

MANUFACTURING PROFILE:

BENNETT TRUKS

CW: How did you initially get involved in making skateboard trucks?

Mr. Bennett: Christmas of 1974, Santa brought my son, Brian, a skateboard he had asked for. The next morning he's out in the street with the other kids in the neighborhood. Soon, he's back inside saying his board, "doesn't turn". I figure no problem, I can fix that. I adjusted the trucks as best I could and sent him back out. Again, he's back, "it still doesn't turn." I tried again and realized the problem was simply a short wheelbase steering system on a long wheelbase vehicle. I wondered why no one had designed trucks specifically for a skateboard. Soon I wondered, "Why don't I do it?"

CW: What was your background?

Mr. Bennett: My formal education was architectural engineering, and I was always mechanically inclined and curious about how things worked. So I did a lot of research into steel alloys, rubber compounds, thermoplastics, aluminum alloys and the foundry casting industry. At the time, the aerospace industry was in a deep slump, so I found the companies with the expertise, machines, and production capacity to produce the trucks I had designed.

CW: Why trucks as opposed to trucks?

Mr. Bennett: I thought it was a unique spelling of a word and perhaps it would set me apart from the generic roller skate trucks that were so prevalent. Besides, look at how much ink and typing strokes it has saved over the years. [laughs] I should get a medal for being one of the first "Green" operations. [more laughs]

CW: The plastic base plate thing must have been a horror, yes?

Mr. Bennett: In the beginning, I did everything I could to build a lightweight / heavy-duty truck that addressed the skating style of the day. I probably made a mistake by declaring the baseplates "Unbreakable," but did replace every single one sent back. There were several variations and I had to design them so they'd work with a variety of hole patterns.

CW: As I understand it, you eventually replaced the nylon baseplate with an aluminum base plate—but not many made it into circulation?

Mr. Bennett: Yes, as the production date for the new Vector series approached, I switched to the new Magalum baseplate on the Hijacker and Pro trucks as well. When the Vectors went into full production, I discontinued the Hijacker and Pro models so I could keep up with demand for the new trucks, and especially the Vector Stak+Trak model, which I loved for its adjustable tread width, which was intended to be the companion to the Alligator wheels. It also addressed the issue of wheels with different bearing cage locations. Most were back-set, some were offset like the Alligators, and some were even center set.



Mr. Bennett

CW: The number of pros who rode Bennett Truks is astounding. Who were your favorites?

Mr. Bennett: Boy, that is a tough one...Who couldn't love Tony Alva and that crowd, Stacy, Jay Adams... There was also Steve Cathay, Ellen O'Neil, Tom Sims, the Logans, Skoldberg, Hutson, Hester, Guy Grundy—and I especially admired Russ Howell for his skill and humility. I can't leave out Chris Chaput who won the '76 World's Championships on Bennetts. I can remember when Chris worked at Kanoa Surf, and I showed him the Alligator contact patch on the top of a glass showcase—I'm sure he still remembers that.

CW: Did you have a team or sponsor anyone?

Mr. Bennett: Everybody's team was my team. I didn't feel that I should compete with my major accounts—Hobie, Gordon & Smith, Logan, Santa Cruz and the others. It sounds funny today, but nearly ever single Pro was riding Bennetts, so I never formally sponsored any skaters—although I tried to make sure the Team captains flowed the stuff to their guys.

CW: Did you see the Z-boys documentary and the Lords of Dogtown movie and if so, what did you think?

Mr. Bennett: I loved the Z-Boys documentary and I'm really proud of Stacy for what he has accomplished. It was odd that there were no Bennetts in the movie though, since that's what those boys were all riding at that time.

CW: You were distributed by NHS at one point, right? What happened?

Mr. Bennett: Anybody can look at a Stage I Independent and figure it out. I felt betrayed at the time, but I am not bitter.

CW: Did you see your designs manifest in other companies trucks as well?

Mr. Bennett: Independent and ACS were the first to cop. Black base plates, square axle housings, red rubbers, and on and on. At one point I counted over 20 companies with trucks "borrowing" original Bennett designs or features. I haven't much respect for those who can't create anything on their own.

CW: The demand for your Alligator and Super-gator Wheels was overwhelming, yet not many made it into circulation—what happened?

Mr. Bennett: There were quality control issues that delayed production. I was not going to ship anything that was not as perfect as I had advertised. If you've seen an Alligator, you will notice that it's perfect to the last aesthetic detail—and they worked like I said they would. Same thing with the trucks right now—they are not coming out until I say they are right.

CW: Have you noticed what NOS Bennett Truks and Alligator Wheels can fetch on eBay?

Mr. Bennett: I'm told that a set of Alligators sold for over \$900 US on ebay, and later privately resold to a collector for \$2000 US, and that a set of Vector Stak+Traks sold for over \$600 US. Wild.

CW: Why did you quit making trucks and wheels?

Mr. Bennett: In the early eighties the Hobie franchisee, which was a large account, filed for

reason I was here the first time. Skaters needed innovation then, and I see a need for some innovative products now. Seems like an opportunity for some fun only comes around every thirty years or so. I just hope there are enough discriminating skaters out there that will appreciate well made, good looking stuff that works better than what they are riding today.

CW: How stoked were you that your father made the first, and at the time, arguably the best skateboard trucks, for you?

Brian Bennett: I was only 10-years old. I just thought that was what dads do. Later, it kind of freaked me out when everybody was riding them. I was totally stoked.

CW: Do you still skate?

Brian Bennett: Almost every day. Mostly in the parking lots around our building. I'm not into the pop sticks. I like pumping and hard carving—the stuff our Vectors do best.

CW: You have a company, Big Distribution. Tell us about it.

Brian Bennett: We handle the entire back end for Bennett Truks and Alligator Wheels. Everything business related. It really frees Dad up to concentrate on engineering and design. He's a genius, and this allows him to be the mad scientist he is.

CW: Are the limited edition reissues the same as the '70s Bennetts or are you updating them?

Brian Bennett: The Vectors are nearly identical to the '70s issues. Whether you rode them back in the day or are going to try them for the first time, you will be stoked. They dive into turns and carve just like the originals.

CW: What about Alligator Wheels and Lite-beam decks?

Brian Bennett: We are working with the lab to get the hot pot urethane just right for the Alligators. I know my Dad wants to make that deck again. I thought the grip tape design was so cool. But we kind of have our hands full right now, but we will see.

CW: Where does Bennett go from here?

Brain Bennett: I think the all new RK series trucks are going to freak people out. They have features Dad has been talking about for more than 20 years. Alligators, Supergators, pool truk, street truk... Who knows? We are just having fun with it right now. However, I will tell you that the mad scientist is working on some wicked stuff. **CW**



bankruptcy, and NHS dropped us as they had a new truck of their own. That all had an impact financially, but what it really boiled down to was that life got in the way and I had a family to raise.

CW: What are you up to these days?

Mr. Bennett: Through the years I have watched the industry from afar and just resisted the temptation to get back in the business. A while back my son, Brian, asked me if I could do it again... I said "no, but we can"... So here we are. I'm back for the same



Tony Alva at Wallos in Hawaii, 1976. Photo: Warren Bolster

"Bennett Trucks turn on a dime."

—Steve Olson

"If none of you were there back in the day, you can say just about anything you want, 'cause you don't know, and therefore what is said don't matter, much. But, when there wasn't shit to ride, and other trucks weren't shit, and didn't turn. But Bennetts, they revolutionized it all, made quick turning, or just turning at all, a reality. I never could get a hold of the other baseplates, the cast ones, otherwise, who knows how my perception of Indys would have been. As it was, I saw Indys as Bennetts that had better baseplates. Now Bennett are returning, and in narrow widths, I look forward to picking up where I left off."

— Mofo

"Before there was Tracker, before there was Independent—there was Bennett trucks. Bennett trucks were (and still are) some of the most responsive skateboard trucks EVER produced. If you look at all of the early, early pool and ramp shots back in the day of all the Dog Town Guys, myself, Olson, and Wally—We all rode Bennett's because they were the best turning truck in the World. The only thing that sucked about them was the plastic base plates that used to break! We used to replace them with the metal ACS base plates before Mr. Bennett fixed this situation. I think Bennett's return to the industry is long overdue—I'd ride them again in a heartbeat! You reading this Mr. Bennett? Good—now send me some trucks!!!"

— David Hackett

"Back in the day, I liked Bennett because they were light and had a quick response—they turned amazing and had the best geometry. They were way ahead of their time for their day! I think it's great they're coming back. Let them come, let them rise again from the ashes like the phoenix!"

— Ray Flores