

JAKE BURTON & BURTON SNOWBOARDS

Many kids in the 1960s grew up riding a Snurfer in the winter months – after all, Sherman Poppen’s invention sold thousands of boards – including Jake Burton. Although he was a talented skier, attended the University of Colorado and hoped to join the ski team before a collarbone fracture, Jake pursued his love for riding single plank devices.

Upon graduating from New York University in 1977, Jake worked in the financial world for a few months before quitting his job to create Burton Boards. By the 1977-78 season, he was building homemade snowboard prototypes out of a barn in Londonderry, Vermont. Constructed of laminated maple wood, the Burton Backhill was born.

Jake visited shops all over Vermont that winter, marketing his prototype, but he had a similar experience to Winterstick’s flop at the 1977 trade shows: no one was very interested. After selling just 300 boards during that season, Jake returned to Vermont in 1979 with a new model known as The Backyard and sold 700 boards – a huge improvement. Regular and goofy stances, as well as binding adjustments (no tools necessary!) were available. Burton had a bright future.

Jake widened the boards, added a urethane base, began signing team riders, and moved Burton to Manchester, Vermont during the 1980s. Over the next few years, Jake competed at snowboarding contests (including the first ever contest at Ski Cooper in 1981), showing off his groundbreaking products and innovative equipment, including soft boots, metal edges, P-tex bases, highbacks and bindings. The first snowboarding outerwear gear was introduced and Burton expanded internationally – all while campaigning to have ski resorts open lifts to snowboarders. By 1996, 95% of ski resorts had opened their doors.

Throughout the 1990s, Jake and Burton Snowboards continued to push snowboarding to the forefront of winter sports by continuing the pursuit of establishing it as a vital part of the Colorado and international market. In 1995, Jake and wife Donna founded the Chill program, which works to “build the self esteem of undeserved youth through board sports.” The program exposes kids, who wouldn’t normally have access to these opportunities, to snowboarding.

In 1998, snowboarding premieres at the Winter Olympics and Burton riders capture bronze and gold medals in the halfpipe, including Colorado native Shannon Dunn.

Jake was inducted into the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Hall of Fame in 2010, recognized for his rich history in the establishment and development of snowboarding in the state. Some of Jake’s early snowboard creations are on display at the new snowboard exhibit at the Colorado Ski & Snowboard Museum. Several pieces are visible, including the wooden board Jake brought to the first Snurfer competition, generously on loan from Brooke Long.

Jake and Burton Snowboards continue to contribute to Colorado snowboarding by investing personally, sponsoring riders and events, and continuing local research and development.

Sources included:

Off the Chain: An Insider’s History of Snowboarding by Ross Rebagliati

“Snowboarding: It’s Older Than You Think,” by Paul J. MacArthur, Skiing Heritage Journal, March 2009

“Meet Jake,” Burton website, http://www.burton.com/on/demandware.store/Sites-Burton_US-Site/default/Company-MeetJake