

# Daily Grind

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# Daily GRIND

**How can Activision and Neversoft make Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 even more addicting than the original? Easy. They're turning to the pros—and the players—for help.**

**By Crispin Boyer**  
*Illustrations by Allan Ditzig*

**T**he guys at Neversoft have ticked off their downstairs neighbors again. Employees at the accounting firm on the first floor of the game developer's two-story mirrored-window office building are griping about the pounding sounds reverberating across their ceiling. To the accountants, it sounds like the Neversoft gang upstairs must be dropping 160-pound barbells on the floor.

Close. It's actually the cubicle-quaking racket of a skateboarder launching his deck off a conference-room table, executing a perfect kicktrick in midglide, then slamming his wheels onto the carpet.

The sound can only mean one thing: The pro skaters are visiting Neversoft's offices in Woodland Hills, Calif., today. They're here to check the progress on Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2, sequel to the best skateboarding game ever. And, unfortunately for the irritable bean counters downstairs, pro skater Jamie Thomas is also here to show off his skills to the game's developers and EGM's

photographer. After he's scuffed Neversoft's table and pounded the floor to submission with his street-skater stylings, Thomas sits before an early build of the PlayStation version—which Activision will publish in late August—and fires off questions about the sequel.

"Will the riders' special grinds be the same generally as the ones in the first game?" he asks.

"No, we'll do whatever you guys want," says Scott Pease, THPS2's producer at Neversoft. "I hope you have ideas. Rodney [Mullen] has ideas."

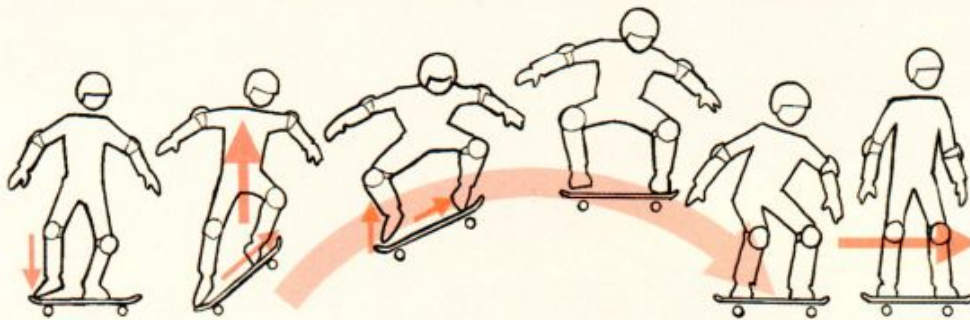
"Hey, I got a call from a friend of mine," Thomas adds, "and he said, 'Dude, you know Street Sk8r 2 lets you build your own course. You better tell those Neversoft guys that. Better tell them.'"

The game's producer grins. "Don't worry. It's covered," he says.

Then the Birdman himself, Tony Hawk, arrives with his own questions ("Who's in the demo?") and suggestions ("Your character should progressively get more beat up.") Soon after, pro skater Chad







## The Ollie

1. Grab your deck and find a flat patch of blacktop—preferably not the middle of a busy street or interstate—and hop aboard.
2. Kick a few times to build momentum until you're rolling along at a decent clip.
3. Rest your front foot at the board's halfway point, while placing the ball of your other foot on the tail. Now bend your knees.
4. Do all the following in one explosive movement: Forcefully press the back of the board against the ground and jump while sliding your front leg up toward the front of the board. Do it all right and your deck should leave the ground at an angle, which will level out as you slide your front foot forward—a motion that pulls the rear of the board free of the concrete.
5. Bend you knees again at your ollie's peak and stay centered over your deck. Keep your shoulders lined up with the board, too.
6. Make sure your knees are bent when you touch down. Your front foot should rest on the forward truck bolts. Keep your rear foot right near the start of the tail.



Muska shows up for his hands-on playtime.

It's the same collaborative process that made the original Tony Hawk's Pro Skater such an addicting, appealing and—with nearly 1 million copies sold in the U.S.—successful PlayStation title. The starring pro skaters lend more than their appearances and custom boards to the sequel; they play it, help tweak it, and above all, immerse the developers in skate culture. It all makes for a game with serious street cred, mainly because the pro skaters are often brutally honest about what needs fixing.

"It's a fun process," Pease says, nodding at Thomas, "even when he comes in here and rips on us."

"I'm your worst nightmare," Thomas agrees, "and you actually let me in the door to tell you what's wrong with the game."

For the sequel—which is also due to hit the Dreamcast, N64, Game Boy Color and PC—Neversoft has access to feedback from more than just the game's cadre of pro skaters. The bulletin board on their Web site ([www.neversoft.com](http://www.neversoft.com)) is crammed with at least 25,000 messages from addicts of the original game. These fans know what they want in the sequel, and they're not shy about posting their demands on Neversoft's board. At the top of their list: a skate-park editor and a create-a-skater feature.

Neversoft listened. THPS2 will pack the most in-depth level editor ever seen in a PlayStation game (see sidebar). And the custom-skater option is just as ambitious. Aside from tailoring every head-to-toe feature of your characters (including their skin tones, tattoos, clothing styles—even

types of tube socks), you can customize their trick sets and tweak category upon subcategory of stats. You'll create a vert or street skater, then take him through the Career Mode and build his abilities to superhuman levels, better than any of the pro skaters who come with the game. Oh, and if you don't have a DexDrive yet, you'll definitely want one for THPS2. "The goal obviously is when people start trading these parks and skaters on the Internet," Neversoft game designer Chris Rausch tells us. "You'll get a completely different experience every time you play somebody else's guy or park, creating basically an endless roster of characters and levels."

Too lazy to create your own in-game doppelganger? No problem: THPS2 still packs the 10 pros of the original game. And three new skaters have come along for the ride. You now get Scott Caballero, Eric Koston and Rodney Mullen—the one guy gamers demanded most of all, the father of modern street skating.

Fans of the first game have one other

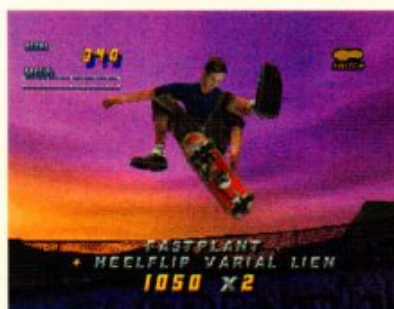


The new custom-skater feature is so in-depth you can essentially build yourself and compete with the pros. Or you could just go with "white afro" guy.



common demand of the sequel: They want to see more skate spots ripped from real-life. They want more locations like Burnside, the original game's most realistic level. So when it came time to design THPS2's 10 levels, the developers did their homework. "The team pretty much sits at this conference table every day for lunch and repeatedly watches every skate video that's ever been made," Neversoft president Joel Jewett tells us. Team members embarked on field trips to the top skate spots in the world. They snapped pictures. They recorded hundreds of hours of video. They even tapped Thomas, who's made several professional skate videos in his free time. "They sent me a list of all the spots they needed," Thomas says, "and I brought all my videos in, and I even brought in my raw footage, too, so they could see everything that's going on at those spots."

Their field work paid off. Neversoft has duplicated several real-world locales, including parks in Marseille, France; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and the infamous Skate Street, located in Ventura, Calif. Heck, Skate Street is accurate right down to its wall murals, soda machines and T-Shirt racks in its gift shop. "To have it totally grounded in



reality is a blast," Jewett says. "If you've actually been to one of these spots, you're like, 'Yeah! Check this out! I can do stuff here that'd kill me if I tried it in real life.'"

The team sifted through all the fans' feedback, put together a list of most-requested real-life spots, then built them in the game. Take the new school level, for instance, which is actually a combination of several southern California high school campuses made famous in skate videos. It's here you'll find the Leap of Faith, a two-story ollie drop Jamie Thomas once attempted in real life, only to bust his board on landing. In the New York level, you'll skate an exact

## Hawk Tawk

An interview with pro skaters Tony Hawk and Jamie Thomas

Tony Hawk may be the world's most talented vert skateboarder. He may be the only man in history to pull off the once-fabled 900. He may have dominated dozens of competitions, starred in as many commercials and even done the motion-capture for Disney's Tarzan.

But he's still a down-to-earth guy, and he's still gotta eat. So we chomped down Mexican food with the 31-year-old skate veteran, who's also a father of two, along with fellow pro skater Jamie Thomas. The duo told us everything we did and maybe didn't want to know about the new game, getting hurt, the merits of K-Mart skateboards and exactly what pro skaters do in a typical day.

**EGM: How deep was your involvement with the original game and its sequel?**

**Tony Hawk:** We just figure out what we think should stay or go or be improved or what feels more realistic and more fun. For the most part, it's just playing it and figuring out what's possible and what people are gonna like. I mean, I play it with my son, who plays all the time. So he tells me what he thinks, too. He's brutally honest.

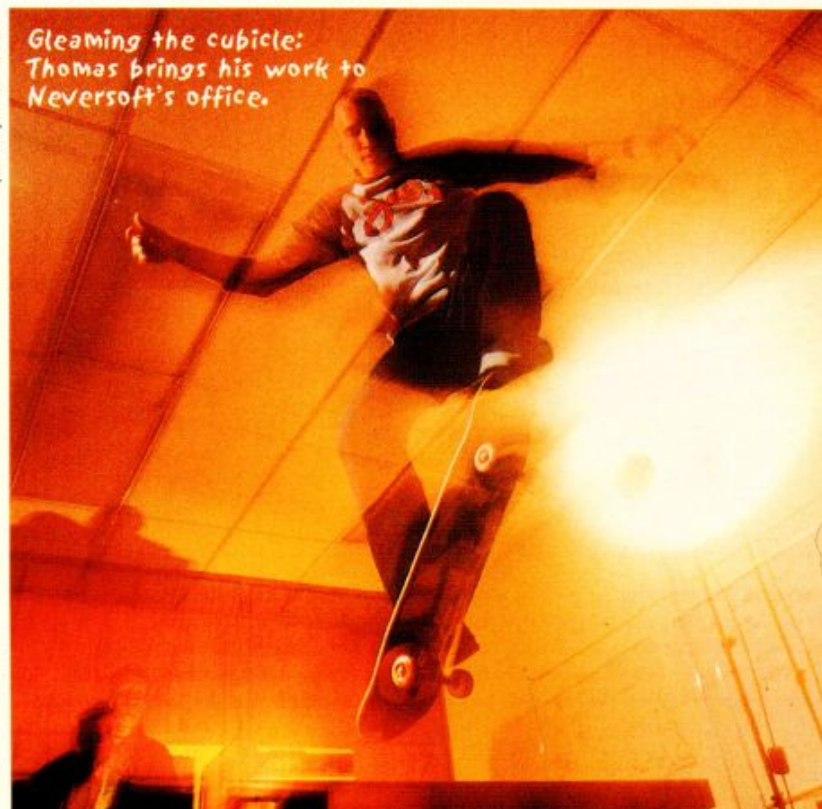
**EGM: Who's better at Pro Skater, you or your son?**

**TH:** Oh, I don't know. I think he has more time to play it these days. I used to think it was just me, but he's gotten a lot better.

**EGM: Why do you think the original appealed to so many people, not just skaters?**

**Jamie Thomas:** It has so much variety and so many possibilities. If you watch anybody play, they've all got their own style and they all do their own runs and their own things. I mean, sure it has the story part of the game and you're supposed to get so many tapes or do this or that, but for the most part you can just get creative, just like real skateboarding. For the people who have never gotten into skateboarding—they're not physically able or whatever—it's a way they can live the thing that has drawn all the skateboarders to skateboarding, the freedom to do whatever you want when you want. Now you have that in a video game,

photo by Voldi Tanner





so everybody gets to experience it without going through the bad things about skating, which is getting kicked out, getting hurt, dealing with all the hassles. Now you have hassle-free, freedom of expression on your TV.

TH: Yeah, but I think also it's a totally new way of playing games. There really hasn't been any game



like it, even in other sports. In other skate games, you didn't really have full control over what you're doing. It's more like you punch in a combo then you watch the guy.

TH: Also, Neversoft totally immersed themselves in the skate culture. That's pretty rare as far as getting so deep into it.

**EGM: Did other companies approach you to make a skateboarding before Activision and Neversoft?**

TH: Yeah, right at the same time a couple different companies did. I just kinda figured out who was on the right track.

**EGM: Why Neversoft then?**

TH: Actually [they] showed me a sample of what they already had, and I could tell they were on the right track. They just had a super-early guy who would ollie and do a couple tricks, but it felt right, and everyone else was scrambling to figure out what skateboarding was all about. I didn't want to go through that. To try to teach them from ground zero would just take too long, and too much compromise.

**EGM: What games are you guys into at home?**

TH: I have all the systems. I play a lot of the N64 games, stuff like Banjo, Super Mario, Mario Kart, and then I'm into Crash Bandicoot on the PlayStation, but anything that's, like, super role-playing or involved, I just don't have the time.

JT: Yeah, yeah, my wife bought me Zelda a Christmas ago, and I knew as soon as I unlocked the wrapper that it was gonna take my life away for about two weeks, so I never even



replica of the Brooklyn Banks, the most recognizable deck mecca on the East Coast. "The reason these spots made it into the game is because they're plastered all over the skate videos," Pease says. "So a player can take a run through this school, then watch the replay and get replay angles similar to what he just saw in the video and absolutely recognize what he's doing—and all this with his create-a-skater character who looks just like him."

Of course, the sequel won't restrict you to

real-world stuff. Within the levels, you'll still find plenty of fantasy elements, obstacles like stacked picnic tables, loads of banks, rooftops and hundreds of things to grind. "We're gonna put in a lot more stair sets and kinked rails, as well," Rausch adds. "Not just run-of-the-mill straight rails everywhere."

Like the first game, THPS2 packs both small competition arenas and sprawling city levels. But the objectives in Career Mode are different this time. Instead of completing goals to nab skate tapes, you now track down and collect money icons scattered through each level. Collecting money lets you "buy" upgrades to your skater's stats, as well as purchase new decks and access later levels. "Going over to a cash-based system gives us the chance to put extra cash hidden all over the level and in hard-to-reach places," Pease tells us. "It will be really hard to clean out the levels totally."

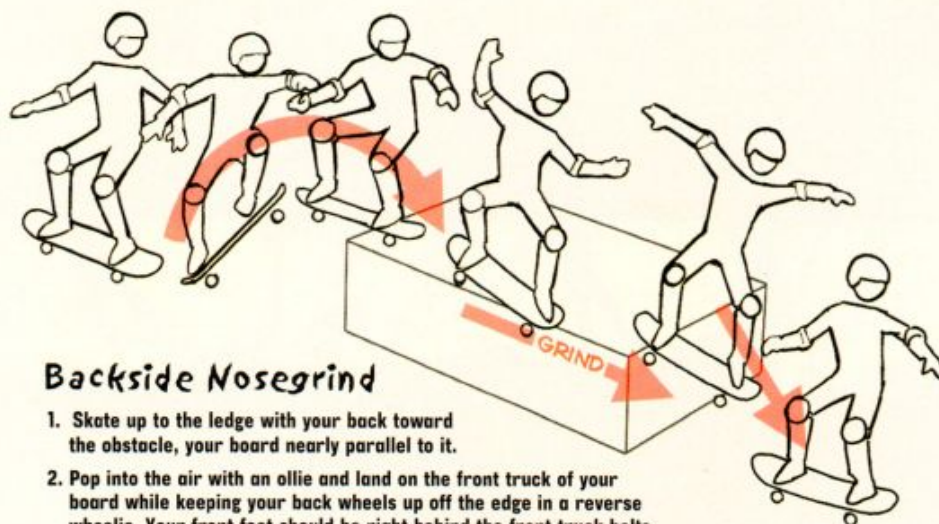
But scooping up cash won't be your only objective in each stage. While the first game's Career Mode only gave you five goals per level, the sequel packs many, many



Neversoft's THPS2 team, from left to right: Joel Jewett, Noel Hines, Ralph D'Amato, Jason Keeney, Gary Jesdanun (lower), Darren Thorne (above Gary), Junki Saita, Ryan McMahon, Jason Uyeda, Johnny Ow, Mick West, Chris Rausch (throwing a sign), Scott Pease, Silvio Porretta, Jamie Thomas, Chad Muska's hand. Not pictured is designer Aaron Cammarata, who works in New York and helped nail the look of the Central Park level.

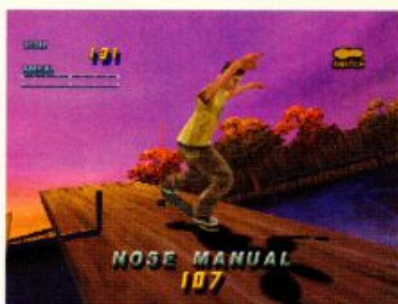
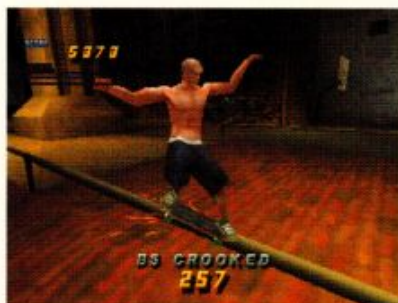
photo by Voldi Tanner





## Backside Nosegrind

1. Skate up to the ledge with your back toward the obstacle, your board nearly parallel to it.
2. Pop into the air with an ollie and land on the front truck of your board while keeping your back wheels up off the edge in a reverse wheelie. Your front foot should be right behind the front truck bolts when you ollie and just in front of them when you land on the ledge.
3. Grind for a bit, then push down a bit on the nose of your board and pop off the edge.



more. You still need to collect letters to spell "SKATE," and you'll come across obstacle-specific objectives (such as ollie 10 garbage cans, grind eight benches, etc.). Just expect more of them. In New York, for instance, you'll need to nab tokens to gain access to the subway system and its grindable rails.

Many obstacles will also be highly interactive this time around. In the school, for example, you'll find a streetlight you can actually topple over if you ram it from the right angle. Then, once it has fallen, you can

grind along it and hop to another rail for big combos points. In another level, you can knock over a basketball net if you grind its backboard. The fallen post explodes into cash icons. You won't be able to complete some level objectives unless you find these scattered interactive obstacles. "What we want to do this time is constantly have the player find new things they might not have seen before," Rausch said. "Levels will be full of these things—as much as we can cram in. Our only limitation is memory."

Speaking of which, Neversoft has devised a more efficient way of storing animations. That means the team can cram dozens of new tricks into the sequel. "A lot of the special moves from the last game reappear as just regular moves," Pease says, "and we have a lot of new special moves on top of that. Each skater's moves will be more differentiated, too." THPS2 packs new grinds, including Hurricanes, Salad grinds and frontside and backside Bluntslides. And while the original THPS only had one handplant, the sequel will have many. New

opened the wrapper. And one time I got into Super Mario by accident. My wife rented it, and I couldn't return it for nine days until I beat it. And when I beat it I said I don't want to play this ever again. Get it away from me. But with Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, you can pick it up and play for 10 minutes then leave. Although usually it doesn't work that way. Usually it's an hour at least.

TH: I would love to play a game like Final Fantasy, but I know that I couldn't even start. It would take too long. It's the same thing with learning HTML. I always wanted to learn it, but I know as soon as I started, I wouldn't want to stop, so I just let other people do it because they put in the time.

**EGM:** Tony, what's your status now? Didn't you just retire from skating?

TH: I'm just not competing, so I'm just doing lots of exhibitions and tours, like at the X-Games I'll be doing commentary, so I'll still be there. A lot of the pro skaters, some of the big names, Jamie included, don't really compete, so you don't really have to compete to be considered one of the top pros. You just gotta perform, you know, get coverage, video footage, magazines, that's what the skater kids care about. There's a whole other culture of people who watch it on TV, but generally those aren't the people who are really hardcore into it, who are buying the skateboards and watching the videos.

**EGM:** How many goos have you pulled since your first?

A: I don't know, like four or five.

**EGM:** Do you get tired of people asking what your next big thing is?

TH: Yeah, people think the 1080's next, but I got no desire to kill myself with 1080s.

**EGM:** Describe a typical day for a pro skater?

JT: Depends on what kind of pro skater you are. I know I do a lot more of the business stuff, so a typical day for me is almost like a typical day for some business guy but in a skateboard line of work. I go to my companies and make sure all the team stuff is worked out, make sure all the graphics are done for the next catalog, whatever. A regular pro street skater, though, his typical day is just play video games and ride his skateboard, and if he wants to go shoot a photo or film something, that's up to him. It's basically play.



# Tony Hawk Revisited

The Original Version Returns on a Console Near You

If you haven't played the original Tony Hawk's Pro Skater because you lack a PlayStation, you're running out of excuses—fast. The near-perfect N64 port should be hitting stores as you read this, and a Dreamcast version, due in May, is in the works from Crave, who licensed the game from Activision. Heck, even a Game Boy Color Pro Skater is on the way.

But let's be honest: It's the Dreamcast version, the prettiest incarnation of the bunch, that you really wanna know about. Developed for Crave by Treyarch (who's also creating the DC action-RPG *Draconus*), Tony Hawk's Pro Skater on the Dreamcast "is basically the same as the PlayStation game, except the look is highly enhanced," Gregory John, the game's producer at Treyarch, told us. "Certainly we didn't want to change the feel, because the original PlayStation game was fantastic."

So expect heavy déjà vu if you've already torn through the PS version. The DC game packs identical courses, the same 10 pro skaters and all the original tunes and multiplayer modes. The original's perfect control translates just fine to the DC pad (Treyarch even found a workable solution to the DC controller's shortage of shoulder buttons).

And the visual enhancement is easy enough to spot. Treyarch has bumped up the skaters' polygon counts considerably. Characters in the PS game were built from roughly 500 polys; in the DC version, they each consist of more than 1,600. In other words, Tony Hawk's in-game incarnation has genuine ears and a nose now.

The skateboard decks look more substantial, too. Peer closely and you can see their wheel and truck assemblies in astonishing detail (the boards themselves are built from roughly 200 polygons). The team boosted poly counts on curved surfaces such as half pipes and pools, making them appear more rounded and realistic. Treyarch also doubled the draw distance and repainted all the levels with higher-res textures. They're even adding new fall-down and victory animations. But here's the best bit of news: The game plays at a steady 30 frames per second.

The Dreamcast version also uses the VMU. Watch its tiny screen and you'll see the name of your last trick combo and how many points it got you. It's a handy little feature, since



trick scores tend to disappear from the main game screen quickly.

Speaking of tiny screens, the Game Boy Color incarnation of THPS should hit stores in March. Developed by Natsume, this on-the-go version offers two play styles: a top-down street skating mode and a side-view vert ramp. Rest assured, Pro Skater on the Game Boy still packs the 10 pro skaters, the videotape-gathering goals and all the tricks of its console big brothers. Just expect gameplay that's highly reminiscent of the old-school skate gem 720°.



PlayStation version



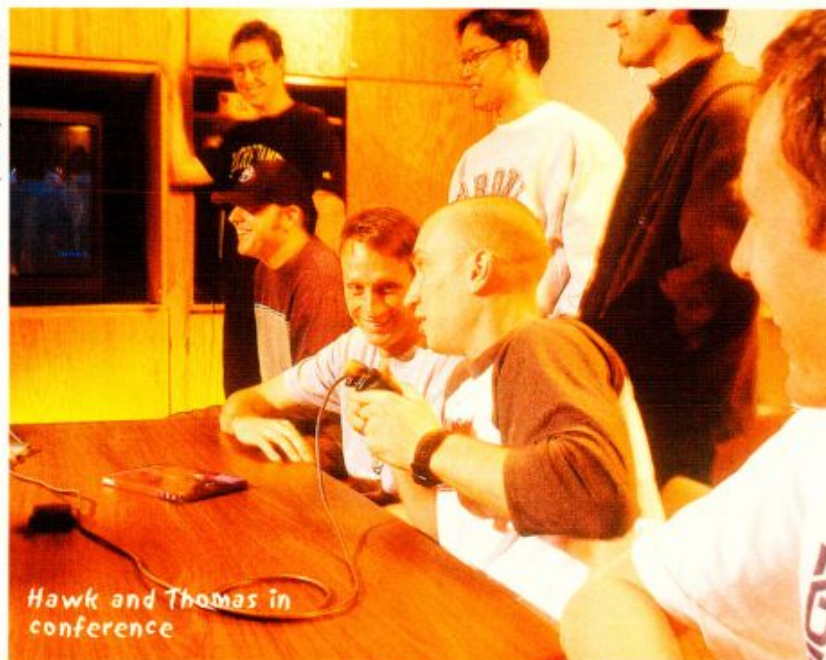
Dreamcast version







photo by Voldi Tanner



Hawk and Thomas in conference

grabs abound, including the Airwalk, Crossbone, Indy Stiffy, Judo Air.

We just don't have enough room to list all the new kicktricks and gabs—from Varials to Shove Its—in this magazine. Neversoft has already implemented more than 30 new moves, and they'll cram in more over the next few months. Even tricks that aren't quite as popular with today's elite pros will make it into the game. "We're finding a lot of the older crowd in our audience," Rausch says, "and they're looking for the old-school skate stuff, so we're making everybody happy this time." The team has even addressed fans' minor gripes with the trick-naming conventions in the first game. A few moves in the original THPS—when you put a certain spin on them with the shoulder buttons—didn't register the correct trick name on screen. And a few grinds popped up with misnomers, too, raising the ire of hardcore skaters. All these minor problems have been fixed in the sequel.

Neversoft knows the original game's

control system worked just fine. After all, it was this easy-to-learn, tough-to-master joystick setup that made THPS so addicting. So the team isn't about to mess with the sequel's control scheme. Instead, they're adding a few elements to it. Players can now perform a Manual by tapping up then down on the control pad. This move pops your front wheel in the air (or rear wheel, if you do a reverse Manual), and it's up to you to balance your skater with fine up and down movements of the pad. While in mid-Manual, you can pull off as many tricks as you like, as long as you keep your balance. Every trick you perform adds to your total combined points until you end the Manual or fall. "Now with Manuals you can link two elements that are halfway across the park if you can keep your balance going the whole way," Pease says. "It totally opens up a whole different way to play. You don't have to look for rails to keep your combo going."

Grabs come in two stages now, too. You can bust out of them quickly and miss out

You wake up at noon, and then on weekends—since street skaters can't skate at that many places on weekdays—you try to hook up with a couple of other guys and maybe a photographer, and then you try to shoot a photo of something. If the photo doesn't go good, then you just have fun skating at a spot, you just horse around with your friends and do that. And then at night, depending on your lifestyle, you either go to a movie or to a party or whatever.

TH: A lot of the guys I skate with are vert skaters, so they're not really restricted to skating on weekends or in schoolyards. They're waking up earlier and skating at skateparks for a good part of the day. It's kinda like training but obviously they're doing it because they love it. Now my typical day starts with me waking up early with the kids, getting them off to school, doing a lot of work, like e-mail and phone calls, through the day and probably going to skate and shooting photos or doing interviews, then picking up the kids and trying my best to be around them.

EGM: How much have you guys spent on medical bills?

JT: Minimal compared to how much you make. Not to jinx either one of us, but if you work up to things, you don't get hurt as often.

TH: The whole perception about skating is that you just kind of fling yourself into tricks without thinking about the consequences, but that's not true. Everything we do is totally calculated. We practice this stuff forever. I mean, if you're gonna try to jump some big gap, you've been practicing other things similar to it to get up to that.

JT: Street skating's a little bit different than that. You really can't work up to something, or you have to work up to it in a different place. Say there's a 20-stair rail in front of you you want to grind. You have to go practice on a 10-stair, 15-stair and if there's not one on the premises, you're out of luck. You have to just do it. You can't just slide half of it and knee slide out. You either do it or don't.

TH: But there is a level of confidence that you reach, that you know you can do a trick, through so much practice. People think anyone can just grab a skateboard and try to go down a rail, and if they make it, they're a hero, but that's not really how it is.

JT: But then that brings in injury. For



## The Caballerial

1. Head toward the ramp wall in a fakie position and start to twist the top half of your body as you ride up the transition.
2. Pop off as if you're doing a fakie ollie when your back wheels hit the top of the ramp.
3. Pull both knees to your body while spinning 360 degrees.
4. Pick out your landing point while you're closing out the last half of your rotation. Guide the board around to that point.
5. Straighten your legs and push the board down onto the ramp right as you land.
6. Touchdown! Center your weight over the board as you roll out so you don't bail.

new skateboarders, the chances of injury go up because they try to do what's in the skate videos before they're ready for that. The guys in the videos have been building up for 12 years. These guys who've only been skating a year try to skate like guys who've been skating 12 years. You can't skip the levels, bottom line. You got to learn to crawl before you can walk.

TH: The learning curve is a lot faster these days.

EGM: Why's that?

TH: Because kids have seen what is possible, and if you know what is possible, it's a lot easier to reach it, whereas when you're out there trying to innovate these things, you don't really know if it's possible, so there's this attitude that's scary.

JT: The message that gets put across from skate videos is this really is possible and everybody's doing it, and kids don't know this is really hard. They grow up accustomed to the fact that high-end tricks are the standard, but when we started skateboarding, the standard was a small trick of any sort.

TH: My son's 7 years old. He learned kickflips. I mean, kickflips hadn't even been invented until I'd been skating four years, and so for me to learn a kickflip took forever, because I'd already been focused on a certain style and how I thought skating was. He thinks it's just a normal average trick.

EGM: So what do you think tricks will be like, say, 20 years from now?

JT: Oh, 20 years, I don't even know. With technology and stuff...you see those future movies where every-




on full points, or you can hold your grab, tweak it a bit and earn the full score. The developers are also making it easier to switch your stance on the fly, and you'll notice a genuine difference between ollie and nollie tricks. At the same time, the game's animators are adding more bail and mishap animations. Foul up a grind and your skater will kerplunk, legs akimbo, onto the rail, taking a nasty pound to the family jewels. Character models will gradually suffer visible damage if they bounce too many times against the concrete. The art team is avoiding motion capture this time and animating all the new tricks by hand. "Our animator, Noel Hines, has just got everything freakin' nailed," Jewett says. "He's just in tune with the tricks. The guy can barely go 10 feet on a skateboard, but he can stand on the carpet and ollie waste high. It's from fully understanding the mechanics of how it all works."

On top of all the new tricks, real locations and customization options, Neversoft has dumped lots of gravy. They spruced up the graphics engine with improved real-time



lighting effects on the skaters. The sound designer actually mounted a microphone on the bottom of a skateboard to record better effects. You'll get more music, between 15 and 20 tracks, and the tunes will be more diverse (everything from metal to hip-hop). The developers are even trying to build in a feature that lets you pop in your own CD. All the original multiplayer modes return, along with a new competition mode that lets up to eight people and their custom characters hash it out in a full-on skate tournament.

THPS2's long list of features is about to undergo serious scrutiny, thanks to all the competing titles like EA's Street Sk8er 2 and Sony's Grind Session, which are riding the wave of skate-game popularity created by the original THPS. But Neversoft prez Jewett isn't worried. He figures THPS2, just like the first game, will have everyone else playing catch-up. "You saw today, those guys Tony, Jamie and Chad came in and helped us out, we've got a design team that's just kick ass, and we have a head start on everybody," Jewett tells us. "So to the competition I say, 'See ya, wouldn't want to be ya.'" 



# Park It!

## Play Skateboard God with the New Level Editor

The development team calls it Pro Skater 2's "Big Enchilada," and it's the one feature that fans of the original game wanted most in this sequel. But could the new game's amazingly in-depth but easy-to-use skate-park editor also be—gasp!—the first-ever example of ultra-fun edutainment? "It's like a whole new experience because you can really learn how to design good gameplay at your house," Neversoft president Joel Jewett said. "It's like we're educating the masses. I'll start taking résumés next year."

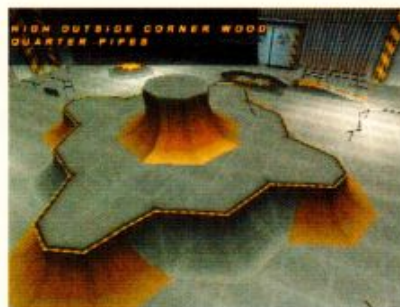
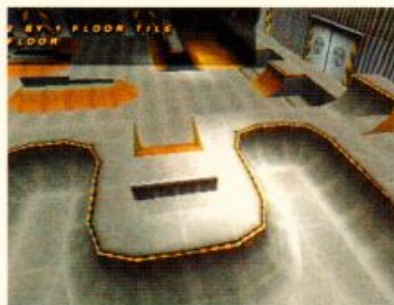
Educational value aside, THPS2's skate-park editor is so comprehensive that, for instance, you can build an exact replica of the first game's warehouse level in a matter of minutes. Unlike the 2D top-down level creator in Street Sk8er 2, this editor runs in 3D, letting you see your level in all its real-time glory as you build it. You can choose from hundreds of different skate-park parts, including dozens of different rails, quarter pipes, benches, ramps, obstacles and surfaces. You just select your part, rotate it into position, then drop it onto the floor.

You can also build up to five levels of risers, then place rails or other obstacles on top of those, thus lifting your park to vertigo-inducing altitudes as high as 40 feet. You'll also be able to choose several park sizes, from the smaller competition-style arenas to more sprawling city-size arenas. Finally, you can switch between different theme settings. Pick "Goth," for instance, and watch every obstacle and wall in the level take on an appropriately gloomy look.

Testing your custom-built course is easy; at any time during construction, you can drop

your skater into the level and give it a test run. When you're finally satisfied with your masterpiece, save it to the memory card (each custom park only takes one block), then access it in Free Skate or the multiplayer modes. Neversoft fully expects an Internet culture to build around this game, since fans will no doubt post their custom parks on the Web. The developers even plan to house a repository of homemade levels at [www.neversoft.com](http://www.neversoft.com).

To get your creative juices flowing, Neversoft will include at least 10 pre-made custom levels with the final game. They may include a lot more than that (as many as 100, in fact!) since the parks take up very little space on the CD. Tinker around with the pre-made tracks. Get the hang of the editor. Then cut your imagination loose. Whether you're a street skater or prefer big air, the editor gives you more than enough options to build your dream course. "We had a focus tester in here the other day," Producer Scott Pease said, "and all he did was lay down rails. It ended up looking like a line at Disney World."



body's floating about. It seems like that's possible. Who knows what's in store.

TH: Right now, though, in the immediate future, if you want to do something new, it's pretty much guaranteed that there's a much higher danger level than in the past. If you want to be noticed, if you want to outdo someone, it's gotta be something big.

EGM: What's your advice then to new skaters who eventually want to build to your level?

TH: Just learn the basics.

EGM: Can you do that on a K-Mart skating board?

JT: Yeah, you can learn the basics. You can learn to ollie. But on a K-Mart board, all you're learning is control and being able to push. Once you get into any kind of tricks at all you need a better board. Otherwise, it's gonna be too heavy, it's gonna slow you down, everything's gonna be bananas, wacky, whatever. But learning all the basics is most important. The basics used to be an ollie and knowing how to jump on your board. Now basics is a kickflip, a 360 flip, so kids learn how to kickflip and 360 flip before they learn how to really ollie—

TH: Before they learn the type of balance they need to do other stuff that's gonna help them be more rounded. There's kids who can do a 360 but they can't go up and over a small ramp.