

RINKSIDER

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March-April 2015

2015 RSA Convention Preview..... pg. 9

It's a rodeo roundup of this year's Roller Skating Association International convention at the South Point Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas.

Champion Leadership at USARS pg. 12

Meet the new president of the United States Association of Roller Sports, Danny Brown.

Still using tokens in your arcade?..... pg. 14

Embedded technology is the newest player in the game that will replace magnetic card stripes.

The nation's oldest rink celebrates another milestone..... pg 27

Oaks Park in Portland, Oregon turns 110 this year, with a floating floor and a Wurlitzer organ.

Fixing and maintaining skates can pay big dividends

By *Connie Evener*

A well-equipped tech bench, managed by a knowledgeable technician with a flair for customer service, can turn a rink's pro-shop into a magnet for service – and sales. That's because rinks that take pro shop service seriously tend to attract customers who take skates and skating seriously.

Between the two of them, Mickey Ritter and Mike Pattison have close to nine decades of experience working on skates. Ritter, a manager at the Palace Roller Skating and Fun Center near Philadelphia, started as an apprentice to an older and more experienced co-worker more than 30 years ago. Pattison, who owns Pattison's West Family Skate Center near Federal Way, Wash., has been hanging around rinks and tinkering with skates for as long as he can remember. "My grandfather owned a rink, so I've been around skating my whole life," he said.

Pattison's West has the reputation for being the place to have skates maintained, repaired and adjusted, which also makes it the place to buy skates. "That's one of our selling points," said Pattison. "We'll main-

tain them and we always have spare parts on hand." The parts aren't all that expensive, but it's important to keep an eagle eye on the inventory, he noted.

Pattison's West doesn't have a roller derby team, "but we get a lot of derby girls." They flock in to get their wheels lathed. Although a good lathe will prob-

ably cost between \$500 and \$600, Pattison considers his a good investment. "Wheels start at about \$50, but most of the wheels I turn are more like \$80 to \$100." Most customers can't afford to toss wheels that are grooved or "dinked," so they figure having

continued on page 28



Abigail Peylun Ax, Scarlett Akin, and Clara Novotny ask "Do you Want to Build a Snowman?" during the annual Winterfest Show performed by the Memphis Figure Skating Club. Read the full story and see more pictures on page 27.

A well stocked tech bench keeps your skaters rolling

By *Catherine Bennett*

When someone neglects their car, letting dirt cake onto the exterior and interior, never taking it to the shop

for a wheel rotation or oil change, it is likely that it's not a fun set of wheels to drive. Taking care of a pair of roller skates is no different. No matter the make or model, each pair of skates needs to be treated with special care so that

they live a long life and let skaters do what they love to do most, skate.

Whether a business rents skates or sells skates, it's essential to know basic skate care in order to get the most worth out of each pair and help the customer do the same. "There are a lot of moving parts that need to be adjusted and cared for," said Steven Ball, Sales and Marketing Manager at Sure-Grip International. "You can make skates last a lifetime or not depending on the work you put in."

Margie Kulak, Customer Service Manager at Riedell Skates, said she recently met a man who has been using the same pair of skates for 30 years, which is possible with a nice pair of leather skates. She said she recommends that rink owners who sell skates enforce skate cleaning and maintenance after every 150 hours of use for the best results.

Skate shop employees should tell their



Having all the right tools and parts on hand will keep your customers rolling.

continued on page 30

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Skate maintenance (cont'd from page 1)

their wheels restored to perfect roundness by a pro is a good deal.

"I charge \$12.00 to lathe (eight) wheels and it makes them like brand new," said Pattison. He also uses that lathe to polish up customer relations. When a regular customer needs a lathe job, Pattison sometimes chooses to say "No charge." When they're expecting to pay and he does it for free, loyal customers become even more loyal. And that kind of customer satisfaction

is well worth the five minutes (once the wheels are off the skates) it takes to do the job.

The well-stocked - and staffed - tech bench can also increase customer satisfaction when they're renting skates. At The Palace, wheels, boots, and insoles are carefully inspected. Ritter and the tech crew always double check the laces because if the tip is gone, trying to lace up can be pretty frustrating.

Preventing frustration and making

the experience positive is key to turning occasional skaters into regulars. "If you don't adjust a skate properly, the customer won't be able to control it," said Ritter. And if he can't control it, he's either going to fall or not have a good time because he's focused on trying to control the skate, rather than enjoying the music, the atmosphere, and just skating."

Ritter graciously agreed to spread his equipment and tools out, then took

photos so RINKSIDER readers can see what's essential for a well-stocked tech area. Then, of course, he put everything back where it belongs so he'll be able to find what he needs the next time he's working on a pair of skates.

Note the transparent fronts on Ritter's storage compartments and parts bins. And if the contents aren't readily recognizable, he labels the bin or

cont'd on page 30

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Skate maintenance (cont'd from page 28)

drawer. Beneath the bins is Ritter's work surface, where that black ribbed rubber mat helps keep small parts from rolling off onto the floor. The WD-40 is Ritter's product of choice for removing excess grease and grime from bearings and other metal parts.

That box of latex gloves comes in handy for messy jobs. The yellow auto parts cleaner bucket is the perfect place to soak the gunk off bearings. "Put the bearings in there for a couple of hours," said Ritter, "then lift them up with the inside strainer, and lay them out on a paper towel."

Some customers seem to have the idea that the more grease or oil they use,

the faster their skates will go. But Ritter and Pattison agree. A little bit goes a long way. And too much makes for a big mess. Ritter, who uses Uncle Charlie's or Lynx Skate Bearing Oil, says "maybe two drops." For Pattison, who uses motor oil, "any kind of motor oil," one drop is sufficient. That said, however, Pattison does stock a lighter oil for customers who skate competitively.

As soon as Ritter got his bearing press/puller from Southeastern Skate Supply, he mounted it on a wooden block, to keep it from "flopping all over the place" while he uses it. And the vise, he said, "is always helpful when inserting axels."

Note how each drawer in the dark metal tool chest is labeled in big white letters: Screwdrivers... Sockets... Allen Wrench... Drill Bits... The shoemaker's anvil stand has three different sized anvils for mounting and drilling different sized boots.

A good variable speed drill is essential, as is the Snyder boot marking tool and the ruler for double checking markings. Resting just below The Palace's collection of drill bits is a "y3 tool," a non-slip grip tool with 9/16" and 1/2" sockets, plus a 15/16" open wrench. Screw drivers in a range of sizes and heads are a must. And so is the ratchet with a selection of sockets and

that collection of open end wrenches, all in the same sizes: 1/4", 3/8", 1/2", 9/16", 7/16" and 11/16".

Many of these tools, like the drill, wrenches, screw drivers, etc., will do double duty in maintaining the rink itself, noted Pattison.

And when you finish a job, always put the tools back where they belong, said Ritter. "Keep organized: a place for everything and everything in its place. Because just having that good quality open end 11/16 wrench isn't enough. You need to know where to find it, too."

Tech benches (cont'd from page 1)

customers to inspect their skates once per month at the very least, Ball said, to make sure everything is in working order. But what exactly should skate owners be looking for when they begin their monthly inspection? Whether or not the skate owner can answer this question often falls back on the employee selling the skate.

Educate the customer

"Skates require a level of maintenance before they even leave the shop in the customer's hands," said Luther Bernstein, owner of GoldenHorse Skates. "When the salesperson is finishing the sale, the salesperson should have a wrench and know how to adjust the skates," Bernstein said. "They will back the wheel off a half turn to make sure the wheel rolls because when the skate is manufactured the wheels are tightened down all the way."

It's then important to see that the toe stop is tight and that the action is backed off half a turn to make sure the truck can move slightly, he added.

Fitting a customer in a boot and making adjustments to that boot is easy. It's time consuming and a fair amount of extra work to teach the customer proper and in-depth skate maintenance, Bernstein said. Skate shop owners decide whether or not they want to teach the customer in-depth or light maintenance skills as a service to the customer, but many simply sell the skate and then tell the customer to come back to the shop for routine checkups. Either way, someone needs to know how to care for the skate to ensure that the customer enjoys each session at the rink and keeps coming back.

The Dryer the Better

Perhaps one of the most stressed rules of skate maintenance is letting the skates get some fresh air after they've been lived in by sweaty feet, Kulak said. "When you finish skating, pull the tongues out of your skates and let them air out," Bernstein said. "They need ventilation. Then spray them with a disinfectant like Lysol."

Kulak said she cannot stress enough the importance of not putting skates back into a skate bag after wearing them around the rink. Trapping damp skates in confined space can cause a number of unpleasant

problems. These same problems are often prevalent in humid climates.

"We've seen issues over the year with rust," Ball said. "Bearings are made of steel and if they are dry and not lubricated they will rust with moisture. Skates also contain aluminum and when they get a lot of oxidation this can sometimes cause mold."

The back seat of a car during hot summer months is another bad place to leave a pair of skates, Ball said, especially in southern states with high humidity levels. When leather gets wet it can crack. In addition, the insoles of leather boots insoles can become brittle with too much moisture and even begin to rot, he said. Boots made with moisture resistant linings do exist, but they aren't the norm.

However, if skate owners and rental counter techs are mindful of keeping skates in a dry, open space, especially if the skates sit there for a longer period of time, then they shouldn't experience rusting, molding or cracking. To ensure this doesn't happen, Ball said, "it's wise to insert salt bags often found in new shoes because they absorb any extra moisture lingering in the boots."

The royal skate treatment

Every pair of skates requires a certain amount of cleaning and even grooming to keep them looking and functioning at their best. However, before a skate owner starts taking out too many boot products and tools, they should first remove any excess dirt and grime.

Leather boots can be cleaned with a leather conditioner while vinyl skates are best cleaned with a simple, damp rag, Kulak said. Keep in mind that soaking the rag will harm the skate, so go easy on the water.

It's easy for wheels to get filthy on any rink floor, so to keep them looking new skate owners or skate renters may want to invest in a wheel washer. Those who aren't ready to fork over the money for a wheel cleaning contraption can use a rag and mild dish soap to clean the wheels, Ball said, but it's important to make sure that the skates' trucks and bearings don't get wet in the process.

The more intricate parts of a skate, including the trucks and bearings, pick

up dirt like the rest of the boot. When the bearings get dirty it can affect how fast the wheels spin.

"First, you need to take the wheels off the skates in order to clean the bearings," Kulak said. "There is a front and back bearing to each wheel. These can be cleaned with a product like Simple Green. They can be soaked or swished in this and then they need to be laid out on the counter to dry. Some people will take a cool hair dryer to them to make sure they don't sit in water for too long."

Before putting the dry bearings back on the skates, Kulak recommends applying a bearing lubricant found at any skate shop. This will help the wheels rotate smoothly for the best skating experience. Bearing oil is a best seller as far as skate maintenance products go, however, Ball said he prefers using a grease product compared to an oil product because it stays on bearings longer, makes bearings quieter, and will still continue to be effective in substantial heat.

Once skates are cleaned and lubed up, it's time to break out the tools for a tune-up. Ball said that Sure-Grip sells an all-in-one tool that can make any adjustment to a skate. These are rather inexpensive for those looking for a quick fix. Skate owners who are more serious about skate maintenance should look into purchasing a 100-piece tool kit which could be more beneficial in the long run than the small tools that many skate companies sell.

Wear and Tear

There are a number of skate parts a skate owner should inspect and adjust with their handy-dandy tool set every few weeks. Those who are not familiar with all of the components of a skate can easily search online for a helpful diagram before making adjustments. However, without any maintenance education it's difficult to make sense of what to look at. Skate owners should learn the basics, or take their skates into the shop where they purchased them every so often so that the employees can look them over for any needed adjustments, Ball said.

"There isn't a lot of education going on out there," Bernstein said. "A lot of times shops won't tell you about the skates because they expect that the particular

customer will just come back in and buy a new pair when their old ones wear out."

Ball said he believes including maintenance in skate shops makes people feel more at ease about going skating. If a customer purchases a skate from Ball, he'll maintain it for the life of the skate, but those who don't purchase from him will need to pay for services.

"Check the toe stops, the pivot inserts and the pivot cup," Kulak said. "Also, check the wear on the wheels. They should be rotated like the wheels on a car. The edges of those wheels wear quickly."

After the wheels are removed from the skate before rotating, check the pivot insert in the plate where the arm of the truck goes. Many people skate until this part of the plate disintegrates, which makes skating difficult. "It's especially easy for this pivot insert to disintegrate when a skater wears their trucks loose and the arm moves around a lot," Kulak said.

Check the cushions on the king pin because those do lose their life. A new set of cushions will go a long way to make a skate perform better.

"Toe stops also wear out," she said, and should be rotated by giving them a quarter turn. "The plate will most likely having the longest life of all the skate parts," Kulak said, and should last beyond the life of the skate.

Protect Your Investment

"When kids get the best experience in their skates, they will keep coming back," Ball said. "If their skates are hurting or they don't turn, they won't use them. They'll think this is what roller skating is and in the mean time they are just built incorrectly. Ultimately, we are losing out on business."

Many kids, and some adults, view skates as toys when they should be treated the way any high-price pair of shoes would be treated. By taking care of a pair of skates, the owners is not only protecting their investment, they're protecting their safety. Add to the skating customers' enjoyment. Help skaters feel comfortable and secure during their sessions and they'll take every opportunity to lace up and cruise around the rink for hours.