

# Bike courses help kids over life's obstacles

> BY JACK CHRISTIE

When it comes to outdoor innovations, ours is a city of firsts. For example, in 1976, PD's Hot Shop in Nanaimo, now the home of the Skull Skates brand in Kitsilano, became Canada's first skateboard store. In 1980, the Vancouver-based Outdoor Recreation Council launched B.C. Rivers Day, which spawned the first World Rivers Day in 2005. And in 2001, the City of Port Moody created North America's first urban bike-trials park. Today, there are five in the GVRD alone, with another on the way in Port Coquitlam.

Bike-trials riding put down roots in Europe but two of its biggest proponents hail from the GVRD: Port Moody's Ryan Leech and North Vancouver-based Jay "Hoots" Krantz. And they would be the first to cite Hans "No Way" Rey from Germany and Spanish rider Ot Pi as pioneers. Pi's father, Pere, a champion motorcyclist, is credited with building the first trials bike. It's a good bet that the lightweight, nonmotorized mountain bicycle didn't sport training wheels. On it, a preteen Ot Pi practised riding up and over man-made and natural obstacles on a course similar to those designed for motorcycle-trials riding.

Ryan Leech discovered he had a talent for trials riding—a blend of balance and hopping skills—when he was 13. Now 28, he's appeared with Cirque du Soleil, starred in the Vans Warped Tour, and ridden his specially designed Norco bike in Whistler, Peru, and just about everywhere in between. True to his West Coast roots, you're just as likely to find him working out year-round in the PoMo Rotary Bike Trials Park, sheltered from the elements by the Moody Street overpass above Murray Street, and sporting his trademark megawatt smile.



Jay "Hoots" Krantz builds trials and skills parks that teach patience, balance, and self-esteem. Louise Christie photo.

Thanks to the groundbreaking talent of Lower Mainland-based cyclists like Leech, the art of riding a mountain bike has been seriously redefined. Speed was once the driving factor when plummeting downhill. That's still the case, but not nearly as much as it once was, especially on the North Shore, the home of technical riding, where riders like Leech, Krantz, and Anmore's Jason and Steve Baia negotiate huge drops and impossibly wide gaps as they patiently test their balancing skills while trying not to let their feet touch the ground. (At age nine, Steve Baia won the 2003 Under 12 World Bike Trials Championships in Japan.)

In March, Leech unveiled his latest

production, Trials of Life ([www.trials oflife.com/](http://www.trials oflife.com/)). Its inspirational theme encourages kids not to lose touch with their innate optimism, no matter what challenges life presents. Following a hop-and-talk presentation at the Fraserview Boys' and Girls' Club in South Vancouver, Leech told the *Georgia Straight* that bike-trials riding has taught him a valuable lesson: patience is its own reward. "When you're a young kid learning to make your way in the world and trying hard to figure out what you really want to do with your life, listen to your heart."

As Leech set out in April to spread his trials gospel across Canada, Krantz was busy putting the finishing touches

on several bike-skills parks he's built locally, including one in Burnaby's new Taylor Park (a former municipal landfill), plus remodelling the South Surrey Bike Park, which the 38-year-old designed back in 2001. Creating trials and skills parks takes vision. Rather than mix riders together like a tossed salad, as was sometimes done in the past, bike parks now feature a variety of skills features, such as dirt jumps and mounds, and a separate trials area with logs, teeter-totters, and boardwalks where cyclists can progressively hone their skills.

Like Leech, Krantz has turned his passion into a profession. He has natty dreadlocks flying out from beneath his helmet and an infectious grin that

never seems to quit, and both kids and grownups are quick to catch his buzz. "At first," he told the *Georgia Straight*, "park planners may have had concerns about risk management and other bureaucratic issues, but I've found that my professional approach, plus the obvious need for more urban skills and jump parks, has gradually won over the skeptics."

Taylor Park is the latest proof of that. The *Straight* caught up with Krantz there in early May after Burnaby mayor Derrick Corrigan officially opened the bike park as part of a larger multi-use facility downhill from the Edmonds SkyTrain station. "Port Moody's park is very trials-specific," Krantz noted. "When I worked on my first one—the Sprockids Park on the Sunshine Coast—it opened my mind to adding jumps as well." Despite early successes in communities like Gibsons and South Surrey, Krantz added that "it's only this year that a broader portion of municipalities are starting to realize the value of bike-skills parks for what they offer the community. The one I'm building in Port Coquitlam, set to open this summer, will be an absolutely stellar park. I'm in touch with four different First Nations councils as well, who are exploring possible parks on their reserves." (To find out more about Krantz's parks, visit [www.hoots.ca/](http://www.hoots.ca/).)

As for the demographics of bike-park users, Krantz drew a comparison with skate parks. "The entire community is using well-built skills parks: young, old, disabled. Some real thought went into Taylor and South Surrey parks. Although they are overwhelmingly used by youth, there's a different fabric that ties people of all ages together there. Skate parks are destinations in themselves. Bike-skills parks are an education, the welcome mat to mountain biking anywhere." North Shore trails, anyone? ♦