

Wear & Tear: Houkie Skateboard Shoe Protector

by Daniel Fedkenheuer | Aug 28, 2018 | Cover Stories | 1 Comment



Words by Daniel Fedkenheuer

As a contributor to the skateboarding world still attempting to grow within the industry, I reach out to a number of riders, company owners and brand associates on a daily basis. In the myriad of replies and declines I tend to sift through, rarely have I been approached about the release of a new product in the same way. That being said, when Michael Fransko, Owner and Developer of the [Houkie Skateboard Shoe Protector](#), reached out to tell me about his gear and intentions to revolutionize the skate footwear protection game, I was all ears.



What Fransko went on to tell me about was an effort rooted in a George Powell-esque effort to create an innovation solution for his skateboarding son. In this case, however, the focus was turned to the wear and tear of skate shoes. To explain, Fransko told me, "The project started between me and my currently 23 year old son. He has been a skater since he was 12. Of course, I would have to buy him new skate shoes every couple of months because he destroyed them. I said that someone should come up with a way to save these shoes from getting shredded... Years passed and when he was 20, he came to visit me and I saw that his shoes were still shredded. I said, 'Well, it's time we made something to save these skaters and their parents money.'" Thus, one of the most comprehensive attempts at conquering skate shoe protection was born.



In essence, the Houkies, sold in pairs of two, are rubber sleeves that slip over skate shoes as a durable, all-over layer of protection against wear down from grip tape, foot stopping or any other abuse on any side of the shoes. The protectors feature a smooth layer of flexible rubber on all sides including the bottom, where a base layer mimics the tread pattern of the sole of the skate shoe. For a snug fit, the material is vented on the tops and sides while the bottom features a break in the material to help slip them over your shoes. Though Fransko and I originally had plans to give them a shot somewhere in between our homes in North and Central New Jersey, a delay in the manufacturing process and my recent move to the West Coast meant that I would be taking them out for a spin in the Southern California sunshine instead.



Luckily for me, The Houkies arrived at a point where my Nike SB's had just about worn through the last layer of the Shoe Goo I applied to them. Admittedly, I tore the packaging open, slipped the shoe protectors on and burst outside to take them around the block and see how they felt. Expecting a bit of discomfort due to my unfamiliarity with them, I only realized after I got back in and read the directions that to properly fit them to your shoes, they had to be boiled and quickly adorned to take a more form-fitting shape. Once I went through this properly, they fit like a charm.



Perhaps the most enticing thing about the latest iteration Houkies is the look. In a world where skaters are more prideful of their shoes than the participants of any other sport, the clear material used for the protectors is a crucial piece to keeping the aesthetic of the form on point with the function of the product. When you look down at them, it is an unfamiliar sight to get used to. However, the functional durability that they provide soon alleviates any doubt over their appearance. This is something that Fransko noted by acknowledging, "My son and I collaborated and came up with many designs until we ended up with what the Houkie is now. Gotta trade some looks for productivity." Nevertheless, they can hardly be noticed on the riders feet from far away, unless specifically looking for them.

As for putting these things to the test, I was clearly in the presence of quality company in the review department with names including [Sam Tabor](#) already giving glowing reviews on their functionality. After a number of rips, I can attest to a similarly positive experience with the Houkies.



When you first slip them on, it takes a moment to feel them out, just the same as it does to get used to looking down at them. When you take the first push though, the inherent difficulty of skateboarding seems to take over as the feeling of the shoe protectors take a back seat. What this goes to show is the care that Fransko and his son took to develop a covering that molds to the shoe like a second skin, so as not to pose as an obstruction.



Moving forward, these things stayed in place after the cycle of ollies, varial flips and beyond that I put them through. Serving to mimic the same sense of board feel provided by skate shoes on their own, the Houkies gripped the pavement perfectly with each push and maintained the proper hold when digging my back foot in the pockets and tail for popping and scooping tricks. As for the front foot, the top of the material remained flexible enough for the necessary feeling of a smooth flick. The best part? As I ended my session and slipped them back off, there were no signs of any sort of wear on the protectors – only the presence of a mostly thrashed left Janoski that probably could have used a solution like the Houkies a long time ago.

If you'd like to cop a pair for yourself, you can scoop them from their website [here](#). Otherwise, you can stay tuned to their site for a future that Fransko claims will be filled with new colorways, potential designs, sponsorship opportunities and above all, savings for parents and skaters everywhere.

All photos shot by [Andrei Churakov](#)

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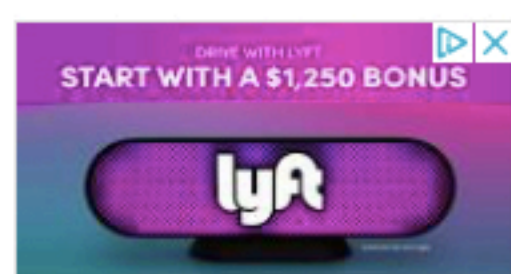
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