

Winchin' Texas

Three riders and a winch do Dallas/Ft. Worth

By Brooke Geery

"I've seen a lot of crazy things in this part of Dallas, but I've never seen anyone wakeboarding down a dam!" — Random onlooker (said with a heavy local accent)

Imagine being able to go on a trip to the best wakeskate spot in the world. Where do you think you'd be? Somewhere with luscious palm trees, glassy aquamarine water, and warm temperatures year round, no doubt. Of course, the living would be easy and cheap, and there would be a Chili's on every corner. Your boat would run on your stoke level and the lake would be all yours whenever you felt like riding. Okay, maybe now I am going a bit overboard.

The point I am trying to make is that when you think about the ultimate place to wakeskate, suburban Dallas probably doesn't come to mind. Northeast Texas, with its endless housing developments and strangely designed freeways wouldn't be your first choice if you were going to spend your hard earned cash on a trip. But after you read this little tale of bust-free drops and numerous winch spots within minutes of each other, perhaps your tune will change.

Let me back up for a minute and start at the beginning. Clint Tompkins, maybe you've heard of him, he happens to be from suburban Dallas. And while he now resides in Orlando, he keeps deep roots (a mom and a girlfriend) in the greater Dallas area. Because of this, he spends a good deal of time in the Lone Star state, and when he's there, he is constantly scoping out winching spots.

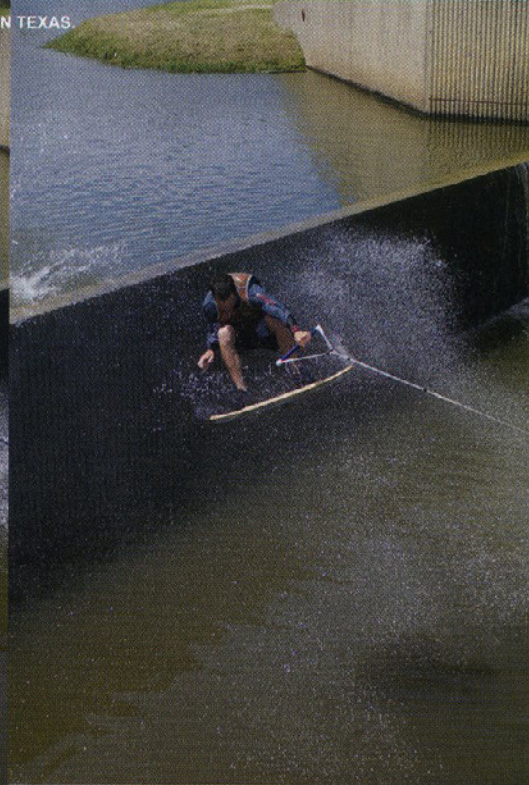
As it turns out, there are a lot of them, so Clint thought it would be a good idea to get a group of riders together to slaysh up the waterways near his home. Unfortunately, many of the pro shredders shared the same attitude you probably have about Texas. After a few riders backed out on the trip, we ended up importing one rider, Matt Hooker (Floridian via Long Island), and recruiting another homegrown one, Bret Little (Toe Jam Champion from not-so-nearby Austin.)

We all met up at Clint's mom's house in Royce City. Originally, the plan was to stay in seedy Texas hotels, but upon settling into the cushy leather couches in front of the big screen TV on Orchid Ave., it was pretty clear we'd found our base. Luckily, Carol (Clint's mom) is completely awesome and welcomed us in.

The weather forecast could have been



AFTER OLLIEING THIS DROP IN PLANO, CLINT TOMPKINS PATRONIZED ONE OF THE MANY FINE ESTABLISHMENTS IN THE NEARBY STRIP MALL. ISN'T AMERICA GREAT!?



more favorable for our trip. Actually, considering that a few days before our arrival in Texas it was snowing, it could have also been less favorable. On our first day, it ended up being 75 and sunny, and we figured we'd better get out there. Unfortunately, Bret had school, so he couldn't meet us until the next day. If he had taken Matt's example and just skipped it, he would have been with us when we rolled up on our first spot.

Clint told me if I printed the exact location of any of these spots, he'd have to kill me, so I'll just stick with the "it was about 40 minutes from his house" thing. As we drove there, he warned us about the fisherman. Apparently this was also a hot spot for catfish and trout. Sure enough, as we pulled up, we could see the line up of fishing poles sticking up along the river. But as we got closer, there was a perfect 5-foot drop. The landing was deep and the only real issue was that there was no way to walk up stream so some swimming was required.

I told the guys I would use my feminine wiles to get the fishermen to move off of the spot. I asked nicely and tried to explain what we were doing. They responded with piqued curiosity but total disregard for our needs, "this was the only place the fish were biting." They shrugged and told us to go ahead and ride anyway. Being a polite Texan, Clint was still hesitant to harsh the fishing session, but he was quickly overruled, and we soon had the winch set up. The water was moving fast, and there was one incident with a snake, but overall, Clint's session went well. With an ollie, shuv, 3 shuv and frontside and backside spins under his belt, he passed the handle to young Matt.

If the rumors about Matt were true, he'd probably kickflip the dam before too long. But the Texas currents seemed to sense he was a Yankee. After only a few goes at the drop, he attempted a shuv. Everything seemed in order, until his back foot slipped off as he landed. He emerged from the water limping, and we decided it might be time for lunch. As it turns out, Matt had torn his MCL, at the first spot on the first day of the trip.

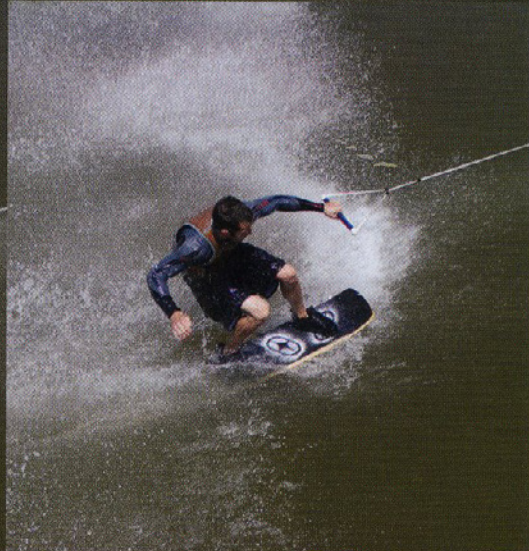
Even with a damaged knee, Matt was ready for more, so we decided to head to Ft. Worth, where a series of dams along a river would offer some smaller, more mellow drops. Unfortunately, the river was rushing at twice its normal depth. After scoping out all the dams (which looked nothing like the pictures Clint had shown us) we finally settled on the first one. The guys took a few hits each, but the sandy shore was not proving a very good base for the winch, and the stoke-level was running a bit low. We decided to pack it in, and save Matt's knee for the next day.

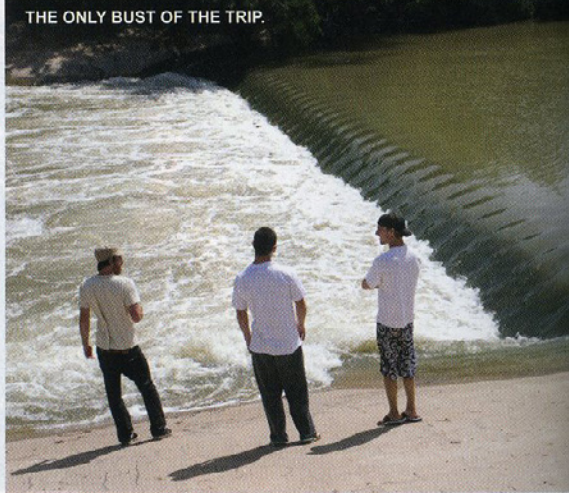
When we woke up, the temperature had managed to drop about 30 degrees. The sky was gray, the wind was whipping, and wakeskating wasn't really sounding appealing to anyone. Instead we opted to check out an indoor skatepark in Dallas, and wait-out the weather. Then things went from bad to worse. As nightfall hit, tornadoes were touching down across the area. On the news a map showed the lines the storm was taking, with a big red line cutting straight through the middle of Royce City.

Tornadoes, unlike hurricanes, give no warning before they hit. Our news was coming from a satellite dish and around the time the storm was supposed to reach us, the signal cut out. While Matt and Josh played *Tiger Woods*, I decided to spend my last moments trying to take a photo they would want to show on the news. Having lived through a tornado or two, Clint was actually respectful of the storm and figured out the safest place in the house if it hit. After all this build up, I bet you are expecting some carnage, but luckily, there was none. The storm missed us entirely, and the only real damage was to the roof of the local grocery store.

After a down day and a scary storm, we were really hoping to hit a few more spots the next day. But the weather, though lacking tornadic winds, was still not cooperating. It was another spring day in the 40s with cloudy skies and wind. Awesome. I won't bore you with the details, because at this halfway point, I do realize we've only hit two spots.

The next day we finally had some luck. The sun was out, and while it wasn't warm, it was warm enough. Previously, we had checked out the gap made famous by Aaron Reed a few years earlier. You know the one, a big concrete incline they sessioned with a PWC. We





THE ONLY BUST OF THE TRIP.

were hoping since the water was high we might be able to winch it, but the thing was still giant. Luckily, Clint knew of a similar, but smaller gap nearby. He had also rigged up a little flat bar that we strapped to the roof of the car as we headed back towards Dallas and the spot.

When we arrived, we saw that it really was all it had been built up to be. One side of the river was covered with the Texas state flower, bright blue bonnets, so the photo possibilities were looking good. A knee-deep run-up butted against a slanted concrete spillway that dropped about 10 feet into the deep water below. In addition to having to drop a ways, this gap would clearly require distance as well. But the guys seemed up for it.

I have to admit, I was a little nervous that the gap would be hard to clear, but after Matt dropped once, it was obvious that wouldn't be a problem. Bret had finally joined us and was earning his keep with his consistency and ability to do everything switch. Matt's knee wasn't feeling that great, but it didn't stop him from ollieing and skating the rail when it was set up. Clint definitely did the most technical tricks of the day including a front board 180 and a front board shuv off of the rail.

It was good to finally get some riding done, and we weren't ready to stop. We decided to head out to Plano, where Clint had scoped another 8-foot drop behind a shopping complex. He hadn't hit it yet, and from afar it did look picture perfect, but upon closer inspection, the 15 or so feet right below the drop had a platform and the water was about ankle deep. There was a great deal of discussion over whether they'd be able to clear this section, but finally Clint decided he wanted to try.

Since we were pulling at about 22 MPH, it actually was no problem, and we raced the quickly setting sun so that everyone could get some tricks down it. Since the drop was behind a movie theatre and some chain restaurants, it seemed like we might also get asked to leave, but instead the workers just watched us on their smoke breaks. Eventually we had to call it as the overhead bridge was casting a gnarly shadow making our photos and film look black. But we knew if we found another spot, we'd still have some daylight left.

Clint had the idea to go to a few spots that were sure busts. They were located in one of the nicest neighborhoods in Dallas. In fact, one of the spots was next door to the home of one of the Dallas Cowboys. We drove around and looked at countless perfect spillways and fountains, but if we stopped the car, the rent-a-cops were there instantly. We finally gave up the dream and headed to a much more reasonable spot—this one behind a shady looking apartment complex.

The spot was a wide drainage ditch with two 3-foot drops. The water was questionably green and there were definitely some floaters, but there was still light. This was the first spot small enough that the guys could get some lines and techy flip tricks. For photos, the light was amazing. For riding, it was somewhat blinding. The guys each took a few runs, but the winch was also getting tired and our session didn't last long. We packed it up just in time for someone to come ask us about our use of the drainage ditch. After the past three days of sitting around, we were all psyched on a very successful day.

The next day we woke up to more good weather, and decided to start our day at the first spot we'd visited. Thanks to the storm, the water had risen about three feet, and it looked completely different. Clint immediately starting trying to kickflip it, and was getting close when the 5-0 showed up. Apparently, even though he was wearing a CGA approved vest, it was still unsafe to "swim" here. A little bummed and pretty sure that the fisherman had ratted us out, we decided to just move on.

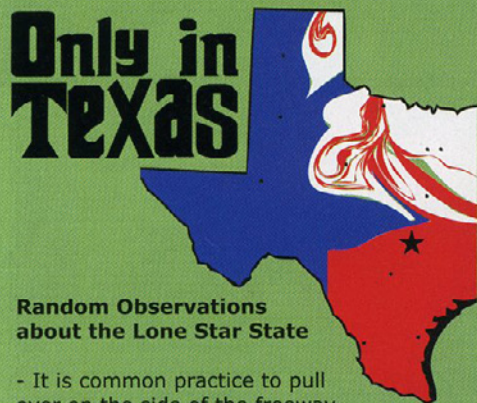
The next drop was the biggest yet. It was located next to a golf course, on the land where they kept all the supplies for upkeep. There was a constant stream of workmen on lawnmowers driving by, and two deer statues overlooking the drop. I was pretty sure we'd only get a hit or two before we got booted, but apparently people mowing golf courses really don't care if you wakeskate in the creek. This spot was not good for weak knees – it was at least 10 feet down. Clint and Bret both got a few tricks, though. Bret's big shifty and switch ollies were especially nice. Clint shuv'd and cabbed it, and after that sesh, everyone was ready for a break from knee abuse.

We headed out to Texas Mastercraft's private lake, where apparently the storm had blown a storage pod into the water, and we figured it might be fun to ride. Of course, by the time we actually arrived, it had filled with water and sunk to the bottom of the lake, so instead it just turned out to be a mellow boat sesh. Winching is awesome, but there is something nice about riding around in the boat and rides that last longer than 30

seconds. Since we'd hit some of the biggest and coolest winching spots for the past two days, it was a perfect conclusion to the trip.

Texas still isn't first on my list of travel destinations, but after this trip, I'm definitely going to stop hating it so much. Thanks to Clint and Carol Tompkins, Texas MasterCraft and this guy Richie for making the trip possible. Yeehaw!

See the trip video on-line now at www.alliancewake.com



Random Observations about the Lone Star State

- It is common practice to pull over on the side of the freeway, and get family photos in the blue bonnets, which seem to grow best near speeding cars.

- We ate at a really good Vietnamese restaurant. Our waiter was definitely from Mexico.

- I had to join a "club" to be served a beer. We were in a dry county, so I guess I am stoked they even served me, but seriously, I had to fill out a form and got a copy of the membership agreement. Hopefully my card comes in the mail soon.

- When they decide to "build" a lake in Texas, they apparently just flood a forest. No removal of the trees just let the flood kill them. Talk about dead heads.

- Every other billboard advertises some new housing community. "From the 120's! you can live in a brick house that looks just like every house around it and is surrounded by a fence." They inappropriately name these communities things like Woodland Creek or Sunrise Meadows. Yay urban sprawl!

- Dallas freeways don't have off ramps, but rather quick exits onto "service roads" - smaller roads that run parallel to every highway. Of course, there are cars driving along the service roads, and they are expected to yield to the poorly marked exit ramp's fast moving traffic. I've only blown through one of those yield signs so far, but I can imagine there are higher insurance rates in Texas to compensate for the unsafe nature of the roads.

- Texans aren't afraid to ask for help. I thought it was funny when I saw a "baby planning center," but I didn't think much of it. Then we heard a radio ad for a marriage proposal assistance service that will "help you dream up romantic ways to propose." Nothing says romance like calling in the services of a professional.



MATT HOOKER SKIPPED CLASS TO DO THIS BOARDSLIDE IN LOS COLINAS.