

STREET SPIRIT

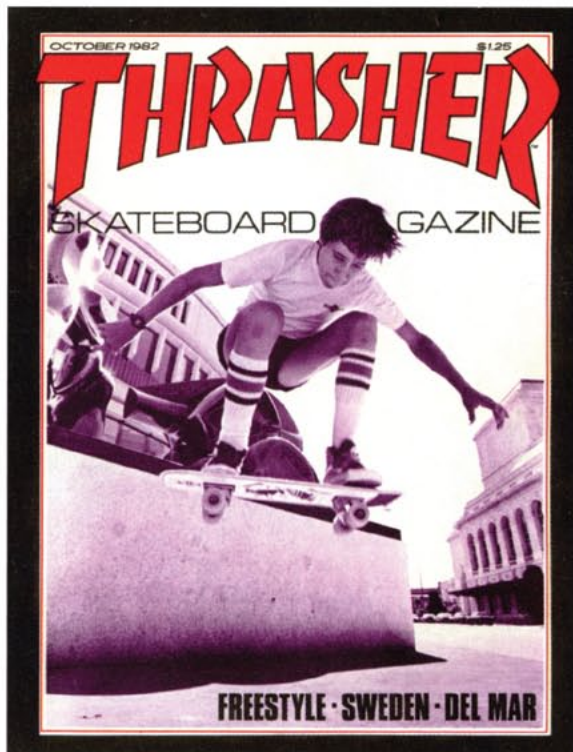
A skateboard whiz pushed off flat ground into mid-air and gave his sport new life

IN A GARAGE ON THE RURAL FRINGES of Gainesville, Fla., 15-year-old Rodney Mullen slammed down on the tail of his skateboard as he jumped up, levelling the deck in mid-air. It was 1982, and he'd recently seen Alan Gelfand, a fellow Floridian who was three years older, perform an "ollie," a trick Gelfand had invented in 1976. Gelfand, who skated vert—on ramps and in drained-out pools—would scoop up the wall of a bowl and push off the tail of his skateboard, whipping into the air without the help of his hands, his feet still on the board. It took Mullen one day to replicate the trick on his garage floor.

Mullen was a freestyler, skating choreographed routines of technical tricks on the ground. Gelfand's ollie hadn't translated to freestyle skating, which lacked the upward momentum of vert to push skaters into the air. But years before, Mullen, who started skating when he was 10, had developed a move to get from the tail of the board to the

nose—standing on the back, with the tail edge propped on the ground, and jumping to the front. "I thought, wait a second, it's essentially the same motion," says Mullen. He would jump, popping the board off the ground by striking down on the tail, then use his front foot to level the deck before landing. By adapting the ollie to flat ground, Mullen laid the foundation for a new form of the sport—street skating.

Mullen premiered his trick at the Rusty Harris Series in Whittier, Calif., in June 1982, and skate legend Stacy Peralta, Mullen's mentor, immediately put him on a plane to San Francisco, where he was photographed for the cover of *Thrasher* magazine. By the mid-1980s, the popularity of freestyle was dwindling, and the flat-ground ollie pointed the way forward, allowing skaters to jump over curbs and perform no-hands aerial tricks on a flat surface. Street skating emerged as the dominant style, and Mullen went on to earn the best contest record of any pro skater ever. He also created a whole body of fundamental tricks, including the kickflip, the heelflip and the "impossible," in which the skater rotates his board 360 degrees off his back foot while in the air.



Today, Mullen splits his time between Los Angeles and Ojai, Calif. He skates alone from midnight until 2 or 3 a.m. "I don't skate for people publicly," he says. "I can't go to skate parks, really. I think a lot of skaters feel a little outcast, and that's definitely my sensibility." But, he adds, "Because I created these things that we all share, it is this incredible feeling of connectedness, of being part of something." **SN**

TRY THIS AT HOME RIDE YOUR DECK ON AIR WITH A BOOST FROM THE FLAT-GROUND OLLIE



- 1 STAND** Crouch down with one foot planted on the tail of your deck and the other foot near the middle.
- 2 POP** Jump up, pushing down on the tail so that your board pops off the ground, nose-up. Slide your front foot forward along the deck, toward the nose.
- 3 LEVEL** As you glide forward in mid-air, guide your board to a horizontal plane by pushing down lightly with your front foot.
- 4 LAND** With your board now level, land on the ground with both feet on the deck.

ILLUSTRATION BY KAGAN NICLECO

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