


Scott Murray

Pulling out the Stops

By Susan Schrier

Scott taking it easy at Squaw Valley's terrain Park
Photo: Tom Rassuchine



I was on my way to meet Scott Murray at Squaw Valley. We had already traded three cell phone calls to push back our ski time. Originally we were scheduled for 10 A.M., then 11:30 A.M., then noon, but we didn't meet until 1 P.M., coffee clenched in hand. Squaw had hosted Jell-O wrestling the night before; the competition was fierce, and the after effects were severe. We looked at each other knowingly, wearily, and agreed to take it easy today, since there was no need to prove anything. And just as soon as our skis hit snow, it was clear that "taking it easy" wasn't in Scott's lexicon.

As we strolled up to the base of KT, I eyed Scott's tattered rubber ducky-colored boots and ragged Karhu skis. His shaggy hair stuck out from under his unbuckled skate helmet, reflecting the hockey style and background that is a clear influence in his aggressive, if somewhat wild, style of freeheeling. Off KT, Scott flew down the hill switch, weight way back on his tails, flexing his skis so hard they bent as if they might almost snap. Legs spread apart, Scott looked between them to avoid the trees and children that were zooming up on him. Using the entire width of the run, he was popping three's off rocks and attacking every available terrain feature to keep the ride interesting. Smiling like a fat kid in a candy store, or a ski bum on the hill, he made it clear that fun is serious business, and play is always all or nothing. At age 31 Scott has managed to keep the majority of adult inhibitions at bay.

If I had a powder day for every time I heard a fixed-heeler look at a telemarker and say, "Oh, it's like they're dancing on snow, or "Look honey, isn't it so graceful," I'd never sleep past 6 a.m. again. And many freeheelers embrace the sport because they see it as a more graceful, elegant way to slide on snow. But about a decade ago, Scott Murray paved the way for those of us that don't mind if our skiing is a little rough around the edges and would rather skip the delicate snow dance in favor of speed and adrenalin.

Born in Cleveland, Scott went to Berkshire School, a boarding school in Massachusetts, to play hockey. James Lozeau, now a ski photographer for magazines like Powder and Freeze, met Scott there as a sophomore. "I was the big skier, and he was the big hockey player, so we started hanging out," says Lozeau. After high school, while Scott was starting center for New England College, Lozeau lured Scott on a ski trip. Right after that, Scott quit the hockey team and Lozeau moved out to Crested Butte. Scott visited and stayed forever, his skills on skates translating easily to longer edges.

Once Scott arrived in Crested Butte, he gravitated toward freeheel, which was already relatively popular there. Unlike other beginners taking their time perfecting the freeheel swoop, Scott mastered the sport by following pros like Lozeau, Dave Swanick, and Seth Morisson.

"He wasn't tele'ing very well at the time, but he picked it up super quick," laughs Lozeau. "He'd get pissed off because we'd go and straightline something, and when he caught up with us he'd be like, 'what the hell, I got stuck in a tree well, and I thought I was going to die!'"

After a year of straightlining and cliff launching, Scott was as good as the guys he used to tail, and he cemented a freeheel style rooted in big-mountain alpine. "Scott's style is aggressive and fast. He was the only

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"Most of the time when Scott's in the air and he spins, he isn't really sure whether he is going for a 540 or a 720"



telemarker in the Crested Butte scene that was doing stunts and dropping cliffs. I had never seen a telemarker even

attempt that kind of stuff," says Lozeau.

Scott spent 10 years in Crested Butte, showcasing his aggressive freeheel style in competitions and photo shoots with Lozeau, and scoring publicity for it in ski films and magazines. After appearing in kayak movies like *The Fix*, *Aphrodisia*, and *Off the Deep End*, Scott easily made the transition to skiing in front of the lens with roles in Matchstick Productions' *Global Storming* and feature parts in the Unparalleled Productions' *Unparalleled* series of freeheel films.

Competition provided the other outlet for Scott, who entered the 1999 U.S. Extreme Freeskiing comp as the only

freeheeler in the field—like many of his early competitions. "I entered alpine comps for three or four years before I entered tele comps," says Scott. "I liked the challenge, and I think I did a lot better in tele comps because of it, but I didn't like the feeling of intruding on their thing."

Scott took his experience in the alpine competitions to the new series of telemark freeskiing events, and brought with him a new level of daring with his line choices. As a result of his familiarity with storm conditions in the backcountry and earlier experience, Scott won the weather-stricken 1999 Arapahoe Basin Telemark Extreme Freeskiing Competition in one run.

Freeheel pro Ben Dolenc met Scott at the A-Basin Telemark Freeskiing Championships in 2000. "He twisted his ankle on his first run and was in first place. He could hardly ski so he just went really fast and threw a 360 of the biggest cliff in the venue and still took second," Ben says.

At the Berthoud Pass Telemark Freeskiing championships, the snow conditions were less than favorable so it was really hard to find a line with any air in it. "I spied Scott looking at this bulge of an ice/cliff thing and asked him if he was really thinking about doing it," says Ben. "He wasn't too sure, but just before they told him to go, he scooted over to line up on it. It was by far the boldest line of the day. Scott always gives freeheeling all he's got just because it is what he loves to do."

Fast, big mountain skiing with natural obstacles taught Scott to react quickly in the park, where his tricks are on par with fixed-heelers and snowboarders. His quick, improvisational style translates well to spins, flips, and grabs. "Most of the time when Scott's in the air and he spins," says freeheel friend Lorenzo Worster, "he isn't really sure whether he is going for a 540 or a 720. When he spots the landing he makes it work. He goes for it—all out—and comes to

Scott airing it out at Crested Butte, Colorado. photo by James Lozeau

terms with whatever is thrown at him."

After 10 years in Crested Butte, Scott moved to Squaw in TK to focus on his personal goals. "In Crested Butte, I marketed myself and chased gear," says Scott. "I used to see something new and say, 'how come I don't have that yet?' Once I moved out to Squaw I got into it for myself and I don't chase it anymore." Though Scott's gear is suffering—he ripped the cable out of his binding landing a rotation in the pipe on our outing—his personal achievements keep growing. "Every day I go out and learn something new. I don't ever want to get bored with skiing."

For all of his accomplishments and movie stardom, Scott stays humble. Image is low on his list of priorities; he doesn't even buckle the top buckles of his boots, because it's more comfortable on his calves. "It's not sloppy," he says in his defense. "Well, I mean it is... but not by my standards."

"He goes for it and sees lines that not everybody sees," says Lorenzo. "Add his skill and risk-taking to his humble personality and you realize that here is a world class skier out there just for the fun of it."

For Scott, fun lurks around every corner of every run. After an afternoon of chasing Scott around the park, down wide-open bowls, and through the dense Granite Chief woods, we wrapped up the warm spring day. As the snowmelt trickled through cracks in the base area cobblestone, Scott hopped on his cruiser bike, stashing his weathered gear between him and his seat, and peddled home. Why not drive to and from the resort? Clearly it's not as much fun...you don't get to sense your speed and feel wind in your face behind a car windshield.



Scott pulling in at Squaw Valley, California. photo by Tom Rassuchine



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