



PROKITER MY FUTURE IS FREESTYLE!

Name: Eli Anderson

Age: 26

Home: Seaside, Oregon, USA.

Sponsors: Ozone, Windz Up, Ground Industries, WingNut Gear, Hill Billy protective shorts, Ultra Nectar, Zeal Optics, Mad Kiting.

Disciplines: Kite Ground Boarding, Kite Buggy Racing, Snow Kiting, Kite Surfing.

X over sports: Paragliding, surfing, scuba diving, downhill anything.

Favourite Trick: Toe-side back roll kite loop to blind plus anything possible off a launch ramp.

Occupations: Ecology, carpentry, kiting.

Web: www.madkiting.com



Eli Anderson is what you would call a natural born kiter. He was raised in a kite shop owned by his mother on one of the most spectacular beaches in the USA – Seaside, Oregon. When Eli was still a kid, his dad hit the garage to tear apart a BMX bike and kick scooter, emerging with the first youth sized buggy.

Experience on this buggy would lead Eli to positions on the Quadrafoil, Libra and JoJo kite buggy teams and his current position working with Ozone. Eli still holds his status as a top buggy pilot in North America pushing speeds in excess of 70 mph, but while he excels at any sport involving a kite his true passion is KGB. Currently nursing an upper body injury, I caught up with Eli for a chat in the desert...

Hey Eli, how's it all going?
Hi Butch, life is interesting! Lots of things all at once! I've been filming quite a bit, anything to keep me off kites for the moment. Sometimes I have to give myself a break, so my focus has been Mad Kiting and lengthening and strengthening my upper plexus!

Raised in a kite shop eh? That must have been a pretty sweet environment...

Yeah for sure. I slaved away for my mom and dad selling sport kites and promoting kite sports! You won't ever hear me complaining – looking back on the growing up days, my life ruled! It was better than the alternative. Could you imagine if my parents had kept me in the city, playing basketball or something?

It's scary to think that my kite fate revolved around a crazy night when a dog catcher came in the front door as my mom, dad, younger bro and doggy (which he was after) split out the back, got in a truck and moved to the coast! I remember one of the first weekends at the beach. My dad had all these really big stunt kites. He wouldn't let me fly them right off. I think he knew that once I grabbed the handles, I wouldn't want to let go.

So your Dad taught you everything you know?

Nah, not all I know, I caught him practising freestyle in a buggy a couple of times. You know he got those moves from me! But he invested in the power kite tools to get us started. He actually set up every deal I've had with kite companies, back in the days when the gear was super soft, big puffy para-foil style kites that would barely go upwind in a buggy. I didn't care about the performance so much – just flew anything my dad put in my hands. I noticed kites were going faster and buggies we were making were changing all the time, but I was little and didn't really notice the true impact of what was going on.

My dad and I would literally ride every day after work, and all day on weekends. Then a big box came for me one day! It was full sets of kites, buggies, protective gear and a letter from one of my mom and dad's reps. I was about 15 when I signed my first powerkite contract. My dad did all the talking so I could do all the riding!

He sounds like a bit of a Kiting Guru?

He kept my style tight in the beginning. He was a perfectionist and would let me know if I looked loose or my gear was dirty! Also, he finished better than I did in races – I didn't win until he quit riding in them. When I turned 17, kitesurfing and kiteboarding took all my time. My dad would send me on 'down winders' and follow me down the beach in his truck. Man, I can remember he didn't like us jumping on land! I didn't think I would ever change his mind about the freestyle land stuff, but in the beginning he was right – "That old shit..." wasn't made for jumping.

So kiting was our 'father/son' activity which sculpted our whole relationship. Everything we did revolved around kiting. In the summer, our front yard was full of about 10 acres of kites camping. He led the way for many of the best in the U.S.

You kitesurf, snowkite, buggy and KGB all at a top level. What made you get so stoked on KGB as your main discipline?

First of all, I started on land with kites. I had been surfing the Oregon coast for years, but my first session with a kite on a board was tough. In north-west winds I had to ride through surf switch stance, when I'm naturally regular stance. It was obvious I should practice kitesurfing on land, so I could get riding switch down before messing with big waves. That started my kite ground boarding – the perfect crossover. I learned KGB, then went kitesurfing, picked up all sorts of freestyle on the water, then took it back to land.

The plan was to use kite ground boarding to train for water, but when I took what I figured out on the water back to land, I realised how 'bad-ass' land kiting was. It's a known fact that most water guys/girls are freaked out on land with their kites. One thing I've learned from going 70 mph in a kite buggy is to handle myself on hard ground! It's crazy or I'm crazy. There is no limit to KGB, yet. My garage is completely full of ramps and materials to make more ramps. I think I'm obsessed!

I gather you have a bit of a fetish for ramps?

That's another one I credit to my dad. When I was in grade school, I rode skateboards ▶

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about as much as kites loop their kites. The older kids could hit this huge jump we had in our church parking lot. Being half the size I needed a smaller ramp, so good old dad looked at what the big kids were riding, then helped me build my first kicker when I was about ten.

My first KGB kicker idea was experimental, but I had light winds in mind! I bought a bunch of lumber and went to town. Next day, Christoph Riddle and I could just get enough speed to make it off the top of the 52 degree board chomper. We felt pretty good about the sesh – we were getting air when the kites couldn't lift us! But when the wind came up, we realised the ramp was all wrong for high speed launching. I was going to need different ramps for different tricks and different speeds! And I needed to build them portable or compactable, so I could get a few to the beach at one time.

So each time you learn a little more about the angles – what are you searching for in the ultimate ramp? I have all sorts of wood working skills that I picked up in school, so making different types of ramps is really easy. The basic idea is simple; you make a ramp to jump, right? So what sort of jumping do you want to do? My first ramp was super steep, which is cool for short high jumps with board offs, hanging inverts and big stock airs. My second was tiny, but I could launch off the smaller jumps riding at higher speeds for double grabs, multi-one footers, board variats or multiple spins.

Like I said, it's important to try a variety of kicker angles. Throwing the kite back during launch is different for each jump angle as well. I even made a small quarter pipe that was good for nothing but back roll kite loops – that or a fat lip! I even have ramps for training up and coming riders. The ultimate jump should be steep and tall enough to catch air in little wind, but should have a gradual radius that doesn't overload the rider and board.

You had a hand in the construction of the Big Red Jump, as seen in PK18 with Gabe and Alex riding off it? We used an old ATV trailer my Dad sold to Gabe Shortman's dad. It was my first attempt at the ultimate kicker since the potential for a monster was quite evident! With a trailer underneath, transporting it to different beaches was a matter of hooking to Gabe's truck a tow. The radius I cut was over 5.5 metres long and just over 2 metres high. The difference was that I could ram into the jump at 20-25 mph versus 10-15 mph, getting way more height and distance without overloading rider or board. The Big Red Jump had to be reinforced so

many times and it took a while to perfect the structure before it would quit breaking every time a session went off. My next step is to make sweet metal jumps that tow in tandem behind a truck.

That's wicked, but how is the current US kite scene? It's hard to tell. Free Riding is Huge in the US and there isn't really a comp scene. The 'States are reluctant when it comes to extreme sports so the idea that something 'could be dangerous' isn't popular here! A basic misunderstanding of kitesports is the barrier for non-kiters. Most folks think you have to walk back every time, 'You'll get taken away and never come down!', or it's just plain crazy! If I find people who want an exciting lifestyle that's healthy and fun, I can usually get them to the beach. One of my best bros and I started the Mad Kiting project in 2002 (www.madkiting.com) which has been effective in educating the general public about kite sports.

Is that business mixed with your pleasure? Mad Kiting has just evolved from what Adam and I consider our normal everyday life. People from all over the country would call and e-mail with questions ending in 'Where can I buy one and learn how to use it?' We wanted a cool site to promote ourselves and kite sports. Then we kept getting calls for gear, so naturally we started a biz! We've even been able to teach beginner and advanced kiting to our clients. And Adam and I are having all sorts of fun with it!

I understand you do a bit of paragliding as well. So what's with the nappy on your dog? Yeah, my friends own www.discoverparagliding.com and for three or four years I've been able to catch really sweet 'tow' sessions at our local beach. The instructors, Brad and Maren, noticed my dog running after me while I was on 'tow' and they know a guy from www.towmeup.com who builds doggy harnesses for paragliding! She's a great dog. Her first flight was just as the sun was setting and we landed in the dark. We only bounced up to 800 feet, just to give my pup a good look around at things!

Anything to finish? Keep an eye out for our upcoming DVD release in the Video Gallery at www.madkiting.com. 'The Vision' is a WingNutz film featuring epic kitesurfing, snowkiting, KGB and buggy footage with 'high flights' with big kites – the future of kiting is in freestyle! PK

Interview: Butch (Ozone UK, Design Extreme, Ground Industries, Billys.)
Photos: Rob Vreeland

