

SLALOM QUEEN LYNN KRAMER

BY GARY FLUITT | PHOTOS: MARIA CARRASCO



Kramer making the podium, US Nationals Breckenridge 2005

Lynn Kramer, a mechanical engineer from San Diego, started showing up at slalom races in 2002 during the Fat City Racing era, and quickly became the fastest woman racer in the U.S. Within two seasons Lynn was winning every major race that had a womens division. She went to Europe to find more women to race. Eventually Lynn had to race in the Mens division to find serious competition in the US. In 2005 she bruised egos in the Mens Open division at the U.S. Nationals and made the Amateur podium and did the same at Hood River. She finished the 2005 season with another Women's World Championship title. Lynn is not just a taker. In her limited amount of spare time she puts on races, teaches clinics on skating, makes skateboards, and makes friends. On top of all that she competes in snowboard races. At 37 she is an American icon in skateboard racing.

CW: You've sort of become "one of the guys" at the U.S. Races. How does that make you feel?

Kramer: I've always felt like "one of the guys," starting as a kid in Little League. I don't see men and women. I see people. When the guys see me as "one of the guys," it is honorable because they have seen past my physique. I'm just a skater in a woman's body.

CW: I know a few guys that would prefer not to race you, for fear of being beat by a girl. What do you want to tell them?

Kramer: It is the guys that have a problem with competitive women that are contributing to the problem of not having a large Women's division. They are cutting their own throat. If you encourage your daughters to try their best, and to not be afraid of skinned knees, then they will excel. This applies to everything, not just skating.

CW: Sounds like your parents were pretty encouraging. What was your upbringing like?

Kramer: I have four older sisters. I always wanted a brother. My best friends growing up were two boys on my block. We used to ride our bikes down giant hills, and we used to slide down this big hill by my house on cardboard boxes. I got this great idea that if we used a plastic round snow-sled, I could go faster. It worked. I got carried off the hill that day.

I wasn't allowed to skateboard or ride motorcycles cause my dad's an orthopedist. I don't have to explain that to all you skaters, cause you've all got one. I saw skateboarding in the early 80's and thought it was so cool. That was right when Dogtown came out with their 10" board. It was way cooler than the skinny Alva. My friend got a new Dogtown board and went to Skatercross in Reseda, but I wasn't allowed to go.

When I got to college, I busted out of my shell. It took about 2 days to find Punk Rock and Skateboarding. UCSD was a street mecca. Slam pits every weekend.

CW: So the UCSD environment was the catalyst you needed?

Kramer: Yeah it was like an explosion. I finally found a way to release all my pent up energy and aggression. I met many skaters at UCSD, DJs, musicians, punks, and all around cool people who were motivated to learn. Prior to that, I had resented my natural ability to learn quickly because it wasn't cool to be smart in my High School.

CW: What interested you about racing skateboards, why did you get into that?

Kramer: Adrenaline got me into it, and I like the people. It's the people that make the races fun. Slalom racers tend to be tech heads, and this attracts me. I also like the quick thinking and agility used, and of course, I love to feel the adrenaline rush and the wind in my face.

CW: You've been at this now for four or five years, you've won every major U.S. race you've entered lately, and now you have to race Men to make it competitive. Seems like you've accomplished plenty, so what keeps you in this?

Kramer: My friends all race. I have developed a group of friends who all skate together. We have fun. I have yet to race competitively at the Men's Pro level. I've been entering and qualifying "A" in Pro-Am races, and am going to try to keep progressing. There are a core group of guys who I have been progressing with like JJ Corning, Joe and Kyle McLaren, and Josh and Ricky Byrd. So why stop now?

CW: In 2004 you, Tiger and Dave Hamm resurrected the La Costa race. What was that like putting on a major race, and competing in it too?

Kramer: Putting on that race was a lot of work. There are so many details. I'm lucky to work for myself and have the free time to do that legwork. There were so many volunteers, especially Debbie Gordon. She made the race run smoothly. They made it possible for me to race that day. It wasn't until the middle of warm-ups that I took a breath, looked up, and saw hundreds of people, banners, and tents, and knew we did something cool. Tiger and I are planning the La Costa Open for this September 15-17 in a new location. We have expanded it to three days so that everybody can race head to head. We like the idea of the C division. It gives newcomers the competitive feeling. We don't want anybody to pay \$75-100 to take two runs down the hill and go home.

CW: You've been going to Europe now for a couple of years to race the Euro ladies. How is it different racing over there?

Kramer: My biggest competitors in Europe are the Swiss. They have very regimented training over there, specifically for the event, where over here, we tend to skate parks and more varied terrain. The Women in Europe race on



a different course than the Pro Men. They race the same course as the Amateur Men. This is good and bad. It's good for the less skilled women. It gives them a chance to come out and race, and make the course. It's bad for advancing the top womens racing skills. It's also bad for me, because I train on hard courses that emphasize quickness, offsets, and controlling speed. The courses over there are all about pumping. Cyber slalom on a slope.

CW: So what's the perfect course for you.

Kramer: A course should be hard to run clean. It should have a fast rhythm, although, not necessarily consistent. I don't like waiting for the next cone to come up.

CW: Who has inspired your racing, technique, and style?

Kramer: Richy Carrasco and JJ Corning have had the most direct influence on me. All the La Costa Boys have been motivating, and have always been behind me 100%. The first day I came out to skate with them, Hester told me I would be in the top 3 women. I didn't believe him, but it gave me something to work toward. My boyfriend Erik has been very supportive. He built the timer we've been using for the last 2 years.

CW: Have you had many set backs?

Kramer: Not in slalom. I've been mostly injury free since 2001. I used to skate vert and mini-ramp competitively, and had alot of debilitating injuries. It starts to wear you down after 5 knee surgeries, and multiple broken bones in the same year.

CW: You're a professional, in engineering, a traditionally male dominated field, and you race skateboards with boys. Is there a pattern here?

Kramer: The guys stole all the fun stuff!

CW: What are you interested in that would surprise us?

Kramer: Yoga and gardening. What surprised you?

CW: Gardening?

Kramer: I like dirt.

CW: What is the Womens Skateboard Network?

Kramer: The Network started in 1988. It started as a few girls who went to Del Mar Skatepark together. I got into it, and developed

the roster to 250 girls in 8 countries. We communicated by way of a 'zine called Equal Time. Some of the girls I met in the Network still skate. Cara Beth Burnside, Patty Segovia, Canadian Joyce Weldrake, JoAnn Gillespie, and Stacey Roper in New Zealand. My boyfriend and I would travel around the country skating and interviewing women and putting their pictures in the 'zine. It was very stoking. Patty and Cara Beth have taken Women's Skateboarding to the next level by running the All Girl Skate Jam and the Action Sports Alliance.

CW: What do you see for Women's skateboarding in the future? Will it take off like women's surfing?

Kramer: Women's vert and street are already on their way. With womens divisions in the X games, people have seen that girls can skate. As more and more women make their way into the executive offices of sports media, they'll create greater exposure and prize money for these rippers. Slalom will follow, as it did for the men.

CW: Are you still involved?

Kramer: I skate at the local All Girl Skate Jams. I help out Patty when I can, but I'm more involved in Slalom now, and they are just starting to catch on. Maybe in the near future there will be a large push for womens slalom. I tend to be ahead of everybody else, cause I usually don't pay attention to what other people are doing.

CW: What advice do you have for any aspiring downhill divas out there?

Kramer: Wear pads and learn to use them. Then falling won't be an issue. Come out to the races, even to watch, because once you catch the stoke, there's no turning back. **CW**

