



'Joey Jett' Is Ready For Liftoff



PHOTOS BY KEVIN CLARK — THE WASHINGTON POST

Joey "Jett" Hornish looks down the six-foot ramp and doesn't seem the least bit hesitant as he tips his skateboard over the edge. Within seconds he's going about 25 miles an hour, spinning around on another ramp about 50 feet away and shooting back to the starting point.

He flies up and touches the ceiling before turning again and coming to a stop. Then he looks at his mother for her reaction.

Joey is 8 years old. He is one of the youngest skateboarding sensations in the world. He lives outside Baltimore with his parents and brother, Stephen, who is 10.

Joey practices four times a week at State of Confusion, a skate park in Baltimore where most of the other skaters are teenagers or older. Few are as good as Joey.

"The first time I saw him I just filmed the heck out of him," says Beau Barlow, 27, manager of the skate park. "He was obviously a little prodigy. Obviously."

Joey says the attention of others makes him feel "a little embarrassed, but good." He remembers at one competition he had just done a "540" — that's 1½ turns in the air, a big deal even for an older skater — when everyone started calling his number. "The people in the stands, they were all saying, 'Number Six! Number Six!'" Joey says.

No wonder people chant. It's hard to imagine having the skill, much less the guts, to go as fast, jump as high and do the complicated moves that Joey does.

Get a Move On

Some of the moves in skateboarding have silly-sounding names. Here are a few from Joey's bag of tricks.

Ollie — skating on a flat surface and jumping in the air, bringing the skateboard up with you, then landing on it. This was Joey's first move.

540 Air — grabbing the board and doing 1½ turns in the air at the top of the ramp. Don't try this at home!

180 Nose Grab Over the Gap — grabbing the front tip of the board while doing a half turn and jumping over a gap in the ramp.

Mexican Blunt — Joey's signature move. A blunt is stopping quickly at the top of the ramp, balanced on two wheels. Joey invented a variation: kicking a leg out to the side. Sometimes he does a half spin before going back down the ramp.

He's never had a bad injury from skateboarding, but he does fall hard sometimes. He is protected by a helmet and heavy padding on his elbows, knees and hips.

Joey says his mom, Isabel Cumming, is his coach, but everything she



knows about skating she learned from him. And she is amazed by what Joey has learned to do since she bought his first skateboard at a yard sale two years ago.

"It doesn't make any sense," she says, laughing over how quickly he's mastered the sport.

At first Joey thought skateboarding was dull. But when he started playing with a neighborhood friend who had a small ramp, he got hooked. "I just keep doing something over and over till I get it," he says.

It was his mom who came up with

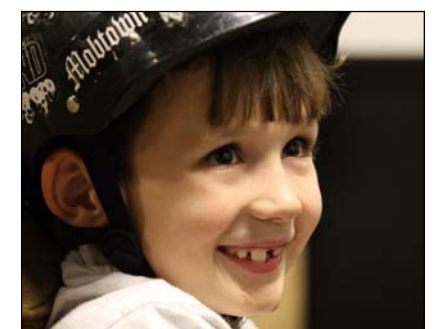
the name Joey Jett, and it stuck as his professional name.

Last year at the PlayStation Big Hookup tournament in Philadelphia, Joey came in first among skaters 14 and younger and seventh overall in a field of 80 competitors. He is the youngest skater to land a 540 in competition. Sponsors help pay for his gear, and Conformist, a Baltimore skateboarding company, makes a Joey Jett skateboard in several sizes.

This month Joey will travel to Minnesota for the King of the Groms tournament, which attracts 12-and-under

skaters from all over the world. Last year he was the youngest skater there, placing ninth.

Sports come naturally to Joey. His mother was a top gymnast in Maryland; his father, an Air Force officer, was an accomplished lacrosse player; and Stephen is a competitive tennis player. But Joey doesn't care only about skateboarding; he also loves to play football and collects Yu-Gi-Oh! cards. One thing he never does, though, is play video games.



"It's boring," he says.

— Margaret Webb Pressler