

photo: Desiree Astorga



# The Black Russian's Urethane Dream

How a Doukhobor kid from the Kootenays became a skateboard king. A conversation with Josh Evin.

by Geoff Mueller

Nelson's Josh Evin has risen from Kootenay obscurity to the worldwide spotlight quicker than you can say Tony Hawk. Starting in 2001 with a first-place amateur finish at Vancouver's Slam City Jam to having his own signature board with Montreal's Premium Skateboards—the biggest board manufacturer outside the U.S.—Evin, whether it makes sense he's from small-town BC or not, is one of the best skateboarders in North America.

The fact he's from the Kootenays—not necessarily known as a skate mecca by any means—puts Evin's story into the category of, well, fairy tale. Watching him rule a skate park, though, is something far more believable. Physical genius some would say.

The question is, is Evin a product of his environment? The elements are all there: concrete, wood, metal, gravity. But is there something more? Something in the fresh Kootenay air and cool mountain water? Depends on who you ask. Ask Evin and he'll tell you straight, the Kootenays play a significant factor in who he is today. Ask someone from the industry, on the other hand, and they may spin a different story—one based on hard work, determination and uncanny natural ability. Aside from his supernatural skating abilities, Evin's got plenty of entrepreneurial smarts. He co-owns a clothing line called Black Russian and has dibs on profits from sales of two signature skateboard models.

The 23-year-old recently finished a whirlwind tour across Australia, stopping to compete in front of 15,000 skate nuts at the Globe World Cup. He returned to Vancouver only to be whisked away again three days later, this time to China for a trade show and magazine shoot. In between international customs checks and late-night hotel-room poker sessions, Evin dreams of his Kootenay roots.

#### Why skate?

It's what I've been doing for so long now. It's in my blood. As soon as I started skateboarding I knew this is what I wanted to do forever. Hopefully, when I'm 40 I'll be doing the same thing. It's the drive that's inside of me. Once you start getting a bit better and progressing—it takes years and years to do anything properly in this sport—it's hard to stop.

#### How has the Kootenay skate scene evolved since you started?

It's come a long way over the last decade. When I started in the early '90s there were only a handful of us. We were instantly outcasts to the community because people didn't understand what we were doing. It was up to us to keep the scene alive by not giving up. We were getting our boards taken away, getting arrested at age 11, on and on. Today skateboarding seems to be more respected here than

ever before because there's so many people getting into it. It's showing the community that it must be a good thing, and it is. The skate scene here is actually quite amazing. Since the Castlegar skate park was built I've seen so many more people getting into skating. Personally, I've watched kids progress to a high amateur level within two to three years...unheard of. This goes to show how important it is to support and listen to what the kids need. I wish we had a skate park 15 years ago, but we were outlawed.

Some of the other communities in the Kootenays have caught on and seen what Castlegar has finally done for skateboarding. Places like Trail, Kaslo, Grand Forks and even a small place like Slocan City are all in the process of building skateboard playgrounds. It's about time.

**How did you make the transition from skate rat to skate pro?**

It was a slow process. I was entering amateur contests for years throughout BC and elsewhere. I wanted to make it happen; that was my goal and it still is my goal, to keep pushing it. It's like a never-ending job really; you're never going to be the best. I eventually entered and won a pro contest, and from that point on picked up some sponsors and started competing around the world.

**Talk a bit about your Doukhobor heritage.**

My family is full 100% Russian from way back. It's a cool little thing we've got going on there, staying true to life and the way they live. I don't know a lot about the heritage, but I'm learning more about it.

**You've named your clothing company and skate team Black Russian, where does the name come from?**

Black Russian has been my nickname for a long time, about 10 years or so. The company is something for my friends, something for us to build and try and work on in the future. It represents what we're about.

**How lucrative is it being a pro skateboarder?**

I think it's possible to make as much money as you want in skateboarding. It has no boundaries unlike some other sports. I personally make enough to live comfortably just from my sponsors, but I did skate and fight the cement ground for over 10 years before I saw a dime. Now it's possible to make a quick million by being in a skateboard video game, stunt work for movies or getting endorsed by big mainstream sponsorships. Skateboarding has grown so much over the last few years that there's demand for it everywhere.

**How has living in the Kootenays influenced you as a professional skater?**

It's a little bit more of a laid-back and relaxed scene. But it's not easy. There are lots of [skate] spots but they're different. It's not like a big city with spots everywhere—you have to make do with what you've got here. It's a little rougher, which kind of brings out the best in you; later on in the long run you have the ability to skate really difficult spots.

**How important is it to stay true to your Kootenay roots?**

It's very important to me. I've said it since day one—this is where I'll be no matter what. I might go away for a while, maybe a year here, a few months there, but I'll always be back. My family is here, my brother. This is where I was born and raised and it's where I feel at home the most. Everywhere I've been I always miss home. To be on the beach somewhere tropical and missing home more than anything is something weird but you get really attached. It's the best place in the world with the big mountains, the fresh air. People don't know what they're missing sometimes. ☀



photo: Nelson Daily News