

All-Road Terminator: the Flexboardz Karrika

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 Wednesday, 26 April 2006
 Last Updated Thursday, 04 October 2007

Definitely one of the most interesting items we've reviewed to date, the FlexBoardz Karrika is a platform of Gallic innovation. This is a unique carving machine from a maker that proclaims a very interesting concept: "open source deck design". With their 2006 line already well into production and group testing rides taking place soon in Leucate, France, the company is constantly seeking to improve the design and performance of their line of on road, off-road and kite decks. We took a while to test out the Karrika in our home turf of San Diego and finally, after riding, breaking and writing, we bring to you our thoughts on the FlexBoardz.

Stats

MSRP: 249 EUR 300 USD

Deck length: 25 1/2"

Width: 10 1/2" at ends: 9 1/2"

Middle concave variable: 0

Rocker equals: .750"

Deck height: 5" at center

Ground clearance: 3 1/2" at center static flex: 1 3/4" for 230lbs 1" for 120lbs

Deck thickness: 3/8"

Hanger width effective: 9"

Wheels width center to center: 10 7/8"

Contact patch: minimal

Wheel diameter: 7"

Hub diameter: 4.25"

Wheelbase axle to axle: 40" 80 PSI wheels

Website: <http://www.flexboardz.com/>

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Meeting Karrika. The Flexboardz rig was quickly dubbed "the Terminator" by one of the Ninjas. On seeing the metal, wood and rubber deck, the skaters immediately knew what a formidable weapon it would be for conquering the steeps of San Diego. However, we're getting ahead of ourselves: the deck arrived in a large, flat, heavy box. Once opened, the box divulged a deck, wheels, swing-arms and a bunch of loose parts. It also included one of the most informative manuals we have ever seen with a deck. Not only did it have assembly instructions, but riding, tuning and tweaking advice as well. We wish every deck came with a manual such as this one came with; it not only answered our questions but showed the level of thought that went into the Karrika.

The reviewer that actually assembled the Flexboardz remarked, "[p]utting it together was a trip! The angles you need to get at are tight, and the tools provided do the job, but I found needle nose pliers worked better to get into the arm housings in the rails. At times, I felt like I was putting together an Ikea table or something." However, with the help of the manual, the deck came together quickly. What started out like a coffee table soon took shape into the completed Karikka. The kit not only came with the tools for assembly but also spare bushing/washers for the arms. They are small and rubber. After riding the deck for a while, we discovered how good it was that it came with spares: it chews up the rubber bushings on the connecting rods.

The deck itself is 7 layers of Canadian Maple with supports bolted to the wheel control arms and using a bushing on both sides of the mount. The arms can be extended or retracted to lessen or increase turning capacity. We will have more on that later however. The deck, wheels and struts appear solid and really give the deck a mechanical look. Very Bio-Tech Longboard style -- a mechanical beast with big rubber wheels.

Road Ripping. On our initial rides, the testing team had to take some time getting the deck tuned. It is very important to get tension on the struts just right. It's easy to verify the settings by counting exposed threads, and there is a pronounced effect from changes. Too many threads exposed (ie tension) and the deck didn't turn smoothly; too little tension and the deck bottomed-out in hard carves. Once we found the right setup for strut tension, real testing commenced and we moved on to tinkering with air pressure in the tires. There, it's pretty straightforward: really low pressure allows the tires to squirm and is no good; low, but firm, pressure gives loads of traction; firm, but not hard tires are notably faster yet remain grippy; hard tires are really fast, but slide like crazy once they reach threshold or hit something wet...

The Karikka turns unlike anything else! With four wheel, independent, suspension and the big rubber tires, street deformations were a non-issue. As long as the undercarriage cleared obstacles, the deck conquered everything in its path. On slower hills, we'd increase air pressure in the tires for speed, and then air back down for grip on faster, steeper hills or rough textured roads.

At speed, the Flexboardz really whips into turns, sometimes turning so sharply that it takes a lot to stay on deck. This is not a ride we'd compare to anything else we've ridden, including other "hybrids" we've had in the Longboard Consortium quiver along with the Karikka. The manual repeatedly states "this is not a skateboard" and they're right. Not only does the deck lean over at insane angles in deep curves, but the independent suspension can allow the inside wheels to really sink into their travel. We bounced a few toes off the street, and reaffirmed the importance of setting the strut tension just right.

Our reviewers became enamored with the all-terrain feel of "the Terminator". One wrote to us, "[i]t rides like a freaking jacked-up Jeep! It's a crazy ride, easier to get used to than you would think. It took some tuning, but minor changes to the bushing arms and that was solved. We rode it on loose dirt, streets, concrete, grass, gravel and brick. It took everything we threw at it, short of a car. The wheels are durable, as is the frame, and the deck seems safe-guarded by the rails. It has an intricate suspension system that took a short time to put together but all in all a killer ride. Very "flow", very stable at speed-- which it can pick up, quickly." Several riders commented that this deck would benefit from a binding system to prevent rear feet from drifting onto the suspension arms during successive, alternating carves. At this point, we think a slalom-style foot stop would also do the trick.

I'll be back.

Are you Ready for a Flexboardz? If you're looking for an urban avenger, an all-terrain carving machine and to be the only kid on your block with a Terminator of your own, the Flexboardz Karrika is just your ticket. The Karikka owns hills at any speed with moderate tweaking, is an intricate, effective design and there's nothing else like it. With FlexBoardz "Open Source" ethos, it's easy to see how advantageous it would be to let riders make additions and changes to the setup. Call or email the crew at Flexboardz and find out how the boards have evolved since ours. And, if you're skating in Ocean Beach, California and see a grinning lunatic carve off a steep hill into a driveway, rip across a lawn, then drop off a brick ledge to the sidewalk before stealing your line on the street; well, you'll know we've fixed ours. See you out there!