

TERRY KIDWELL (Tahoma, Calif.)

Tahoe rider Terry Kidwell changed the trajectory of snowboarding. Known as “The Father of Freestyle,” his innovative vision in the ‘70s and ‘80s laid the groundwork of modern snowboarding. Kidwell pioneered the early evolution of the sport, creating early elements of freestyle competition, enabling him to dominate as a four-time halfpipe and three-time overall world champion. His passion led to ultimately defining the terrain, the equipment, and the style that still characterizes the sport today.

Growing up in Tahoe City, Calif., on the north shore of the lake, he first gravitated to the fledgling new sport of snowboarding in 1977 when he rode friend Allen Arnbrister’s adapted-to-snow waterski. The board really didn’t turn, but it could go straight. As skateboarders at heart, they built a jump as a solution. That simple innovation would become the blueprint for Kidwell’s career.

Kidwell and his friends quickly graduated to Winterstick boards. With limited access to lifts, they scouted their surroundings for challenging terrain, crafting a halfpipe at the local Tahoe City trash dump. A visit by future Hall of Famer Tom Sims helped convince them they were on the right track, using the free-spirited creativity of skateboarding for the future of snowboarding.

As snowboarding equipment continued to advance in the early ‘80s, along with the acceptance of snowboarding at lift-served resorts, Kidwell and his Tahoe City Halfpipe crew followed suit. Hand-dug halfpipes were added to more traditional ski-style timed race disciplines. As the sport headed into pipes, Kidwell’s natural athletic talent and creative style made him an early force that was tough to beat – winning literally every event he entered over a period of time.

Kidwell gained worldwide attention as the sport progressed. He was one of the first snowboarders featured by Warren Miller in 1984. An ‘80s Tom Sims film session of Kidwell flying off Soda Springs’ Wine Rock is considered the most published photo in snowboarding history.

But a limiting factor for Kidwell was that up to that point, the snowboards of the day were designed for powder turns or racing. He was looking for something more akin to skateboarding on snow for the tricks he sought to achieve.

Kidwell and Sims joined forces to create the first snowboard designed to function equally well ridden in either direction, opening up an entirely new world of skate-inspired riding. Their prototype featured an upturned tail for riding fakie, setting a wider stance and using a binding featured a newly-integrated highback. It became the world’s first signature model freestyle snowboard, the Terry Kidwell Roundtail 1550FE Pro, released in 1985. Its design remains state of the art decades later, with Sims reissuing the board in 2014.

From that point forward, Kidwell’s influence was absolute. He became a focal point for media. His engagement in films like Sims’ *This is Snowboarding* in 1987, along with future Hall of Famers Craig Kelly and Shaun Palmer, opened minds.

His legendary session at the Donner Quarterpipe included the first documented McTwists, handplants and other skate-driven tricks like Kidwell's still-revered method air. The footage was changing the world of the new sport with everyone wanting to be like Kidwell.

Kidwell helped usher snowboarding into the national consciousness in 1987 as a star of a Wrigley Juicy Fruit gum commercial airing on primetime network television. His Andrecht handplant blew minds and the closing shot of his signature method air added the punctuation. It foreshadowed the disruptive success that snowboarding would later bring through the X Games and Olympics.

Long before the X Games, Kidwell dominated the competition scene, winning the halfpipe World Championships four times in a row from 1984-87. He was second to Sims in the inaugural Mount Baker Banked Slalom in 1985 and won the 1985 Sierra Snowboarding Championships. At the 1986 World Snowboard Classic in Breckenridge, Colo., he won halfpipe, giant slalom and slalom. In 1987 he took overall, slalom and moguls (yes, moguls) at the North American Championships in Sunshine Village, B.C. He also won the halfpipe as it made its U.S. Open debut in 1988.

Throughout the late 80s and early 90s Kidwell continued his career with further-evolved pro models from Sims, Apocalypse, and HazMat. He expanded his influence, leading to receiving the TransWorld Snowboarding Lifetime Achievement Award. It was the highest honor in snowboarding, bestowed upon him by his peers and pro riders in the industry.