

# 70s Skateboarding

*Photography by Warren Bolster*







Gregg Weaver  
La Jolla, January 1975



In loving memory of Warren Bolster  
(1947-2006)



Learn more about Warren's legacy





TO MY FAMILY, I DEDICATE EVERYTHING.  
I LOVE YOU ALL SO MUCH.

*Warren Bolster*



# January 1975

Bob Neishi skating above San Clemente for an Infinity ad.

This was before safety gear became mandatory and before the 1970s re-birth of SkateBoarder, when Surfer magazine (in the same office) was picking up on the various moods of the gravity/downhill games. Wanting to keep Surfer for surfers, the magazine would introduce a new sport for one or two issues, until the publishers and owners decided whether it warranted a magazine of its own. SailBoarder and Powder started this way.

The Cadillac Wheel ads with Gregg Weaver definitely had a strong stylistic influence on skateboarding and fueled my own desire to shoot the basics with the best possible color values. It took some time to discourage people from showing up in Levi's and black t-shirts. And they wondered why they weren't getting into the magazine!

I really admired Craig Stecyk's use of black-and-white film. It gave the magazine contrast, and it gave Craig the freedom to shoot in poor lighting or poor color conditions. Many magazines use way too much color. They think to themselves, "It's a page designated for color, so we're going to use it!" — without reflecting on the opportunity for variety they're missing.







# May 1975

During the first two weeks of pool skating, Gregg Weaver — aka The Cadillac Kid — does a bird-like, barefoot dance in perfect light at the San Marcos pool, showing the easy-going flow from the nowfamous ads.

The pool was about ten miles inland, so the summer fog didn't have to burn off. Although backlit, the brightness of the hot summer day cast a perfect light on Weaver's natural grace as he negotiated the vertical re-entry point. It was no pose — Gregg's style went everywhere he did. The angle and lighting didn't matter.

SkateBoarder hadn't come out yet. The sponsors, possibly jealous of the Weaver images, were looking for fault, pressuring the publication for coverage, and soon demanding safety gear.

In those days, many kids just skated as they lived — barefoot and unprotected. By the second issue, safety gear was foisted on the magazine. The sport really did need such restraints to survive and grow, but we had to leave a lot of great photos unused to get to that point. Ultimately it made little visual difference and even created another market within the sport. Nonetheless, famous surfers Larry Bertleman and Glen "Buttons" Kaluhiokalani were later on allowed to skate the El Cajon Park barefoot, because they never wore shoes in Hawaii!

The Kid appeared in the first ads for Cadillac Wheels, which Frank Nasworthy introduced. Art Brewer's ad photos had me thinking that Weaver might already be too big to deal with. But he was the most down-to-earth human being. Having him around was not only mellow, but fun and a guarantee of good shots.

Gregg was also one of the only people I'd let inside my car. I'd take him everywhere, and if people didn't like it, well, too bad. He and my son, Little Warren, are so much alike that I call both of them my traveling buddies.

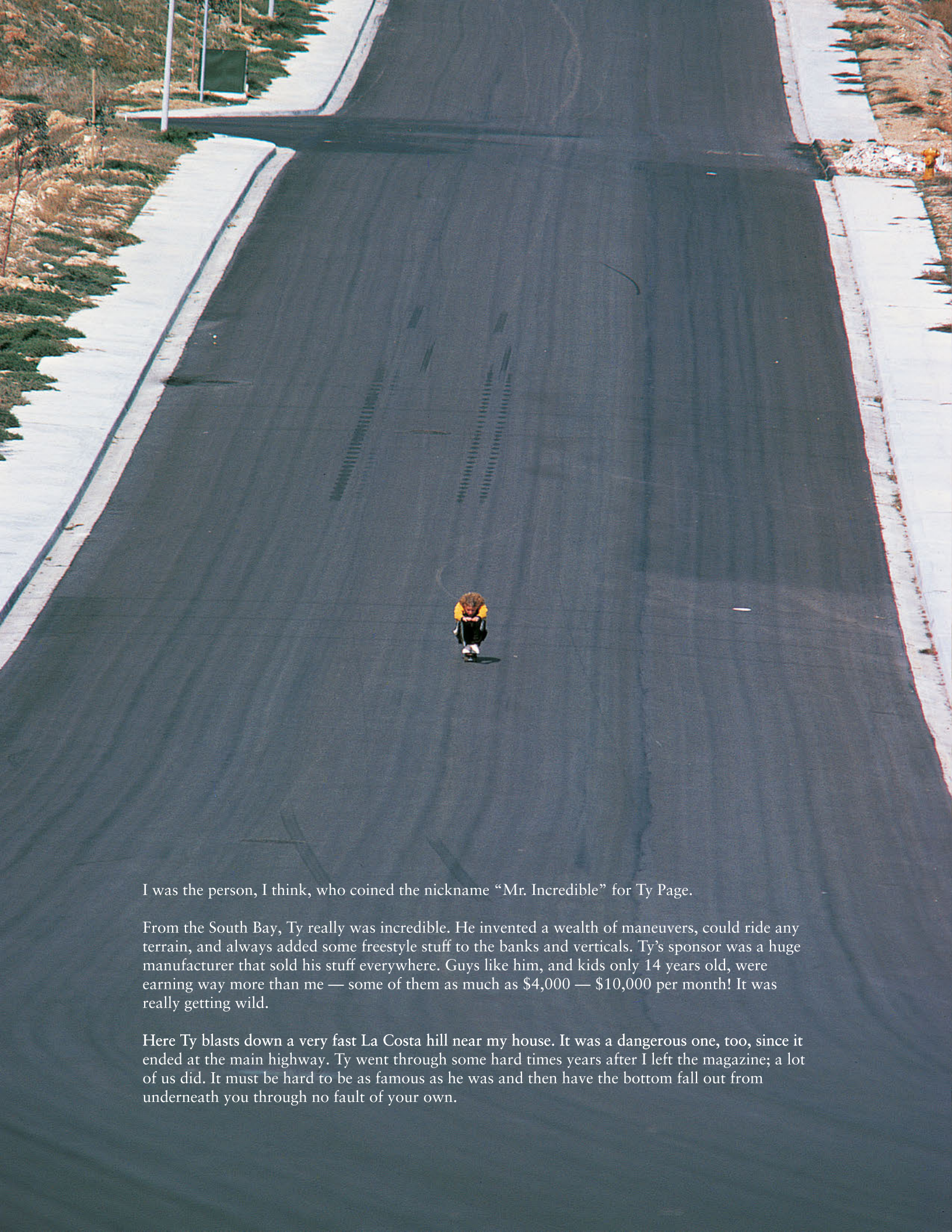
The Kid didn't have to trumpet himself — he could do it all. The number of fan letters — not just from girls — topped even Alva most weeks! And he was no poser — that was his natural style. To my surprise, he was also a hot surfer — he once got a two-page spread in Surfer magazine.





Steve Cathey  
La Costa, July 1975





I was the person, I think, who coined the nickname “Mr. Incredible” for Ty Page.

From the South Bay, Ty really was incredible. He invented a wealth of maneuvers, could ride any terrain, and always added some freestyle stuff to the banks and verticals. Ty’s sponsor was a huge manufacturer that sold his stuff everywhere. Guys like him, and kids only 14 years old, were earning way more than me — some of them as much as \$4,000 — \$10,000 per month! It was really getting wild.

Here Ty blasts down a very fast La Costa hill near my house. It was a dangerous one, too, since it ended at the main highway. Ty went through some hard times years after I left the magazine; a lot of us did. It must be hard to be as famous as he was and then have the bottom fall out from underneath you through no fault of your own.



## February 1976

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Torger Johnson’s name was very familiar to me.

As a young kid in the 1960s, he toured widely with the old Makaha Skate Team, doing demonstrations at department stores and other venues.

He was also a musician, and he moved to Kauai after his skateboarding heydays. Torger had a bag of moves that no one else could perform with quite the same class. He invented the space-walk — where you’d kickturn back-and-forth without letting the front wheels touch down. He had amazing control. From a dead stop, he could space-walk for longer than anyone I’ve ever seen.

Having some of the ’60s crew around really helped things develop during the ’70s, and it always added a touch of magic to whatever was going on.

Bruce Logan was another ’60s star who’d basically been dormant. Like Torger, in the ’70s he helped bring the classic moves to the new generations. Both guys had their own signature deck models with Logan Earth Ski, too, which meant Torger could come down from LA and stay with the Logan family for as long as he liked.





By the time I shot this photo, Black Hill was close to home and lined up well with the sunset.

So I'd often jam a couple of miles back to catch the late action. The highjump is another discipline retrieved from the 1960s. I'm certain it helped skaters evolve other means of getting aloft over the years.

This could be a dangerous undertaking, though. A bad landing could cause a broken ankle or compression fracture. Unbeknownst to the general public, Bruce Logan labored for years with an ankle fracture while performing highspeed runs, aerial pirouettes and more.



## March 1976

Everyone came to ride Carlsbad, the world's first skateboard park, in its early years. Here freestyle legend Skitch Hitchcock shows off his seemingly perpetual broken wrist. (He continued doing handstands on it for years.)

I didn't know Skitch very well, and I rarely saw him outside of contests. But he seemed like a great guy, and he pioneered many difficult maneuvers. He wasn't pushy about getting published, and we didn't run many photos of him, but Skitch was still nice enough to give me one of his beautifully-crafted hand-shaped decks, with my initials in the griptape. He still didn't get published much!

I never saw a double-kicked deck before the ones Skitch made. It was obviously great for freestyle, and nowadays almost everybody rides one!





Dana Point's Mike Weed had friends who constructed a "wave" out of fiberglass.

The ramp could be thrown in back of a truck and driven anywhere that had little traffic, such as a beach-side parking lot. When I was around, the police were always very cool with skateboarders and surfers. I think they knew it was a positive alternative to many other things we could've been doing.

Here we see former Surfer magazine editor Drew Kampion, a well-known and truly creative writer, observing the movable feast. Drew and I had both been "contributing editors" at Surfer before I was hired off the street by Steve Pezman, then editor of Surfer. I labored without the benefit of formal journalism training, but it was a real thrill to be on the masthead with one of the best writers in the sport.





Jay Adams and Tony Alva were among the first standouts from the “Dogtown” section of Santa Monica.

I gave space in the magazine to the rivalry between skaters from Dogtown and those from “Down South” (San Diego County). It was basically friendly and very interesting for the sport. No one got hurt.

Via eavesdropping or secondhand reports, I knew that Tony and Jay would occasionally talk trash about freestyle or “Down Southerners” such as Weaver. I could understand that, and they were entitled to their opinions. But it was just an attitude thing.

When Weaver (or another Down Southerner) would appear by chance, the Z-Boys would introduce their rival as a good friend. And when the Z-Boys traveled south to La Costa in San Diego’s laidback North County, they were not only friendly. They also showed they could do the moves in both styles.

Here at Black Hill, Jay does a cross between a “Bert” and a “Christie”. The publishers of SkateBoarder tapped me to be editor because I had indepth knowledge of the sport and was already shooting every discipline. I’ve never considered myself a great writer or editor, and after the first issue the publishers thought about replacing me with a seasoned professional.

I remember softly breaking into tears in the office. I had worked for half a year at \$500 per month to launch SkateBoarder, and it sold 100%. How could they let me go?

I’m an emotional person, and I work from the heart more often than from the head. That’s my strength, and occasionally my pitfall. When I was a teenager, one of the cool expressions was, “I don’t care.” I once said that to a junior high school teacher, and it was disastrous. He kept me after class and told me very firmly, “You DO care.” He was right, and it left me in tears.

I cared from deep in my heart about skateboarding, and I worked my butt off to do the very best I could. To their credit, the publishers placed the future of SkateBoarder in my hands. They had a photographer who was good enough, an editor who was — well, for a young magazine — good enough, and someone who genuinely cared.

I had an eye for talent and could cover it or assign someone else to do so. I could photograph, write copy and captions, and work with the art director to steward my concepts from start to finish. Sales proved the point. I did not, but the magazine made a lot of money. A lot.

But it was impossible for me to be everywhere at once. I could have delegated responsibility, but no one with the right skills cared enough to see things all the way through. I was over-worked, with no time for recreation (surfing, my truest love) or vacations (in Hawaii). So I quit — walked out carrying a cardboard box.

No one really wanted my job — not even Dogtown chronicler C.R. Stecyk, an artist who chose to shoot mostly in black-and-white and occasionally in color, and the only other photographer at the time who gave more than a token effort to skateboarding.

The publishers hired two people to replace me. They had their own opinions, but even four people couldn’t have done the job without a commitment to watering the roots of the sport. The magazine folded one-and-a-half years later!

I went back to work at Surfer, but the parent corporation (whose owner had been a famous economist) saw a recession coming and fired all the photographers. My income went from \$40,000 per year (not bad in the 1970’s) to almost nothing.

When I quit the publishers of SkateBoarder apologized, and maybe I should have taken my old job back. That would have saved the careers of many star skaters who got the cold shoulder after I left. But at some point, I just had to take care of me.

The skateboard photographers who followed us took a middle path between Stecyk’s style and mine. As aggressive skating in pools and on the street began dominating the scene, Craig’s approach became more influential.

Freestyle, slalom and stand-up speed skating were a huge part of the sport but got lost for a long time.