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A new angle on skating

By [Jeff Strickler](#), Star Tribune June 15, 2007 Photo by Joey Mcleister, Star Tribune

The LandRoller is a new style roller blade with two outboard mounted oversize wheels and canted boots.

LandRollers, a goofy-looking pair of roller skates, left a novice getting the last laugh.

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When my editor asked me to test-drive an innovative pair of roller skates that are ballyhooed as being ideal for beginners because of their increased stability, I figured it would go down as one of the quickest assignments in my career.

The skates are called LandRollers, and I was confident that one of two things would happen: They were going to perform as advertised or I was going to run into a tree and break my neck. Either way, I figured, we'd know the result in about 20 seconds.

Like most people in Minnesota, I've spent plenty of time on ice skates. But I'm of the generation that hangs up the skates once the neighborhood rink thaws. The wheels I use in the summer are attached to a bicycle. I've never been a roller-skater, either of the in-line or traditional variety.

Nor am I particularly adept at activities that require coordination and timing. (In other words, any sport other than ice fishing.) So when the folks at LandRollers said the skates could be handled by a neophyte, I really, really took them at their word.

Much to my relief, they weren't exaggerating. I'm not claiming that I morphed into the second coming of Eric Heiden, but I did manage to negotiate my way around Lake Calhoun without endangering myself or anyone else. I was able to turn when I needed to turn and stop when I needed to stop.

After I was about halfway around the lake, I actually started to feel semi-relaxed. I even worked up the nerve to sneak a couple of looks at the sail boats, interrupting my panicked vigil for the wayward cocker spaniel that I was sure was going to wander onto the bike path and send us both to the promised land.

The skates look as strange as all get out. I considered that an advantage; anything that diverted attention away from my awkwardness has to be a plus. People notice them. Then again, they hardly could miss them.

It's the wheels that draw your attention. They're big, and they're mounted on an angle on the outside of the boot, splaying off to the side as if the bolt holding them in place is down to its last turn. "Your skates are broken," one helpful young skater tried to warn me.

The oversized wheels are the key to the skates' stability, according to the manufacturer, LandRoller Inc. in Hermosa Beach, Calif. The back wheel has a 7-inch diameter, and the front one is a tad over 5½ inches.

The larger wheels make it easier to skate over bumps, cracks, rough patches of road and even the random swath of gravel. During my circumnavigation of the lake, I encountered all those conditions without falling. (I was going to say, "without losing my balance," but there were some veteran skaters who weren't sure that I had any sense of balance to begin with.)

The skates are not recommended for off-road use, but they handle the occasional straying off the path with (pleasantly) surprising ease. An experienced in-line skater had warned me against trying to stop by pulling off the path onto the grass, saying that the maneuver should be used only in an emergency because most novice skaters end up with their noses planted in the turf. Out of a morbid sense of curiosity, I forced myself to try it after a few minutes of practice skating. I proudly remained upright.

The wheels are mounted at an angle so that they will contact the road below the center of the foot. They are offset slightly from each other, leading the manufacturer to dub them "out of line" skates. They feel fine, but it can be disconcerting to look down and see the wheels pointed a different direction than you are. In fact, the manufacturer specifically recommends that new skaters avoid looking at their feet.

That's advice well worth taking, said an avid in-line skater who agreed to give the skates a test run. David Rubins, a junior at the University of Wisconsin who is spending the summer back home in St. Louis Park, skates both for fitness and to play roller hockey.

About 10 yards into his test run, he let out a dismayed cry after glancing at his feet. But he recovered. And when he was done, he reported that he liked the smoother ride provided by the bigger wheels but found the skates harder to maneuver.

According to the manufacturer, that's normal. Skaters can turn just as sharply as on in-line skates, they say -- and their website has video clips to prove it -- but there is some "relearning" involved.

The skates retail for \$250, but discounts exist, especially when ordering on-line directly from the manufacturer (www.landroller.com). For comparison, high-end in-line skates run from \$150 to \$400.

One thing that's hard to put a price tag on is image. When I brought home the demo pair of LandRoller skates, my teenagers thought I was "really cool." That's the first time that's happened since ... well, ever.

Jeff Strickler • 612-673-7392 • jstrickler@startribune.com

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