

Jukebox Skate

Words by scott radnidge

In the Californian warm nighttime sky, neon signs and jukeboxes played through the night. On freshly painted multi-lane roads, letterman jackets and homecoming queens, high on pop and nicotine, rode giddily in convertibles that jockeyed for position in lines of snaking cars, whose fins glittered and pierced the nocturnal darkness with luminous taillights.

While idling at a stoplight, the din of piano fueled rock limped over the AM radio waves and oozed out of the waiting cars' open tops and ajar windows. Pulling into the parking lot, the cars spilled out their occupants, who noisily funneled through wide glass doors. Inside the drive-in diner, customers huddled around tables and devoured chocolate malts while feeding the insatiable appetite of the jukebox, whose yawning mouth never quite had enough coins to eat. Skirts twirled to the beats and toughs in rolled up t-shirts and greased hair watched from the counter seats, eager to fight and itching for love.

It was a peaceful night in the late 50's, a boom time for large art deco cars and cigarettes, music and social hangouts. Everywhere, people dreamed of brighter futures with new materials, new pastimes, and greater highs.

Through the crowded drive-ins and fogged up car windshields, outside you'd see the evolution and adaptation beginning. Under the streetlights, shapes darted between parked cars and street signs, their motion blurred in the nighttime air, looking every bit the juxtaposed as they were.

Vibrating wheels across pavement whose surface was dotted with landmines of pebbles and pressure cracks, the metal and clay wheels slipped and numbed feet. Between a break of light from oncoming traffic, someone in the back of the pack slipped out, their board shooting out in between cars, its shiny surface glinting from the headlights that quickly bounced off of its gleaming surface. Everyone stopped and waited as the pilot darted across traffic to rescue their hopefully still intact board, their clothes dusty, elbows and knees torn.

"Sidewalk surfing hurts way more than surfing," the skater said, "it was way harder on the body."

"But it's the only thing to do at night". A friend replied, conscious of the surf that wasn't rideable at that hour.

"Yeah, what're you gonna do when there's no surf?"

Nodding in agreement, together they started again, their legs bristling with tension as they gripped their boards of shaped plywood and two-by-fours, past the crowded diner and down the city sidewalks, funneling into parking lots and playgrounds where stunts were born and styles were forged. It was all about adaptation.

Skating first came as the little brother to surfing, one day crawling out of the foaming surf where it flopped around on the beach for a spell, before gaining the rudimentary pieces to try its fate on land. It knew its place as a logical alternate to its creator, surf. But it was just that, second fiddle to the water sport that encouraged its first baby steps. Steel wheels turning to clay, then morphing into urethane, skating buoyed by the popularity it was receiving, and responded with a finger that was held aloft into the noontime sky, the irony the statement made on dry land not lost on brother surf, who watched peacefully and unmoved from the glassy surface of the ocean. And with that, skateboarding became its own country, with leaders and spokespeople, businesses and icons.

Art deco cars morphed to huge muscular beasts, and AM radio doubted itself as FM emerged from the womb. Drive-in's parking spaces got wider and interiors got modernized, and the familiar jukeboxes were updated from the familiar embrace of Do Wop to British invasions. And still, in the neon red and white interior of the diner, people crowded around booths and tables, the ruckus of their excited chatter still as intense as it had been years before, their faces still youthful as their laughter rose above the music, each taking turns sipping from coke floats and large milkshakes.

Though their hangout hasn't changed, nor their appetite for music and moving in packs with excited banter, there was a decidedly different air that fuels the occupants inside. And this time, in and around the diner, the biggest change that really sticks out is that on the sidewalk, and under the tables and leaning up against the diner walls, it's hard not to recognize the skateboards that are there amongst the people, proudly displayed alongside custom cars, cruiser bikes and pretty girlfriends.

To their riders, the steadily evolving skateboards are extensions of their limbs; customized and dreamt about, cherished and loved. Once a basic piece of wood with metal wheels, has now morphed into a carefully thought out work of art, whose purpose continues to evolve and morph quickly over time, along with its riders who continue to push and pull at skateboardings' fabric makeup. From embryo to acceptance, in such a small amount of time. What an adaptation skateboarding had undergone.