

# AN AMAZING RACE

**ROB ROSKOPP, CEO OF SANTA CRUZ BICYCLES, TURNED HIS PASSION INTO PROFIT ON A JOURNEY TO FIND THE PERFECT RIDE**

by Christopher Cussat

**R**ob Roskopp, CEO of Santa Cruz Bicycles (SCB), runs his company the same way he used to ride the pro-skateboarding circuit—with honesty, intensity, and heart. This talented athlete and entrepreneur left Cincinnati, Ohio at age 19, moved to California with \$600 in his pocket, and has never stopped peddling forward.

Today, SCB designs high-end, full-suspension mountain bikes. The company currently offers 14 models and two different suspension platforms, both of which have multiple patents. SCB's bike models cover everything from cross-country riding to downhill racing. Unlike most of its competitors, SCB does not do "model year" bikes and only modifies its designs when they can be made better.

The company was originally founded in 1993 by Roskopp, Richard Novak, and Mike Marquez. The trio were all avid riders at the time, and Roskopp was working for Novak at Santa Cruz Skateboards (SCS), managing one of his product lines, while also skating professionally for him from 1983 to 1990. Roskopp recalls, "Richard has always been a mentor for me, especially in business—he threw out the idea of making Santa Cruz Bicycles one day, so I did the research and found it would be best to enter the market with a full-suspension frame."







Just another day at the office: Roskopp tests his merchandise on the NorthStar trails.





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At the time, full-suspension bikes were in their infancy, so the three found a local designer, Tom Morris, who had already built some prototypes. “We tested them out and were really impressed by the ride characteristics,” Roskopp says. “So we struck a deal, and a year later we sold our first bikes in February 1994.” Around that same time, another partner, Hans Heim, who had connections within the industry, was brought on. SCB was literally off and running the race of a lifetime—and it has been an industry leader ever since.

Every bike that SCB produces is a testament to the company’s uniqueness and epitomizes its competitive edge. “From the beginning, we always let our products speak for themselves—one ride and you’re sold,” Roskopp says. “We’re constantly improving upon every model—we’re never satisfied!” Many professional riders would agree; in fact, SCB’s downhill racer, Steve Peat, won the World Downhill Championships this past year with one of the company’s custom models.

The moment Roskopp got off that Greyhound bus years ago in California, fate began to change his plans. “I told my parents I would go to a state college out west,” he says, “but that ended up getting postponed until years later because my real passion was skateboarding.” Within four months of moving, SCS sponsored Roskopp and he turned professional.



**ABOVE:** Roskopp (right) reviews rider-feedback reports from Syndicate team members at the NorthStar test session. Santa Cruz's lead engineer Joe Graney (left) and Syndicate mechanic Doug Hatfield (center) collaborate with Roskopp on design specifics and plans for improving Santa Cruz's technologies.

**TOP LEFT:** Rob Roskopp (left) gets feedback from Syndicate team-member Steve Peat at a test session on the downhill biking trails at NorthStar Resort in Tahoe. Members of the Santa Cruz Syndicate, including Peat, work with Santa Cruz engineers to test new downhill bike geometry that will best suit the 2010 World Cup season.

**LEFT:** Custom models are powder-coated in Santa Cruz's in-house manufacturing facility.

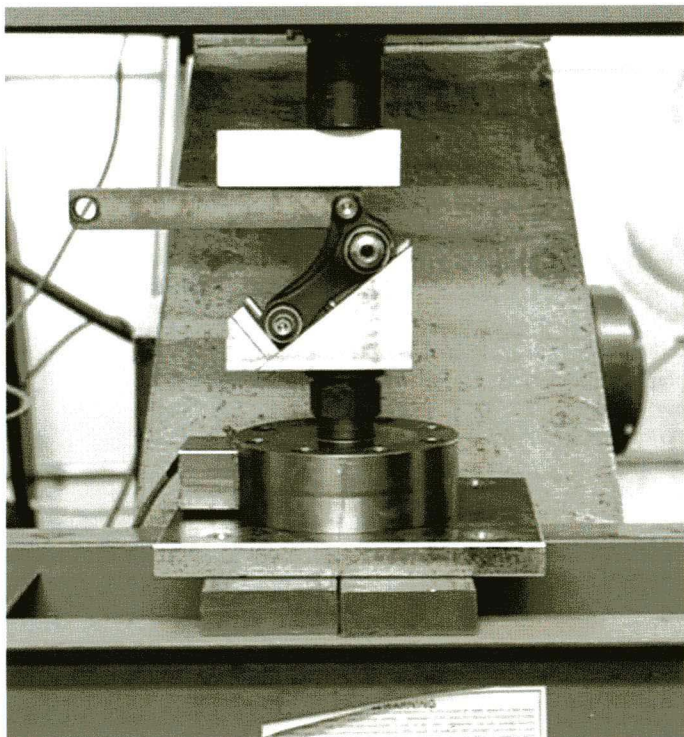




Although his skateboarding career was successful and lasted for eight years, Roskopp had the realistic foresight to know he had to plan for the future. "During that time," he says, "I also designed a number of pro-model skateboards that became some of the top-selling models of all time." He began to regularly attend trade shows for SCS and learned the business ropes from his partner at the company. "After I retired from skating, I went on to work at SCS and also decided to go back to school at night."

All of his life, Roskopp has followed his instincts—and now they have led him down a successful and adventurous path that has taken him to where he is today. "Traveling the world, experiencing different cultures, and, most importantly, learning from someone who already had a successful business going have made it all the better," he shares. Because of his unique experiences, as well as the support of his wife, Lepa, Roskopp had a good understanding of what needed to be done when he started SCB.

In the end, Roskopp believes it's all about your attitude toward work and life, as well as the team you place around you. "Surround yourself with good people and throw yourself into a part of your industry where you can always keep up on what's happening," he says. "And most importantly, you need to have a strong passion for what you do." [P]



**RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT:** Bikes are run through the frame-fatigue testing machine in Santa Cruz's in-house manufacturing and R&D facility. Products undergo intensive design reviews, rigorous quality control, and innovative product specification.



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