

The Best and Worst of ASR

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At every ASR, we walk the floor and see what's innovative and noteworthy, as well as what's a waste of time and space. Sometimes, we see new ideas that just make us want to grab the thing and run for the door, to go skate it. More often than not, we just breeze by much of the suck, but we'll stop to see a lot. Often, we find stuff that's "well-meaning", but falls short of the mark in our view. Sometimes, we see stuff that's just a train-wreck!

Here are our notes for this year, marking both the soaring accomplishments of the markets, and the tragic, icarus-like flight of that which should never have reached the light of day. If we whet your appetite for more photos, be sure to check out the huge gallery of shots we've got from ASR.

Best In Show

The Tunnel crew had a few "new reissue" decks, each a repop of an old design by Mitch Haake, the founder of Tunnel and "Mitchell Skates". This one is an 8-ply maple (the 8th ply is the color) and is actually a tad larger than the original Doug Schneider Pro Model. We stood on it, we scoped out the old photos from the Skateboarder Mag ads and we dig it. A solid reissue, utilizing modern materials and practices to make an old deck new, not hype. Just skate. See it at <http://www.tunnelskateboards.com> as soon as they update their site. Also keep an eye out for the 'rocks in new, soft durometers. Bennett Truks. After all the waiting, how could we not be stoked to see these things on the floor, not to mention the set Dave Hackett was waiving around like a kid in a candy store? The Vector re-pops are updated from the 1970's to abandon the jam-nut design and they use a massive lower bushing...and yes, they're rubber. Lots of rubber: the upper bushing is the size of a Khiro barrel, and it's the "small one"! We saw them in two widths, and also the "RK Project" -- the downhill/carving truk. As a special bonus to our opportunity to fondle the hardware, the booth was manned by two generations of "Mr. Bennett", and both were open and stoked to discuss their trucks and their plans. This was a popular stop in ASR and a gimme pick for this list. Check out the galleries for many photos of the trucks, the forums for details and the goings on at <http://bennetttruks.com/> Okay, we don't know how well it works, but we're gonna find out. Check out this Oregon Scientific Helmet Cam: it's self-contained, using flash memory to record at 480x640. No handcam in your backpack, no extra stuff and it's got an MSRP at about \$100.00! If it works well and is durable, it could open up a whole new level of filming for skaters. Nothing innovates the sport like sharing the ride and a solid, affordable helmet cam could really push the envelope. This model is not on the website yet, but the older version is. Guess what? This version is more affordable and better quality than the old one. Check it @ <http://www.oregonscientific.com/eng/> GFH Boards took a big step forward when they started spec'ing Khiro bushings (and risers) on all their trucks. The quality of the ride and the turn improved a lot, and reduced the need for an immediate upgrade by consumers. We were down with that, but GFH wanted more and created it with Khiro: a GFH-specific Khiro that we thought was just slightly softer than the blues they'd been spec'ing last year, but Khiro Bob says is just the same as his blues. Their cruisers and carvers that have otherwise been majorly revamped in terms of graphics, eye-searing colors, true-art inspired graphics and Tiki stylings. Check out what they have in store for you at <http://www.gfhboards.com/>. The Alpha Micro Tool is an advance of simplicity, a multi function tool worthy of riding shotgun on any session. Hewn from tool steel and rocking six functions in one, this tool not only looks the part but performs well. Compact at only 3" long and without flesh-piercing parts to kill you on a wilson, this one joins the short list of mini-tools good enough to really use. The designer was more than receptive to advances on the product and although we felt it was good, he is looking to improve it to make it even more reliable, and simple. Check out this burly little sidekick multi tool at <http://www.alphaskate.com/> These guys actually participated in a Board Build Off on the 'Fish, and now the crew at Honey Skateboards had a booth at ASR, filled with an array of rich-looking hardwood veneer decks. These decks are works of art with matched veneers of exotic woods: the grain pattern on the top is precisely matched to the bottom, and they gleam like oiled furniture. Maybe they really are using honey in there... a myriad of shapes and nice maple pop kept us interested. Check out their full lineup at <http://www.honeyskateboards.com/> We spotted this truck mounted on a board being carried across ASR, and we may be the only media to cover it. The Wave Truck is the latest design from Togo Hosoda, the dude responsible for creating the patented Thruster front truck used on Amphibian boards. This one does away with multi-pivots, moves the axle way out on a cantilever and pivots on bearings to turn like crazy. It uses an ingeniously simple spring mechanism to provide a positive return to center and we're stoked to see somebody thinking outside the box. So far, only 'fish in Japan can get these. Ask a pool skater what a "longboard" is, and you'll probably get a description of a poolboard that's over 36". Ask an OG pool skater what a longboard is, and you may hear about Jeff Tatum riding monster boards in the 1970's... and

there's a reason many people call JT "the original longboarder". He's never stopped skating and never stopped refining his design for longboard shredders. The Pool King Jeff Tatum 42" uses their uniquely modified Trackers and eponymous wheels. (Hey, we got a free thesaurus.) Look at the photos shown in the display... this thing flies and Pool King is pushing longboards big this year. Check them out at <http://poolkingskateboards.com/>. Does it work? Who knows! Is it safe to ride? Who knows! We haven't tested it yet. Is it the type of innovation birthed by two dedicated guys with a boatload of time and thought invested that we at Silverfish love to see? Hell yea! The Scriber team has dedicated themselves to this configurable-on-the-fly truck since highschool and now they are rocking ASR with their goods. Worth a ride? We'd definitely say so. They get mention not just for the technological advance but their manner of stoke. Much respect! Check them at <http://www.grombiz.com/>

When we first encountered the JBoardz booth, we thought we'd found another longboard company, since we could see some classic, v-lam shapes hanging on the wall. Upon closer inspection, we learned they aren't v-lam (stained maple) and most of them aren't even skateboards (most...they do make boards with these shapes and we'd ride'm) because they're balance boards brought to a new level. Shaped like skateboards, finished like skateboards, with a curved cleat on the underside to enable more balance moves and training, two sizes of roller and a cleat to hang the board on your wall, where they actually look good? We like it, and they make the list. Check them out at www.jboardz.com . Worst In Show, Just Say No!

Can no one else hear the sirens song, calling these decks back to the bowels of hell? No one? Well we can and let us tell you. It's loud and we ain't arguing with it. There are a great number of evils at ASR but plastic things with wheels reek the most foul.

Needless to say, one member of our team had no need to urinate after he walked away from this van. That's what you get when you drive right by and don't stop to pick us up.

You would think there isn't much you could do to improve these things, well you would be wrong. They light up too. Nothing more necessary than to alert those around you that you have no regard for the well being of your ankles with twinkling lights. The editors have confirmed that these are not freeline skates. Either way though if you want to rock something that can't even go -down- curbs, have at it. Don't let our opinion stop you.

Once again they make it into the "worst". The scalpers of the industry shilling out shipments of shanghied goods at rock bottom prices. Looking for a good deal on cheap gear look no further. One vendor specializes in buy-outs for shops that go under and then shills every kind of board, truck & wheel, even if he doesn't know what the heck they are. Hey, these guys are thinkin, no question. They earned a spot in our Best listing, too, but the Alpha Anti-Wheelbite Truck just isn't our kind of deal. Oh, it works... set screws set in the hanger, just under the bushing seat, contact a flat-sided kingpin and the truck stops turning. They might be great on kickflipper boards, but the "longboard" version with a wider hanger & slack angles makes us shudder in anticipation of snapped kingpins. The designer says we're nuts but we ain't drinkin this Kool Aid!

Our next subject for ire is the well-meaning but potentially disastrous Beanie Helmet Substitute. With a miracle polymer sewn into these \$100 beanies, they're offered as a substitute for real helmets, "for kids that won't wear a helmet". Okay, so the polymer is impressive: it's soft, flexible and you can whack it with a hammer to watch it absorb enough impact to prevent a hunk of wood from denting (it dents easily without the polymer on it). But, the polymer is soft and sewn in strips for most of the hats, which means it has no rigid structure. Lay the hat down, and it lies flat. Put someone's head in it, smack it on the pavement and the kid might not have dent mark from the hammer-sized rock he hits, but it may not matter, since there was no structure to protect his cracked skull. Enabling kids too scared to muss their hairdo by giving them an expensive alternative to a skate helmet seems like a rotten idea to us. Well meaning, but just plain bad. What would Nancy Reagan say?