

CHAIRMAN OF THE

BOUNCE

TONY HAWK'S wild ride into business

by **Arden Moore**
Photos by **Chris Barr**

AS A HYPERACTIVE CHILD

growing up in San Diego, Calif., Tony Hawk reveled in being unconventional, pushing his physical limits, and sometimes the patience of his parents and teachers. He was equally tough on himself, too. From an early age, he hated to fail and demanded nothing but the best from himself.

When he was 6, he decided to swim the length of an Olympic-sized pool without taking a breath—"and then he was so frustrated when he didn't do it," his mother, Nancy, remembers. After striking out in a Little League game, young Tony became so distraught that he hid in a ravine and had to be coaxed out by his father. A school psychologist explained to Tony's parents that the youngest of their four children was no ordinary kid. "You have a gifted child who struggles because he has the mind of a 12-year-old trapped inside an 8-year-old's body," the psychologist told them.

Things started to sync the day his older brother, Steve, handed 9-year-old Tony a blue fiberglass banana skateboard. Tony quickly abandoned his baseball bat and discovered he was destined for more than maintaining his balance or picking up speed and making turns on this low-riding board on wheels. He tapped his unconventional, push-it-to-the-limits nature to create skateboard tricks and stunts no one had ever done.

Skateboarding proved to be the perfect confidence builder for Tony. His personality improved as he continued working on getting better and better at skateboarding. He stopped fretting and mentally beating himself up. He smiled more, became more likeable and more generous.

Then he embarked on a one-boy mission: to be the best skateboarder on the planet.

Timing, talent and pure passion soared Hawk to the top of the skateboard world. He turned pro by 14 and bought his first home before he earned his high school diploma. By 16, Tony was considered the best competition skateboarder in the world. In the next 17 years, Hawk won 73 out of 103 pro contests and placed second in 19. He achieved his childhood quest: to be the best in this once-considered maverick sport.

He also obtained skateboarding immortality by being the first to master the impossible: the 900 (2½ revolutions) inside a half-pipe. After working on it for years, even cracking a rib in the effort, he did it live before a televised audience at the 1999 X Games.

The Fall of the Hawk

But when he was in his 20s, the skateboarding world unexpectedly collapsed. Public interest waned. The late 1980s and early 1990s marked the birth of sports marketing, and blue chip companies focused on making household names out of professional athletes from traditional sports like baseball and football, rather than pouring dollars into a grassroots sport of "renegades"—like skateboarding.

For Tony Hawk, the glory days of buying homes, traveling the world and spending like a lottery winner vanished. Unprepared for this financial free-fall, Hawk scrambled to pay bills by refinancing his homes and placing himself on a \$5-a-day meal allowance.

Even at this low point, he saw an opportunity to start a skate company. He knew it was a risky move, but skating had gone through ups and downs before. "I felt like if I could start a company when skating was at one of its deadest states," he says, "then if it takes off again, we've set ourselves up in a position of prominence, and we'd just ride that wave. For someone to come in once the sport takes off, it's just going to take way too much

capital and way too much marketing money to get in a position to be recognized."

Much like the mythical phoenix, this Hawk stayed in the sport and reinvented himself—and helped make skateboarding more popular than ever. "I focused all my energy on it because I loved it so much and I felt like, you know, I want to make this happen," he says. Hawk sharpened his focus and reclaimed his decision-making authority. He started scrutinizing the true intentions of people pitching him opportunities.

"Early in my skating career, I made mistakes because I was less methodical and tended to grab deals as they came," Hawk says.

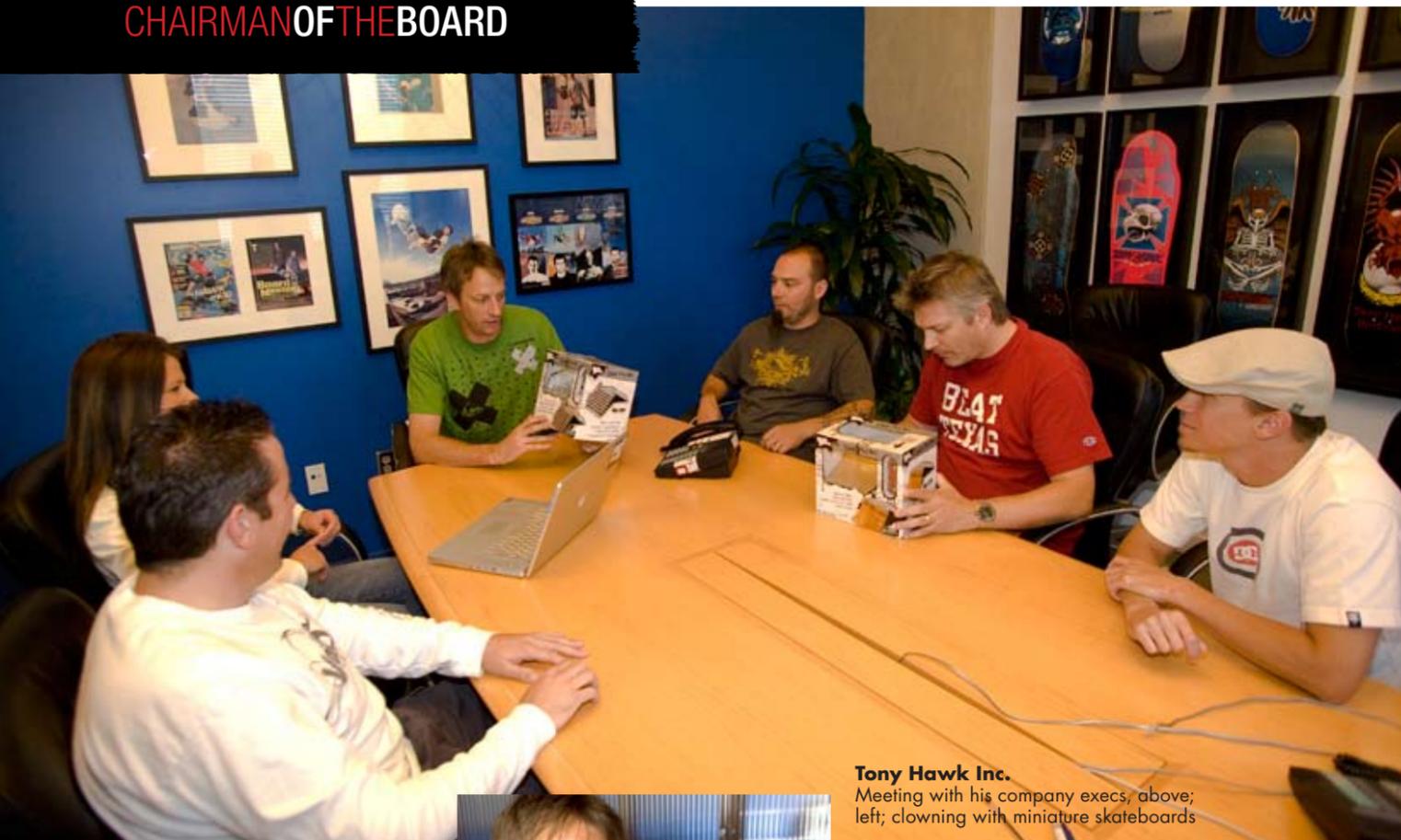
"I learned the hard way not to hand everyone the keys to all your opportunities. I gave them the power to have the final say in projects and deals, and it cost me."

He realized he needed to grow as a brand and not be limited to just being a guy who does amazing stunts on a skateboard. Much like a master chess player, Hawk strategically plotted his comeback. He mentally sized up those pitching him opportunities. He began aligning himself with those who shared his work ethic and his passion for this sport. "If you get involved with someone who clearly does not share your same passion, then you risk ruining your chances and opportunities," he says.

(Continued on page 39)

"Ride through the good times, ride through the bad times, see bumps in the road as a challenge and embrace the challenge."





Tony Hawk Inc.
Meeting with his company execs, above;
left; clowning with miniature skateboards



Flying High Hawk's Tips

On fame: "The idea of being famous for being famous is ridiculous. You have to have something to offer."

On coping with fame: "It is important to stay grounded. In this day and age, some people get a taste of success and blow it out of proportion. They get inflated self-images—a train wreck just waiting to happen."

On staying successful: "These days, I'm more about spotting voids in business and figuring out how to fill those voids and to reach more people."

On passion and persistence: "Your heart has to be into it. It has to be something that you genuinely love to do or that genuinely interests you, because [otherwise] if you go through any sort of shaky times, you're just going to throw it away. And maybe you need to hold onto it through those shaky times to propel yourself even further. . . . I think that the best thing you can do is to ride through the good times, ride through the bad times, see bumps in the road as a challenge and to embrace the challenge."

On spotting talent: "My wife Lhotse and I met a chef at a Marriott. This guy, Carl Schroeder, is the best. I told him to call me when

he was ready to break out on his own. Six months later, he came to me with a business plan and some investors. He is now the head chef at the Market Del Mar. I am happy to invest in him. Years ago, I started an exclusive clothing line, but it was limited to surfing and skate shops. Now, I mass-market bikes and skateboards that are affordable, but offer upgraded bearing decks more true to professional models."

On growing personally and professionally: "If I had any advice on how to reinvent yourself, it is to not get stuck in a rut. Just because you made a good product doesn't mean it will last. You need to see change coming down the road and prepare for it."

On the power of teens: "Kids are so savvy now, so much more technologically advanced. You can't feed them a line and expect them to buy it. They know when you're being authentic."

On managing time: "Never allow open-ended conversations. Keep your comments to the specific topic. Otherwise, you risk being there longer than you want to as the person starts a new subject."

On being a father: "Being emotionally supportive to my children is most important. It is not just the time together, but the way we spend that time."

On pursuing a skateboarder career: "Only do it because you truly enjoy it, and do not underestimate the power of an education—even if you make it to the pro ranks. Always continue to challenge yourself, mentally and physically."

"KIDS ARE SAVVY... YOU CAN'T FEED THEM A LINE AND EXPECT THEM TO BUY IT."

(Continued from page 37)

Most important, he recognized he was the face of this fast-growing sport. He used this power base to broker deals that gave him the ultimate say. It was a risk, but in true Tony Hawk style, a calculated risk.

Back on Top

At 40, with flecks of gray in his sandy brown hair, Hawk is hailed as the father of skateboarding, still dominant in a youth-oriented marketplace. But he is much more. He is a savvy visionary directing a wide range of ventures, a let's-get-it-done-right head of a charitable foundation designing quality skateboard parks and, most of all, a devoted dad to three sons and a newborn daughter.

Since taking over the wheel of his life, Hawk has achieved success inside the half-pipe and beyond. His series of Tony Hawk PlayStation games have sold more than 40 million copies. His autobiography, *HAWK: Occupation: Skateboarder*, landed 13th on the *New York Times* Best-Seller List. His name is stitched on a line of clothing and he offers a video arsenal of trick tip DVDs. And, yes, he even has a roller-coaster ride named in his honor: Tony Hawk's Big Spin at amusement parks in St. Louis and San Antonio. His name merits not one, but three Wikipedia entries.

Did we mention he dueled Rosie O'Donnell in the premier show of *Million Dollar Password* earlier this year—or that he raised \$175,000 for his Tony Hawk Foundation on *Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?* quiz show?

"OK, so I wasn't smarter than a fifth-grader and won a million dollars, but I knew when to stop and collect the prize money for the foundation," he says. "Knowing your limits is a good thing."

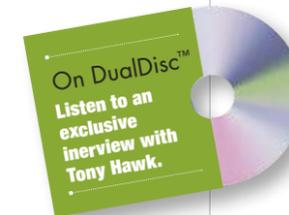
Not bad for a 40-year-old guy who still can't get enough of skateboarding. He maintains his childlike wonder and spunk and willingness to take on any challenge. Even if it means donning a designer

Hawk's Ascent

- **1968:** Born May 12 in San Diego, the youngest of four, to parents Frank and Nancy Hawk.
- **Age 9:** Older brother Steve gave Tony a blue fiberglass banana board as an outlet for Tony's hyper behavior.
- **Age 12:** Sponsored by Dogtown Skateboards.
- **Age 14:** Turned pro in skateboarding.
- **Age 16:** Ranked the No. 1 skateboarder in the world.
- **Age 17:** Bought his first home in Del Mar, Calif., and a second one in Fallbrook two years later.
- **1991:** The popularity of skateboarding takes a nosedive.
- **1992:** Refinanced his home to start a skateboard company called Birdhouse Projects.
- **1996:** Skateboard interest begins to grow again.
- **1998:** Creates a children's clothing company called Hawk Clothing.
- **1999:** Teams up with Activision to create Tony Hawk's Pro Skater video game for PlayStation, the first of many popular video games. Starts a TV production company called 900 Films.
- **1999:** First skateboarder to master the 900 (2½ revolutions in a half-pipe) during the televised X Games.
- **2000:** Writes the *New York Times* Best-Seller, *HAWK: Occupation: skateboarder*.
- **2002:** Starts the popular *Boom Boom HuckJam* tour across America.
- **2002:** Forms the Tony Hawk Foundation to create well-designed skateboard parks.
- **2007:** Six Flags Fiesta Texas unveils its newest roller coaster, Tony Hawk's Big Spin.
- **2008:** Partners with T-Mobile USA to introduce a limited-edition Tony Hawk Sidekick LX.



Tony
in the 7th grade





Half-Pipe Dreams
Hawk's corporate headquarters includes his own customized half-pipe.

gray suit and performing a few tricks inside the customized half-pipe at his corporate headquarters in Vista, Calif., during a recent photo shoot.

"Tony, Tony, can you look right at the camera when you get to the top of the rim?" pleaded the frantic photographer, perched precariously on scaffolding. "Not without knee pads," replied Hawk with a sly smile.

Seconds later, Hawk masters the move and shoots a grin directly into the camera without a single stutter step. Hawk delivers. As usual.

The Legend Continues

In competitive skateboarding, Hawk was the guy you feared—and admired. He wasn't satisfied to stick to a list of mastered tricks. He was so driven that he compiled a to-do list of seemingly impossible tricks to learn, and one by one he did. He won numerous titles, invented more than 80 tricks before skating for a cause. The deal in skateboarding is that if you create a new trick, you get the honor of naming it. Hawk's laundry list includes the McHawk, Madonna and Stalefish.

Now "retired" from competition, Hawk's fame continues to soar. He created the *Tony Hawk's Boom Boom HuckJam* series in 2002. Today, this annual tour spotlights top skateboarders and BMX and Freestyle MotoX riders performing tricks choreographed to music by top bands to bring awareness to these sports.

His Tony Hawk Foundation, a nonprofit group, has raised more than \$2 million in grants and assistance to create about 400 well-designed skateboard parks in urban and rural communities throughout the United States.

"I want skateboard parks to be available all over the country in big and little cities," he says. "I remember visiting one park opening in a wealthy suburb of Chicago where the city officials were congratulating themselves, but the kids using the park said it was terrible. The officials told the kids, 'Wait until Tony Hawk comes. He knows.' Well, after testing out the park, I told them the truth—it was awful. That's why we are committed to building quality parks."

He envisions a day when the skateboard parks outnumber Little League diamonds. "Skateboard parks are used twice as much as any baseball field or basketball court. Skateboarding is constant participation and fast paced," he says. "This is a fast-paced generation who knows what they want and they want instant gratification. They don't have the patience to tolerate baseball with its 'strike 1, shake it off, strike 2' when they can be on a skateboard or bike and—snap—enjoying the speed."

Hawk knows—and respects—his youthful audience. That's why he pushed to have some of his signature clothing, skateboards and bikes available at major retail discount stores at affordable prices—without sacrificing quality. After all, the stuff bears his name.

"Kids these days know when they're being force-fed and they know when it's bull.... You can't fool them. They know when



you are being insincere and when you're truly being authentic," he says.

Family Man

He also embraces his ever-evolving role as father to three sons—Riley, Spencer and Keegan—plus a newborn daughter, Kadence Clover, whom he and his wife Lhotse welcomed on June 30.

Hawk credits the support provided by his late father, Frank, and his mom, Nancy, for recognizing the importance of family. He wants to carry on the Hawk tradition of honoring promises made to children.

He shares the time when he was about 9 and his father promised him a specific skateboard. Together, they traveled from one surf shop to another until they found the brand at a shop 40 miles north of their home. "My dad made me a promise and I have always appreciated that he made that extra effort," Hawk says.

Tony knows how fortunate he was to grow up with a dad like Frank Hawk. And Frank Hawk knew his precocious youngest needed him. He willingly drove Tony to skateboarding contests up and down the California coast. He constructed countless skate ramps and stepped up to become founder of the California Amateur Skateboard League that served to boost the sport's popularity in the early 1980s.

Eldest son, Riley, 15, has forged a name for himself in skateboarding and has sponsors earned on his own merit—much to the pride of Tony. "At this point, I'm happy to be his chauffeur and do what it takes to facilitate what he's doing," Hawk says. "Being emotionally supportive to my children is most important to me. It's not just the time together, but the way we spend that time. Sometimes, I have to say no to a good project because I value my time with my family very much."

A new—and pleasant—challenge awaits Hawk: being a dad to a daughter for the first time. "With three sons, I know what they like and how to make them laugh. It's a bit scary and exciting to have a daughter," he reveals. "I'm actually looking forward to hosting a tea party with her. Hey, I like tea, so it shouldn't be hard, right?"

We're betting that Hawk will learn to master tea parties and more. **S**