



A Partial History of the Sport of BMX Racing

Compiled by Mike Carruth, July 2008

- 1816 Baron Karl von Drais de Sauerbrun invents the “Draisienne” a forerunner to the bicycle (though it had two same-sized wheels and a seat, it had no cranks or drive mechanism and was foot-powered. Anyone who ever taced a chainring on a neighborhood ride knows how this guy rolled).
- 1836 Scottish blacksmith Kirkpatrick MacMillan invents the first bicycle with foot pedals. Locals disrespect his idea as “frivolous” and he does not patent the invention (it is not known whether MacMillan’s pedals were clips or flats, or if that gave rise to local debate and conflict).
- 1839 Charles Goodyear invents, then perfects, the process for vulcanizing rubber after a stretch in debtor’s prison (without which we would have no knobbies or microknobbies under us).
- 1895 Ignaz Schwinn and Adolph Arnold found Arnold, Schwinn & Company (later Schwinn Bicycle Company) in Chicago, IL, with the corporate purpose of building bicycles.
- 1933 Arnold, Schwinn & Company introduces the “balloon tire” (“tube-in-tire technology”).
- April 30, 1956 As part of a “Queensday” celebration in St. Anthonis, Holland, local youth take part in a “fietscross” (bicycle cross), held on dirt, with primitive berms and pie plates with numbers scrawled on them to ID the riders. Many europeans contend this was the true founding event of the sport of Bicycle Motocross Racing, though critics in the US point to the fact that it did not give rise to an organized sport and, as such, could only be described as an anomaly--removed from the California BMX of the late 1960s, from which the sport, as we know it, took root.
- 1963 Arnold, Schwinn & Company introduces the “Sting-Ray,” featuring high-rise handlebars, a banana seat and the seed of a new industry and way of life in it’s DNA.
- July 10, 1969 A group of Los Angeles kids coerce Palms Park caretaker Ron Mackler into building a track reminiscent of Motorcycle Motocross tracks. The first organized race (of a new sport sometimes called “pedal cross,” sometimes called “BX,” and sometimes called “Pedal Power”) is held on this date.
- November 1970 13-year old Yamaha Motocross Racer and über-promoter Scot Breithaupt gathers his MX trophies and stages BMX races on trails he used for MX practice. B.U.M.S. (named for the homeless who squatted on the land, but later tagged “Bicycle United Motocross Society” to present a more palatable image to the community) park was born.
- July 28, 1971 The film “On Any Sunday” is released in theaters in the US. Director Bruce Brown starts off the film with a sequence depicting a pack of kids riding their Sting-Rays and mimicking the sounds, and movements of their older MX brethren. The film, featuring Steve McQueen, was nominated for a 1971 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature and captured the enthusiasm of a generation of groms who wanted to do it in the dirt, sans motor.



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- 1972 Rick Twomey modifies a Sting-Ray and adds a higher bottom bracket, longer cranks and other enhancements to create a more "BMX-friendly" bike.
- 1972 Scot Breithaupt and his B.U.M.S. organization hold the first BMX state championship race in Long Beach, CA.
- November 1, 1973 Motocross promoter Ernie Alexander starts the National Bicycle Association (NBA), the sport's first national sanctioning body.
- January 26, 1974 George Esser holds his first BMX race as an affiliate of the National Motorcycle League (NML) at Miami Hollywood Speedway Park in Florida. In February, 1976, Mr. Esser would break from the NML to form the National Bicycle League (NBL) as an independent organization.
- 1974 Motorcycle component fabricator Linn Kastan, develops the first "unbreakable" tubular chromoly fork for BMX bikes and markets them under the name of his motorcycle parts company: Red Line (later, and currently, Redline).
- 1974 Webco introduces the first production "straight tube" BMX frame, departing from the modified Sting-Rays, and garage-built rides of the day.
- June 1974 Elaine Holt publishes the first issue of "Bicycle Motocross News," the first exclusively-BMX publication. BMX dad Bob Osborn is a contributor of stories and photos. "Moto Journalism" turns into a family affair when 13-year old daughter Windy picks up a camera and comes up with some great stuff. A ninth-grader, Windy gets masthead billing in the paper soon after.
- July 20, 1974 17-year old B.U.M.S. track operator Scot Breithaupt, convinces his former sponsor, Yamaha, to invest \$100,000 in a four-race BMX series (three qualifiers and a final) to promote their new line of bicycles. The Yamaha Bicycle Gold Cup is born, and the first race of the series (held at Birmingham High School in Van Nuys, CA) happens on this date. In their coverage of the event, Bicycle Motocross News calls it "the day bicycle motocross grew up."
- September 7, 1974 The Yamaha Bicycle Gold Cup finals, attended by over 5,000 spectators in the Los Angeles Coliseum (later home to the 1984 Olympics) is a major moment in BMX history, with soon-to-be BMX legends Stu Thomsen and David Clinton winning the Expert and Junior classes, respectively, and Bob Osborn (who, four years later, would start Bicycle Motocross Action magazine) as the flag-waving starter. A typo in the "Bicycle Motocross News" story had the "Hollywood Wheelmen" doing a demo on "1980s Highboy Bicycles."
- September 1974 Automotive engineer Skip Hess designs and develops the "Motomag" after seeing neighborhood kids in Simi Valley, CA race and jump their bikes. His company, BMX Products, would successfully market the Motomag for more than a decade, and his Mongoose line of bicycles survives to this day, though under different ownership.



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- 1975 Merl Mennenga starts the “Chandler Jaycees” BMX Track in Chandler, AZ. The track is still operating, in the same location, to this day and holds the distinction of “longest continuously running BMX track.” Two years later, Mennenga would form the American Bicycle Association (ABA) with the Chandler track as ABA Track 001.
- March 30, 1975 The National Bicycle Association holds its first national race in Pheonix, AZ. This race is widely accepted as the first “national” in the sport.
- April 1976 At the urging of BMX pioneer Rick Twomey, who was a contributor of motorcycle content, Minicycle Magazine changes its name to Minicycle/BMX Action (later, “Super BMX”). It is the first “slick” publication to regularly feature BMX.
- December 1976 After discussions on purchasing an interest in Elaine Holt’s Bicycle Motocross News, BMX dad/photographer/writer and fireman Bob Osborn starts Bicycle Motocross Action (later BMX Action) magazine with \$30,000 in borrowed capital. Brian Lewis graces the first cover on the fabled Corona downhill track. Bicycle Motocross Action was the first exclusively-BMX “slick” magazine. The magazine would run for nearly 13 years before its final issue in September 1989.
- Summer 1977 While on Scot Breithaupt’s “Team Terrible” national tour (the sport’s first), Bob Haro develops a new product to raise spending money on the tour. The “factory plate” replaces pie plates and plastic squares and ovals with form-fitting design and tricked out graphics. This product, first produced in limited runs on Bob’s mother’s stove, was the foundation for Haro’s BMX empire which ultimately included Haro Bikes and a multimillion dollar sale of the company in 1988 .
- October 13, 1977 Merl Mennenga forms the American Bicycle Association. With its unique “transfer system,” ABA remains the Coke to NBLs Pepsi to this day.
- February, 1978 ABA holds it’s first National race in Azusa, CA. The following year, Azusa track operator Richard Long would co-found GT Bicycles with partner Gary Turner.
- November 1978 Jim Stevens and Scot Breithaupt break from their positions at Bicycle Motocross Action magazine to form BMX Plus! magazine. Greg Hill is on the first cover, riding for Redline. BMX Plus! remains in print to this day, having never missed an issue in 30 years of publication (though there was no May 1983 issue, June 1983 was released at the same time the May issue was expected by subscribers, and on newsstands to synch up with new owner Hi-Torque Publications’ production and cover date schema).
- December 1978 Rock concert promoter and “Jag BMX” owner Renny Roker promotes the first BMX World Championships in Indianapolis, IN. Unlike traditional BMX racing (held outdoors on dirt), the Jag World Championships were run in a convention center, on a cement track with wooden jumps (not seen in a major event since the Yamaha Gold Cup series in the 1974-75). A whole new riding technique and specialized parts would be developed to race “indoors-on-cement.”



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- 1981 National Bicycle Association founder Ernie Alexander steps down as president (the first founder of the major sanctioning bodies to do so. NBL's George Esser would step down in 1983 and ABA's Merl Mennenga in 1985).
- December 22, 1983 The film "BMX Bandits" is released in time for the Christmas film rush. The first feature-length film using BMX as a main plotline, "Bandits" also marks the first major film appearance for a then-unknown Australian actress named Nicole Kidman. Though initially scorned by the BMX community as corny, the film is now a cult classic among the BMXers of the day.
- Spring 1985 American Recreation Group acquires BMX Products and the "Mongoose" brand name from Skip Hess. This marks the first acquisition of an original BMX-related company by a public company. ARG is controlled by Meshulam Ricklis, husband of actress Pia Zadora, who also owns the Riviera Hotel in Las Vegas (where the stage show "Splash" features the first on-strip BMX freestyle demonstration, with Gary Laurent).
- June 1985 The Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) is introduced to North America at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. It is widely blamed in the BMX industry for the sharp decline in BMX racing and freestyle participation that will follow in years to come. Others, however, point to the fact that a large percentage of riders turned 16 between 1985 and 1987, and thus became interested in cars and girls, though probably not in that order).
- March 21, 1986 Director Hal Needham (Smokey and the Bandit, Cannonball Run) releases the feature-length "RAD," in theaters. This film, the first major feature to include actual BMX personalities mixed in with the Hollywood types (Talia Shire of "Godfather" and "Rocky" fame played the mom of lead character Cru Jones (played by Bill Allen)). 1984 Olympic Gold Medal gymnast Bart Connor starred as the evil-yet-fast villain, Bart Taylor. Leading up to the release, the BMX community was abuzz with stories of riders being paid \$3,000 to cut their hair (Martin Aparijo) and perks befitting the H'wood elite at the film location in Canada. The massive starting hill of the Beijing track is reminiscent of the then-outrageous features of fictional "Hell Track" in the film. As with BMX Bandits before it, RAD has become a cult classic among old-time BMXers.
- October 21, 1995 Mike King and Brian Lopes are the first to use clipless pedals in a BMX national race at the ABA Fall Nationals in Burbank, California. The "clips vs. flat (pedals)" choice is the subject of vigorous debate among racers to this day. King would go on to become USAC BMX director, overseeing the Team USA's BMX Olympic efforts.
- July 1996 GT Bicycles co-founder Richard Long is killed in a motorcycle accident while en route to a Mountain Bike event in Big Bear, CA.



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- 1995 Christophe Leveque is first racer from outside the US to earn an American #1 Pro title (in the ABA series). Due to a never-before-invoked rule in the ABA rulebook preventing foreign riders from holding an ABA title, Leveque is not awarded the title...clearing the way for Gary Ellis to win his fourth #1 Pro title. For the 1996 season, the "foreign rider" rule is repealed and Leveque goes on to win the 1998 and 1999 #1 Pro titles. Riders from outside the US win the top title five of the next eight years (Leveque in 1998 and 1999, Wade Bootes in 2000 and Warwick Stevenson in 2001 and 2003).
- November 22, 1997 ABA holds its largest race ever. The ABA Grand Nationals in Oklahoma City, OK counts over 4,500 entries making up a total of 601 motos.
- June 29, 2003 International Olympic Committee (IOC) voted, and approve the inclusion of BMX in the 2008 Summer Games in Beijing, China.
- 2006 Former racer/freestyler John Swarr and freestyle legend Mark Eaton release "Joe Kid on a Sting-Ray: The History of BMX." This feature-length documentary contains rare footage and in-depth interviews with most every BMX personality there is. The title is derived from a quote Stu Thomsen gave in his interview "I was just... 'Joe Kid on a Sting-Ray'..."