple
 Wheelbase: 31";
 Wheel Wells: Yes Cutouts: No
 Wheel/Ski bite: None
 Deck Height: 3 1/2"; Trucks: Randal 150
 Bushings: White Doh Doh
 Wheels: tested with Abec11 Gumball
 78a Bearings: Biltin 3";
 Ski Hardware: Railz Skate Stabilization System
 Grip: Foam "Traction Grip System"
 MSRP: \$139.99
 Link: Railz

The Ride (Snow) The Cascade is a good example of devices that take the testers by surprise. In Breckenridge, we had our first opportunity to get this board on snow. We first tried pushing on near flats. Even with board boots and sub-freezing temperatures, the deck was easy to push and grip was not a problem. On flats, the deck slowed very notably when we tried to turn or pump. In Big Bear, it wasn't nearly so cold and our snow was fine dry powder. In that case, the board simply sunk through the fluff and would bind on the dirt or asphalt below it. Dense snow is the key, here.

In the lift line at Breck, we were reminded to attach the leash we scored from Chris at "Big Hit" in Breckenridge, a Railz dealer. We set our test rider loose on the slopes, and here's his report: "The lifties were cool us taking it on, no worries. I got all sorts of comments while in the line and it was obvious to those I talked to I was just as interested in how it would work at they were. I rode the lift up and hopped out onto a "not bunny slope" green. I set myself up and pushed away.

It was eerie how similar the feeling was to rolling but yet not. I was able to keep speed and carve off speed at will. Having the option to push, just awesome. First run I just carved and rolled wiggling on the hill and just letting myself bleed off the speed. I would just carve it out and then push to get started again I felt perfectly comfortable dropping the knee and just cruising through carves. It was actually kind of nice to find myself in flats where other boarders were paddling and to just be able to step down and push back to speed. I was having fun with the slow speeds but I needed more so I decided to see what the ride was like when it was fast.

I dropped into the blue and took huge slathering carves out of the face of the hill. I was comfortable at speed on some of the deeper piles of powder the rear would slide out a bit just like hard wheels at speed and it was just a simple matter of re-weighting to save it. At one point I was getting a bit more speed than would be responsible for a first time Railz rider and I was nearing a devastating collision with another rider. With the deer like look of my victims face following me I just dropped knee and set up a Coleman a simple solid slash in snow and I was stopped and my near miss skied on not quite sure what I had done to manage dissolving that collision. This left me impressed. The ability to control speed often seems like the last thing inventors think of but to be able to lay down a "slide" in the snow and save my head. That ability left me happy, very happy.

Running a few more runs on the blue I got used to the momentum and movement the way the skids acted when they hit deeper powder and also how they dealt with more groomed conditions. The speeds I reached were still not that of my downhill setups but I feel that was a simple matter of what the skis were made of. Speed was consistent but felt slightly limited by the material. Pumping and carving with a bit more time to get used to the setup I could actually see how it could be fun. The white doh dohs seemed to be a perfect choice because my main question going into this was "how would it turn?" well it turned just fine. Whew! We left it like he sent it…

Our crew in Big Bear took a different approach to the Railz: how would it ride on snowy streets and toboggan runs? As mentioned above, we found out quickly that the skis require fairly dense snow to provide any floatation. Whether we were on a roads or steep hills, powder was not our friend… Where the snow had packed down, the Cascade would surge down the tracks with real speed, and the truck/ski rigging really does allow one to carve the board. In several situations, we picked up enough speed that our reviewers got it in their head to take the Railz to the infamous Fawnskin sled runs. A locals-only set of steep tracks, it's slope after slope that are just perfect for toboggans, saucers and, if the snow is packed, flyers.

We took the Railz out to the runs during a light, but dry and fluffy blizzard. This, we confirmed, is less than optimum. Even on steeper, packed sled runs, the limited surface area of the skis on the Cascade would eventually break through the crust, instantly submerging the board and sending our riders tumbling. Up until the point that happens, however, it's a ton of fun and several locals took turns trying the board. We found the Railz to be very well suited to long, smooth, packed snowy streets. With room to carve and descend, it's a lot of fun.

The Ride (Wheels). After our runs on the slopes of Breckenridge with the beautiful people, we felt it was appropriate to head on down to Denver for a visit with the Mile High Rollers. We set the deck up very similar to the way it's sold as the "Roadkill", with Gumballs on the Randals. We'd swapped out the stock Randal bushings for some super-cush, soft Doh-Dohs in the fear that the yellow Randal bushing would turn to rocks on the icy slopes. This turned out to be a good call, as the flexy Railz board really did well with a responsive and super carvey setup. The deck grip had plenty of hold and with our snow boots in their bags and sneaks on our feet it was easier to feel the concave in the deck.

One thing we learned in our quest to get the Roadkill on the road: the Mile High Rollers will skate in some pretty darn cold weather! Our reviewer took the deck with him to a Mile High Rollers session at the DTC, a quaint little garage festooned with slabs of ice and slush. One of the MHR riders that checked out the deck commented that he found the foam grip way more secure than he'd expected and that the deck was quite a bit of fun to ride. Our traveling skater takes over with this report: "My first run on the deck I was pumping hard smoothly transitioning then I very quickly learned a lesson on the effects of cold weather on duroz. My San Diego soft 78a's suddenly acted like 99a Sergio sliders and I was down chasing after the deck. Humiliating yes, the deck's fault no. The remainder of the runs I was far more tentative with my power on the rails making sure not to anger the duro demons which seemed to have it out for me."

Conclusions. The Railz deck is an interesting ride and gives longboarders some real alternatives to staying indoors for winter. The Cascade rides well on packed snow, whether groomed resort slopes or crusty streets. It's not the thing for powder, unless you want to go digging for it, but it handles on snow like a flexy longboard would on pavement. On pavement, it handles like a flexy longboard, too.

If you have access to lots of snowy icy hills that you really want to hi, the Railz board is worth checking out. One more thing: these guys sell kits so you can convert your own deck into a Railz deck. This is a good option if you are in the market for a new type of winter skating.

Since we received our Railz Cascade, the company has joined forces with Flowlab.

We have to give a big shout-out to Chris and Sam @ "The Big Hit" in Breckenridge. They helped our traveler get the Railz deck all tuned up when his skate key wasn't cutting it and showed us their killer modification to the Shop Railz, set up so the skis can be waxed for more speed on snow.. They carry the full Railz lineup, as well as some Loaded decks. They are good stoke and really helped us out on this interview. So, if you find yourself wandering around Breck drop into "The Big Hit" and tell them Silverfish sent ya.