

# Remembering HOWARD GORDON 1952-2010

by DANIEL GESMER



Photo: Ron Bez

**O**n July 20, 2010, Howard Gordon, a key figure in the modern renaissance of slalom skateboard racing, died of a heart attack in San Luis Obispo, Calif., shortly after returning home from a surfing session. He was just 57.

His impact as a computer entrepreneur is ubiquitous. In the 1990s, his company, Xing Technology, authored the JPEG and MPEG compression software that now lets photo images and video clips move swiftly over the Internet.

Gordon's contributions to the skateboard world began unfolding in May 2001, when he stumbled upon the World Slalom Skateboard Championships in Morro Bay, not far from his home. "He called me up the next day and asked if I would teach him and his two kids to skate," recalled racing legend and Worlds producer Jack Smith. "Over the next few months, I met up with him, Lauren and Dylan to run cones at various hills around San Luis Obispo County."

Quickly joining the sessions was Paul Dunn, a Smith protégé and one of the top slalomers in the world at the time. For the next three years, Dunn skated with Gordon nearly every day. Advanced deck, truck and wheel testing began, and Gordon soon formed a business partnership with iconic slalom deck maker Bob Turner, whose brand had been mostly dormant since the 1970s.

"Those were great times. We would try different combinations of gear to see which worked best," said Dunn. "This process led to the creation of the Fat Boy deck, the TTC truck and the various wheels that Howard was so interested in producing — not for the money, but as an experiment ... Howard loved to tinker, and enjoyed the challenge of resurrecting Turner SummerSki and putting his own spin on it."

Those years also represented a father's love, Dunn said, a way to share some of the best times of his life with his children, who eventually earned World Championship titles in their respective divisions.

In the spring of 2002, Bob Turner died of a sudden heart attack, eerily on the same afternoon as the first race of the FCR Series — the first professional slalom circuit of the modern era. Gordon was one of FCR's key sponsors as well as Turner's

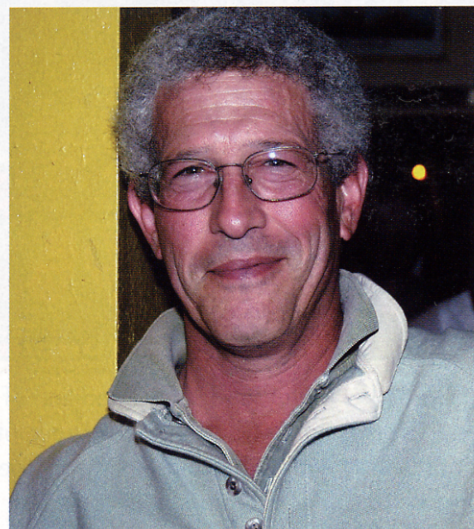


Photo: Farid A. Abraham

business partner, and his passing (from the same cause as Turner's) comes at an equally critical juncture for slalom — which is now testing progressive formats to attract younger generations of racers. Gordon's model of maturity, intelligence, generosity and vision is the "right stuff" to guide not just slalom but all skateboard racing disciplines into a healthy future.

Neal Piper, the owner of high-end wheel manufacturer AEND Industries and arguably the world's leading urethane wheel engineer, considers himself lucky to have worked with Gordon on the original Turner and 3DM wheel line. "Years before longboarding exploded, Howard had the first good read on the next generation of racing wheels," Piper said. "His was the first-ever wheel program dedicated to stand-up longboarding."

Gordon named his wheel shapes in honor of renowned California slalom spots — first La Costa, then Avalon, Cambria and Avila.

"Howard was the innovator of large, wide wheels with sharp, flexible edges both inside and outside," added Piper. "The 68mm Avalon, introduced in early 2002, could be compared to JPEG compression in the then-tiny longboard racing world, in that it set the tone for many of today's designs. Its combination of features represents a true milestone: softer, high-performance, racing-specific urethane; offset bearing location; small core; edge-sensitive design; and contact patch wider than 50mm."

"He was so cool and low-key," said Dunn, "and his riding style reflected his personality: He skated all laid back, with his weight on his back foot. I was always on him to put more weight forward!"

"Stoked... that's how I'll always remember Howard," said Smith. And stoked is exactly how his innovative skateboard products, and the many race gatherings he supported, left so many of us.

Gordon is survived by his wife, Heidi; daughter, Lauren; son, Dylan; and brother, Mitchell.