

Into the Belly of the Beast: ASR this Week.

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A steady stream of trucks, UPS, DHL, various other shippers... shuttles in and out of the backside of the San Diego Convention Center this week. They're delivering display and marketing materials, sometimes worth over \$50,000.00 just for the display booth and involving a nearly equal fee for the privilege of displaying at the Action Sports Retailers tradeshow, to be held September 8-10th.

Known to most simply as, "ASR", the show is a biannual presentation and celebration of all that's retailed and marketed in the skate, surf and lifestyle markets. Retailers, buyers and shop managers will descend upon San Diego to sample the weather, ogle the scores of swimwear models, grope and grovel for stickers, shirts and beers handed out by the "big houses", such as Hurley International, Roxy or Birdhouse, and those with the largest accounts, largest checkbooks and favored markets will score appointments to enter the "invite only" sections of displays erected by big corporations like Oakley, Sector 9 and a grouping of 35 retailers known as the "Gold Box Mission".

It's not all just the big boys, though: ASR has traditionally been the hunting grounds for purveyors of new products and ideas, ranging from the crazy, parallel stance ski-skate devices ridiculed by Silverfish editors a year ago to the crazy, offset inline skates we called "ankle breakers" and new skate products from upstarts like GFHurley and Amphibian. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn't: the ski-stance things haven't shown up in malls (at least, not in the ones we visit), but the Ankle-Breakers are now in Sharper Image with an endorsement by Anton Ohno while the guys we saw hawking the things wearing worn out Izod shirts are basking in the sunny warmth created by selling 10,000 units in one move. GFHurley Longboards, last year's ASR phenom whose mini-boards attracted industry wonks and press from all over the entire show, is back with a larger booth, an evolved name (GFH Boards) more skateboards and a following of retailers stoked on product that moves off the floor in their shops. Amphibian, an upstart in the smaller, January ASR, returns to the big show, now with retail contracts to validate the marketability of the wacky, ultra-turny pumping boards... and bringing validation to the Carver crew in the process.

Parties? Hey, you take a bunch of retailers from all over the globe, bring them to a convention and then find something for them to do. Maybe, if you spend a ton of cash, they'll really identify with your product...and those photos of the shop manager with the swimwear models draped around his neck might be just the ticket! Big parties, small parties, parties... lots of them. The biggest are glitzy, crowded affairs with loud music, paparazi trucked in for effect and loads of beautiful people strutting the latest in surf, skate and chic. Black leather, tattoos, bikini tops and grunge, mixed with wrist bands for beer, plates of free food and plastic bags full of schwag to be snapped up by the eager throngs. The midrange parties typically surround a product, like the Z-Flex line, the new Jay Adams book released by Concrete Wave, an art display or movie. These feature food, music and an opportunity for face time between industry wonks and retailers. The smallest are more private affairs, including the deadly serious ping-pong tournaments that attract hot-hands from Powell and the TransWorld empire, or the outlaw skate sessions led by Malakai Kingston throughout San Diego's downtown. These tend to be BYOB and are focused upon small-group fun more than business.

What's in it for you? Well, we're injecting ourselves back into the maw of commercialism for the 'Fish, this week. Our editors and photogs will bring you coverage of the show, peaks at the innovations in product (or just in marketing) that will come our way in the next several months and our selections for the "Best and Worst of ASR". There are bright points

and stoked people to see, too... that's Ken from SoCal Longboards to the left, for example. Peruse the Official ASR site (go ahead, click that) and tell us in the forums what you'd like our crew to find and cover for you. Watch the Front Page for our daily updates.

Finally, pray for us. Will we be swayed by poster-signing swimwear models, waylaid by bitter corporate lackeys, accosted by juiced-up security guards or pursued by the gnarly lady in the security cart in our favorite parking garage? Life in the balance, brother and sisters...