



Dude!

Join the Rebellion!

By Bob Evancho

The shirtless young man with the earring and tattoos stopped, tucked his skateboard under his arm and gave an incredulous look — like he had been just asked the dumbest question he had ever heard. Standing in a Boise park, he had just finished performing a series of acrobatic tricks and flips with his board.

Now he sized up the middle-aged man who had just asked him why he preferred skateboarding to a more traditional pastime like, say, baseball.

“Dude!” came the response. “You gotta be kiddin’! Baseball is, like, *so lame!*”

He may not have been the most eloquent spokesman for his generation, but the young man’s reply indeed represents an anti-establishment attitude among many Gen Xers who have embraced the so-called “extreme sports” — a variety of outdoor activities that provide not only heart-stopping excitement but also the image of unfettered rebellion.

From downhill mountain bikers to

snowboarders, from sky surfers to vertical skateboarders and rock climbers, many of these extreme athletes are satisfying their need for excitement with their high-risk passions while thumbing their noses at America’s more conventional athletic endeavors.

Boise State psychologist Jim Nicholson, who has done research and written articles on risk activities from a psychological perspective, says that outrageous behavior and a hunger for thrills among young



RYAN EALING PHOTO

Corey Barton takes extreme sports to the extreme with his sky surfing.

than it was decades ago. "With this steady diet of high-violence and high-action films, the thrill-seeking threshold is higher; therefore it takes more stimulation to produce that sense of euphoria found in extreme sports," he says.

As Nicholson observes, death-defying acts and high-risk adventures are nothing new. But there does seem to be a dual commonality among the extreme athletes interviewed for this article: the need to test themselves and push their limits individually and a growing disenchantment with the widely accepted "the-team-comes-first" ethos so entrenched in traditional American sports.

For many of this new breed of young athlete, BMX stunt bikes and in-line skates have replaced baseball gloves and footballs. With any athletic endeavor, there is a certain degree of danger, but it's apparent that these new sports have upped the ante.

To be sure, the danger in extreme sports is very real, but the opportunity to momentarily live on the edge — and to do it solo — seems to be too powerful a lure for these young daredevils.

"The individual challenge is what I enjoy; you're pushing yourself," says Krisjan Hiner, president of Boise State's Snowboard Club.

A junior majoring in English/communication, Hiner, 21, says he "never had a real good experience with team sports. They're too political." Instead, he learned to skateboard and surf at an early age while growing up in San Diego. When he moved to Idaho, it seemed like a natural progression to add snowboarding to his list of extreme pastimes.

Hiner's perspective is similar to that of Boise State sophomore Casey Butz, vice president of Boise State's Kayak Club. "It's not that I dislike football and all that, I just never quite fit into that crowd," says the 21-year-old pre-architecture major from Lancaster, Pa. "When you play a team sport it's all for the team. There's no individuality. For me, kayaking offers more of the individual experience that I prefer."

Meridian resident Corey Barton also eschews traditional games for something a

little more extreme — like jumping out of an airplane at 10,000 feet with a 30-inch graphite board strapped to his feet. "Man, just talking about sky surfing gets me excited!" says the 32-year-old home builder. "The sensation is hard to explain. It's such an incredible challenge."

Barton got into skydiving two years ago and began sky surfing a year later after watching the sport on ESPN2's coverage of last year's X Games.

"I don't think I can compare it to anything else. When you're literally flying at 120-160 mph standing atop a board everything is happening so fast, you're not sure if your mind is working correctly. The sheer speed is what really gets to me. Obviously, it's the individual challenge that makes it so appealing."

'The adrenaline rush is a powerful reinforcement for many. These extreme sports often take the participants away from what is boring and mundane.'

While providing adrenaline rushes for those in need, these sports don't come cheap, which has created a marriage that Boise State kinesiology professor Ron Pfeiffer views with a certain cynicism. Extreme sports, he says, tend to uphold this image of youthful rebellion and non-conformity, which makes corporate America's involvement in enhancing

that image seem just a bit ironic.

Pfeiffer, a mountain bicyclist who has competed in national and international competitions, finds it interesting that while extreme sports project a picture of counterculture lifestyles and escapism, commercials by the makers of Mountain Dew and other products spend millions to shamelessly pander to Gen X consumers.

"Sure, there is an anti-establishment element in these sports, so I find it somewhat paradoxical when you look at all the commercials and media hype that go with them," Pfeiffer comments.

Even so, it seems unlikely that the thrill seekers among today's Gen Xers are going to give up their skateboards, mountain bikes and kayaks anytime soon. "The adrenaline rush is a powerful reinforcement for many," says Nicholson. "These extreme sports often take [the participants] away from what is boring and mundane."

"Besides, they'll just invent new ways to get their thrills." □

Americans is a trait that has been around a long time. "There are similarities [among generations] within the anti-society realm, and I guess you could include thrill seeking in that," he says. "But we had people going over Niagara Falls probably 200 years ago, and Lewis and Clark took huge physical risks."

Because of the influence of television, video games and other technologies, Nicholson suggests that contemporary society's "activation level" is higher today