

How To: The Coleman Slide

Contributed by Tushar Patel
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Would you travel in a car or an airplane if you knew that these vehicles did not have adequate brakes? So why would you ride a skateboard if you didn't know how to stop safely. Stopping a skateboard quickly and safely is equally as important as learning how to push and turn.

There are four main ways to stop or slow down a skateboard.

1) The first way is to ride out your speed. This assumes that you have enough pavement ahead of you to slow down. You can further reduce speed by carving and air braking with this technique. This is the slowest way to stop a skateboard and will obviously not save you in an emergency braking situation.

2) The second method is foot braking. For less experienced riders, this works primary at lower speeds. The main advantage of foot braking is that it is relatively easy to learn and can be used when riding in "tight quarters" such as sidewalks and other areas where lateral movement is limited. The main disadvantage of foot braking is that at higher speeds it is operator dependent and should be used at lower speeds if you are a less experienced rider. More advanced riders can use this technique to intermittently scrub off speed or stop altogether after a bombing run. When used for stopping, foot braking requires a longer distance. Every skater needs to know how to footbrake.

3) The third method is running/jumping off your skateboard. This should only be used as a last ditch effort to save yourself. You can only safely run off your skateboard if you are traveling at a speed which is slower than the speed at which you can run. Obviously this is not the wisest way to stop your progress on a fast moving skateboard, but can be used when all of your other efforts have failed. If you need to use this technique, then try to land on your back/sides/shoulders and roll in order to dissipate the force over your body and minimize injury to your most vital asset, your brain. The folks at Timeship racing recommend that you practice rolling onto your protective pads and back while running on grass. Be prepared for injuries when you use this technique

4) The fourth method is sliding your skateboard. Sliding is the most effective and efficient way to reduce or eliminate your speed quickly while skateboarding. Sliding is not a trick, but rather is a skill which has revolutionized the skateing/longboarding world. The safety advantages are intuitively huge. It has an additional benefit in that it is also very stylish when properly performed and has evolved into an art form as evidenced by the many sliding videos and contests that have surfaced in the past few years.

There are a myriad of techniques to slide a skateboard. The focus of this article is to review and teach the Coleman slide for the primary purpose of safety. Once you are safely performing this slide, then you can concentrate your slide style and attempt other types of slides.

The Coleman slide is a 180 degree heelside slide.

This slide technique was developed by the legendary Cliff Coleman in the 1970's out of his determination to safely ride and bomb the hills in and around Berkeley, California. Cliff is currently in his 50's and is still sliding with style and teaching his techniques to the current generation of skaters around the world. If you ever have the chance to meet him, please thank him for his gift to the skateboard world. I am sure that it has saved countless lives.

Basic Physical Requirements:

Your basic requirements are that you are already skilled at the basics of riding a skateboard (i.e. you have good balance and can push, and turn your skateboard). You need full function of your arms, legs, and mind. You should not attempt to learn this slide or ride your skateboard if you are intoxicated or under the influence of other substances.

To quote Cliff Coleman, "If you can crouch down and ride a skateboard, then you can learn this slide."

Safety equipment Requirements:

Your safety equipment and gear is vital. You will need a good safety helmet which covers your skull and has adequate coverage of the lower portion of the back of your skull to the level of its junction with the upper neck. Do not be cheap with your helmet purchase. Excellent helmets can easily be purchased in the \$50 to \$100 range. More importantly, always wear your helmet. If you fall and hit your helmet, you will need to replace it. Do not feel bad about buying a new helmet. That helmet probably saved you from a traumatic brain injury or death and should be thanked for having done its job. There have been 6 reported longboarding deaths in the media in the past 3 months. None of these skaters were wearing helmets at the time of their accidents.

You will also need adequate sliding gloves. Skateboarding quality knee pads and elbow pads are a must as well.

Sliding Deck Requirements:

You will need an appropriate sliding deck setup.

Although a Coleman slide can be performed on nearly any skateboard deck, truck, and wheel combination, while you are in the learning stages, I recommend that you obtain a dual kicktail board with the appropriate wheels and trucks so you can concentrate more on your technique and not have to struggle against the limitations of your setup. When students are taught to drive, they typically learn automatic transmission small to midsize cars and not eighteen wheeler trucks for a reason. You should make your learning experience as easy as possible.

A 36 to 40 inch length deck is appropriate. Most skaters can learn on a "length deck. You should be able to stand with feet spread apart at shoulder's length on this board and have your feet positioned over the trucks. If your feet are on the kicktail or nose, then your board is too short for you.

Sliding decks can be purchased from a variety of manufacturers. A brief non inclusive list in alphabetical order includes: Faltown Skateboards, Gravity, Lush Globe, Pocket Pistols Cliff Slider, and Rayne.

Your trucks should be conventional geometry trucks such as Indy 169's or Tracker sixtracks.

Your wheels should be in the 60 to 65 mm size range with a harder durometer. The easiest wheels to slide are greater than 97A in durometer. Examples of such wheels include ABEC 11 No Skoolz, Gravity Sergio Sliders, Lush Cannonballs, and Powell mini logos/cubics. These wheels have the least grip and are therefore easier to slide and harder to carve. You can slide lower durometer wheels in time with the appropriate speed and skill.

My current setup is a Pocket Pistols Cliff Slider Deck with Indy 169's, and ABEC 11 No Skoolz 60 mm 88A wheels. I have no problem performing Coleman slides on flat asphalt or gentle slopes with this setup. I recently learned pendulum slides once I switched to Gravity Sergio Slider 99A wheels and went on a steeper hill with the encouragement of Malakai Kingston and the Ninja Bomb Squad.

The Coleman Slide Technique:

The key to the Coleman slide is to center your weight on the board and let the momentum of your body in the crouched drop knee position carry your board into the slide.

1) You should stand on the board with your feet at shoulders length with the back foot toes pointed at 1' o'clock and the front toes pointed at the 11' o'clock position if you are regular foot. Position the back foot toes at 11' o'clock and the front foot toes pointed at the o'clock if you are goofy foot.

2) Let the heels of both your feet hang a little bit over the heelside edge of the board to help you do your heel side carve while you are crouched on the board.

3) Start off with your back foot at the junction of the kicktail and flat part of the board or on the rearmost mounting screws of the back truck.

4) First practice kicking off at a reasonable speed on flat asphalt and getting your feet in the position described above and just crouch/squat down (i.e. butt down and knees fully flexed) on the board going straight and then performing alternating easy/gentle toeside and heelside turns while squatting. You will probably instinctively drop your knees down towards the board while doing the heelside turns. This may only take a few tries to feel comfortable with riding the board heelside and toeside in this simple crouched position.

5) Now that you are comfortable riding in a simple crouched position on the board, you need to know how to ride in the crouched drop knee position.

While crouched on the board you need to lower the back knee down toward the board and rest it on or near the side of your front foot. The side of your back foot should be flat on the board and positioned over the rearmost mounting screws of the back truck. Until you learn how to slide, make sure that your back foot is lying completely flat on its side. Your front knee should be pointing straight up or slightly angled forward.

Meanwhile the bottom of your front foot should be slightly rolled up (i.e. the inner/ big toe side is slightly pointed up). Do not place the outer (small toe side) side of the front foot flat on the board as you do your back foot.

This is a very stable position to ride the skateboard and is referred to getting into "the box". In this position your weight is centered over the board.

Next practice riding in the drop knee position going straight, and then while performing easy alternating toeside and heelside turns.

6) Then find a gentle slope on a relatively wide street or a nicely paved wide section of asphalt and achieve some reasonable speed get into the crouched drop knee position and perform a wide sweeping heelside turn. You don't have to go that fast early on. Just go at a speed you are comfortable with at doing a heelside turn and then work on increasing your speed later. You can still slide the board at slower speeds; it just won't be as dramatic. If you are too slow, you will just carve a circle without a slide at the end however.

As a side note, when I was learning this slide, most of my falls/crashes during my lesson with Cliff Coleman were from lifting up the heel of my back foot in a subconscious attempt to have my foot help to slide the board around during the middle/end portion of my heelside carve. The problem with lifting up the back foot is that your weight is no longer centered on the board and you will most likely fall off the board during or at the end of your slide. This will get you too much road rash and too few style points.

7) As you head into the turn, put your gloved hand on the pavement (i.e. the hand closer to the front of the board) and swing the other arm with the elbow slightly flexed and palm facing away from you, from the approximately 3 o'clock to the 11 to 12 o'clock position if you are regular foot.

If you are goofy like me, then move the swing arm from the 9 o'clock to the 12 to 1 o'clock position. (12 o'clock refers to putting the arm out right in front of your chest).

Do not grab the rail stinkbug like this poor kook! Bad form and not safe! Keep that arm swinging!

Try to move and time the speed of your swing arm at the roughly same speed as your heelside carve. The faster your carve, the faster the motion of your swing arm. Since early on you should try wide long drawn out carves, the speed of your swing arm will not be that quick.

Try to put the pavement slide glove somewhat close to the forward portion of the board where it is comfortable enough to put your weight on this hand. This position varies by rider and you need to experiment with hand placement for yourself. This is usually intuitive. If you put your hand too far away from the edge of the board your balance will be off and the slide will be harder or you may fall.

Also during your heelside carve and slide, don't look at the ground. Keep your head up, your back foot flat on the board, and your front knee pointing up.

Here is a quick video of a Coleman 180

Here is a video of Cliff Coleman drifting a corner

Final thoughts and advice

Just keep practicing. Cliff usually makes his students perform 20 heelside carves in the drop knee position with the glove down and using the swing arm before they become confident with the slide.

If you get frustrated like I did after my first 18 attempts, just take a 30 minute break, put away your skateboard, pads etc and go do something else to clear your mind. It's amazing but during my lesson with Cliff, we had to take a water and snack break because I was getting frustrated after 45 minutes with poor results. After my 20 minute break, I was able to turn my 1 for 10 ratio of successful to unsuccessful slides into 8 for 10. That is why Cliff is the master of teaching slides.

Once you learn the motion/technique, and you hear the sweet sound of sliding wheels and you will be standing up on the board at the end of the slide rather than picking yourself up off the ground. Then you will begin to think less about the minutiae of slide technique and instead, you will start thinking about how to improve your Coleman slide style and begin to think about the techniques of all the other types of slides.

It is very helpful to slide with more experienced skaters. I learned more in a few hours with Cliff Coleman, Malakai Kingston, and the Ninja Bomb Squad then I did in 2 years of solo longboarding. To these gentlemen, I owe many thanks.

In my medical training, we have a mantra which helps to propagate knowledge and the field of medicine. It is: "See one, do one, then teach one".

I have personally seen Cliff Coleman do his namesake slide, done one, and now can hopefully teach you one. My wish is that the longboarding community will continue to support, teach, and propagate this most vital safety skill to its current and future brethren.

Please fill out this survey in our forum to let us know how you liked the Coleman Slide Article

Some links to help you find some of the gear mentioned in this article.

Gravity Skateboards
Lush Longboards
Timeship Racing
Abec11