

# Roller skating becomes popular

By DIANA SULTENFUSS  
Battalion Reporter

A new breed of Texas A&M University student seems to be emerging — with four wheels attached to each foot.

Most estimates show that 28 million Americans roller skate, about 7 percent of the population.

"Whenever good weather rolls around, so do I," said Carole Cristiani, a 21-year-old junior physical education major. "It beats the heck out of walking."

Several students have been trying out their wheels in different environments. Cristiani said she has attended all of her classes on skates. Sheryl Morgan, a 20-year-old junior in marketing, was a grocery checker on wheels in Dallas last summer. Morgan and Jenny Dorsey, a 20-year-old junior marketing major, wore their skates in the rice-eating contest before the Texas A&M-Rice University football game.

"I'll bet we were a first," Morgan said.

Ann Franke, 20, first floor resident adviser in McFadden Hall, began skating "on a whim" when her younger brother received a pair of skates. The junior special education major borrowed them for the exercise and ended up skating through the local Skaggs grocery store.

Jody McKnight, 20, moved from Dallas to California two years ago. When the junior in civil engineering

returned to Texas A&M, she brought the roller skating bug with her. The bug bit several other residents of Mosher Hall where she lives, including Cindy Terry, Liz Fleming and Ruth Schmidt.

A group of roller-skating Texas A&M students formed a club, Wheels. The club began late in the fall semester and president Joey Wasilewsky, 21, said he hopes for many activities in the spring semester. Wasilewsky, a senior in zoology, has already discussed the possibility of an indoor skating facility on campus with someone planning an intramural facility to be built in a few years.

Currently, indoor facilities are available at Pooh's Park, owned by Don Dale. Dale reported a 30 to 40 percent increase in customers per year since he opened the rink in 1972.

"But now it's hard to tell because we've opened other facilities that are also attracting customers," he said. In U.S. News and World Report, the owner of a California rink said his business increased 65 percent in the first five months of 1979.

Different sources estimate between 3,000 and 6,000 rinks in the United States.

Roller skating is invading every phase of American life. Television commercials are featuring roller skates and Playboy magazine said roller skating is sexy.

Texas A&M skaters have different viewpoints on what pedes-

trians think of them.

"People are very friendly," Morgan said. "They're always asking for rides."

Schmidt, a 20-year-old junior pre-pharmacy major, said skaters get a lot of negative feedback that she believes is hidden envy.

Terry, a 20-year-old junior industrial engineering major, said, "You can tell they'd like to be out there, too, if they had skates."

The development of polyurethane wheels seems to be the foundation of the new roller skating craze. The new wheels, borrowed from precision-made skateboard wheels, are quieter and have a smoother ride with more maneuverability. They allow speeds of up to 35 or 40 miles per

hour downhill. Outdoor wheels are softer to absorb the impact of rough ground, but can be used indoors for better traction. Indoor wheels are harder and should not be used outdoors.

A new development has been the "jogger," jogging shoes on wheels. Some specialty stores will put wheels on anything, including western boots and high heels.

The roller skating habit can be an expensive one.

"You need to really look into it before you buy them," Cristiani said. An average pair of skates ranges from \$30 to \$50 at most local stores. Sears also has a pair for \$74. Wyatt's Sporting Goods sells skates with leather boots for \$150 to \$170. National price levels range



Staff photo by Bob Sebre

Paul Willett, a member of the Pepsi Cola SKATE team, demonstrates some trickier roller skating moves with the aid of a ramp.

from \$25 to \$150 for the amateur up to \$1,000 for professional skaters.

Despite these prices, Peck & Goodie, a manufacturer of skates since 1925, reported in a December 1978 article in New York magazine that sales were up 25 percent in 1978. Most other manufacturers reported a 25 to 30 percent increase per year for the past few years.

A Time magazine article of August 1979 lists skate sales at 300,000 pairs a month. Business Week predicted in an August 1979 article that sales would reach \$200 million in 1979.

Extra equipment and accessories are also available to the skater, including knee and elbow pads, helmets and gloves. Disco skaters may want to buy shorts, leotards, pants outfits, short skirts or other such items.

Admission costs to the rink are another consideration. Pooh's Park charges \$2.50 for a two-hour session. Pooh's is open on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Roller skates were invented by small boys in Europe who tied spools to their shoes. They were first patented by Joseph Merlin, a Belgian, in 1760 — with only two wheels on each skate. In 1863, James L. Plimpton patented the first four-wheeled roller skates in New York. He also opened the first roller skating rink in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1866.

Promoters are calling roller skating "the sport of the 80s." The U.S. Amateur Confederation of Roller Skaters administers all competitions in dance, freestyle, figure and speed skating. There are 26,000 registered amateur competitive skaters.

The first national roller skating championships were held in Detroit in 1937. Another form of competition, the Long Beach Marathon, was the first event of its kind and was held in May of 1979. Roller skating was included in the 1979

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