

(Saturday, October 22, 2022, La Quinta, California)
Onsite at La Quinta's X Park Grand Opening

Standing among the legions who've erupted from La Quinta's woodwork — I can't help but don a warm, pleased grin. In the name of their enormous new skatepark, dubbed the best ever constructed by Tony Hawk himself — every conceivable flavor of human has come together in celebration. For the last eight years, this city of 41,000 has been toiling in collaboration with Action Park Alliance to manifest the ultimate pocket of communally accessible concrete — and they've obliterated anything remotely resembling competition in the entirety of the Coachella Valley. The thing is an absurd forty thousand square feet, not including the space inside the shop which doubles as an entrance — literally enough space for every person in the city to stand shoulder to shoulder within its bounds.

I arrived eleven minutes past the scheduled ribbon snipping ritual indispensable to grand openings like these, but it was as though the La Quinta city council — of which every member is presently in attendance, had factored it into their considerations, because I wound up infiltrating the premises in the nick of time. The sea of skateboarders pro and casual alike, BMX bikers, parents, and curious onlookers gently parted as I weaved my way to the heart of the day's introduction. With the vast swath of the city, from babies to the elderly, concentrated in the singular point whereupon their combined mirth was about to color the X Park's official consecration — I gained in ten minutes more appreciation for La Quinta than I'd managed to cultivate in the two years I've spent living here.

The mayor, Linda Evans, delivered the majority of the opening ceremony's shared speech — interspersed with appearances from the park's designer, Aaron Spohn of Spohn Ranch, and the mother of John Meadows, a young La Quinta High student who tragically passed on February 16th 2015 — in whose memory the park itself, and nearby graveyard for broken skateboards, are erected. Red Bull's speaker-laden [Armored Moon Vehicle](#) loomed imposingly behind the congregation, threatening (promising) to flood the X Park with the nicest of vibes shortly after the ceremonial ribbon was severed. Praise and thanks were laid at the feet of the project's heavy lifters, the skateboarders, and the city's denizens alike — and each member of the city council given a custom engraved deck in recognition of their orchestrating prowess. Pretty soon the mayor wielded her short-sword-sized set of scissors and cut the eager masses loose, the air filled with promises of giveaways, guests, and competition in the coming hours.

In attendance among the dense plethora of wheel-borne Californians is the El Gato Classic's eponymous Eddie 'El Gato' Elguera — the aforementioned event being held here in the next few weeks from November 11 –12, as well as New Balance's pro skate team, and representatives from the skateboarding company Enjoi. The theatrical atmosphere dissipated quickly as the sun traversed the sky, Red Bull's tunes the only indication of anything more than an extraordinarily lively afternoon at the skatepark being undergone — with the majority keen to lovingly raze the sea of obstacles, until around 1:30pm when the pump track race began; a face-off between as many who opted to participate, with a shiny pair of New Balances awaiting the winner. Something like thirty people swarmed the plateau serving as the three-way nexus of a massive, winding, interconnected stretch of concrete that snakes through the east side of the park. Every configuration of wheels — inline, BMX, and skateboard, tore off in relays of four to five, each rider vying for the prize.

It's overlooked if from your passing car a skatepark only strikes you as a cesspool of irresponsible masochists — but truly an event like this outdoes even the fiercest sports team rivalries in its capacity to genuinely bring people together. Not in small part because this place isn't predicated on having a

mutual enemy to band in retaliation against — the bonds formed here are the simplest, purest, kind; appreciation for the endeavor of flourishing in a shared space. It's the kind of thing that seldom sounds feasible, but the airborne, rail-grinding, gap-clearing, ankle-smashing phenomenon playing out in this low desert's newest gem is nothing short of the perfect alchemical concoction for reinforcing a community's substructure.

The spirit of skateboarding itself is what catalyzes it — a group of friends skating is a thing containing all the substance necessary to feed the human soul. Between the perpetually increasing complexity of expression involved in mastering new tricks, the camaraderie and competition of growing in parallel with peers, and the shared pain of sustaining failure and injury when a line goes sideways — it's military grade cohesion with none of the dark undertones; the only enemies being gravity and fatigue. The X Park is a huge microcosm of everything that makes a society go right, and an absolutely nourishing addition to La Quinta, and the Coachella Valley at large.

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