

A

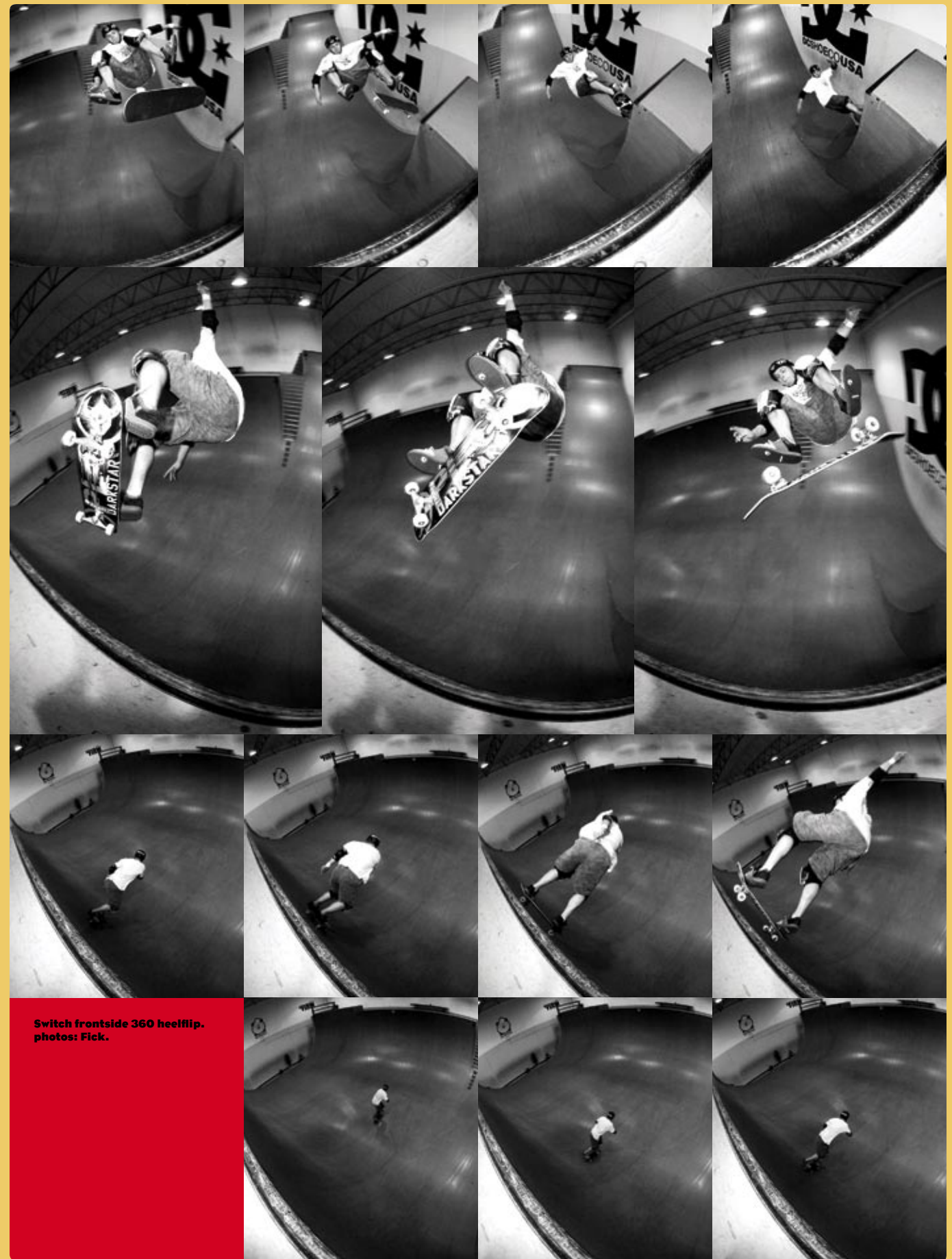
# PRO

## STATE OF MIND

Roll Call: Pierre-Luc Gagnon  
Words by Mackenzie Eisenhour



**"Gagnant,"** pronounced almost exactly like Gagnon, is the French word for "winner." It may be fitting then, that Pierre-Luc Gagnon won almost every vert contest on the planet last year. A French Canadian who weathered the "death" of his very practice in the early 90s, Pierre never gave in to the yellow NTS Airwalks and the all-day curbscrubbing session, but instead persevered by pursuing what made him want to ride a skateboard in the first place—the feeling he got from rolling up and down a ramp. A tranny lover at heart, he transcended both the five-month winters of Montreal and the five years of life-support endured by big-ramp lovers worldwide to find himself comfortably at the wheel of a viable career in big-arena skateboarding (and an accordingly paid-for German V8 sports car). In 2006, the 8th Annual TWS Awards vert finalist Pierre-Luc looks back on the darker days of vertdom, the brighter lights of the X Games, and what kept him going through all of it.



Switch frontside 360 heelflip.  
photos: Fick.

portrait: SKIN



**Pierre-Luc or PLC?**

My friends usually call me PL. Even in French, like JB [Gillet] or something. PLG is a little more like what the TV commentators came up with.

**Was there a specific moment when you decided to become a vert skater?**

Not really. I mean, I started in '88, and back then vert skating was still really strong, so it seemed normal. Street skating was definitely already starting to come up big time, but actually there were two vert ramps in the two cities near my house, so I would just go after school and do kickturns and stuff. I just really liked the feeling of it—the speed and the airs and all that. I basically grew up skating vert since I started when I was eight. I was still skating launch ramps and street the whole time, but I just ended up liking vert a whole lot. Especially by the time '92 came around and street skating was all about doing a noseslide nosegrind on a six-inch curb. So I just stuck to vert then.

**Did you grow up in Montreal itself or outside?**

I grew up on the South Shore, right across the bridge from the city. The city of Montreal is like an island, and then you have the North and South Shores just off the island.

**Do you remember your first drop-in?**

Oh yeah, for sure. It went okay. I was super scared, but I went for it and rolled all the way to the bottom, then kind of sketched out and kneeslid. Then second try I just rolled all the way across to the other wall. I was at the ramp alone, too. But I was super psyched. I was nine years old and didn't really know any

other kids skating vert like that. It was pretty cool because after I did it some people were talking about it like, "Hey, there's this nine-year-old kid dropping in on vert."

**Favorite vert video parts growing up?**

Without a doubt, I looked up to Danny Way and Colin McKay with each and every video part they put out. The Plan B parts they had were by far my favorites. Before that, like in the 80s, when I got my first board, I got an *Animal Chin* video with it. I was a real big Tony Hawk and Lance [Mountain] fan. I was so amped on those guys. As I learned more about skating, I really got into dudes like Jason Jessee, and I was really into Mike Conroy—he had the sickest fastplants. Then when Planet Earth came out with *Now 'N' Later*, I remember seeing Chris Miller doing those backside 270s to Smith grinds/sugarcanes up the extensions and Buster [Halterman] just killing it. I got super into that. But for sure, pretty much throughout the 90s, it was Colin and Danny who motivated me.

**How did you keep skating vert when it was basically deemed "dead"?**

It was pretty hard, for sure. Wheels got really small and everybody stopped skating vert. In Montreal, it was pretty much only me and Max Dufour who kept skating vert. In Vancouver, the dudes like Sluggo and Colin never stopped. There were still little events going on here and there. Like, I remember going to Bricktown in New Jersey and the playground in Connecticut. Then the first time I went out to Cali was for the '92 NSA finals at the YMCA.

**You never thought, "Damn, vert is dying. I should start skating other stuff"?**

Well, the whole time, I was still skating everything—even if vert was still my main love. We were skating tons of mini ramps. Mini ramp was kind of in its heyday at that point, and I always skated street anyway. I was skating everything. But it never crossed my mind to stop skating vert because Danny and Colin were still doing it, and I was so hyped on those guys that it just kept me going. I give them a lot of credit, obviously. Their innovation and video parts kept me motivated to do it. I was definitely bummed that fewer people were skating it, but never once did I think of quitting.

**When would you say vert was "reborn"?**

I'd say around '95, '96, when Tas and Ben Pappas, Rune [Glifberg], and those guys came on the scene and started tearing it up—that's when you could feel vert was back. The contests started picking up again and the crowds were back. It was great to see.

**All-time-greatest 80s vert legend?**

I'd have to say Chris Miller. There's a bunch, but it would be between Tony [Hawk], Christian [Hosoi], and Miller.

**All-time-greatest vert legend, period?**

Danny Way. No doubt.

**You won almost every contest last year. What's your secret?**

I don't know—it's just luck sometimes, skating every day, and just having fun. I love skating, so the more I



Kickflip nosegrind. photos: Fick.

**"SOME VERT GUYS COULDN'T EVEN OLLIE UP A CURB."**

do it, the better I get, and at contests I kind of look at it as a session with my friends. I get pretty amped on seeing the crowd being into the skating and just try to take it from there. It's been pretty good lately, so I'll just keep on doing what I do.

**How do you approach your runs? Is it something pretty set that you build on, or are there some spontaneous tricks in there? How do you prepare for it?**

Most of the time, when I'm at home and just skating, I work on short five-trick runs and try to get them dialed. Then when I get to the contest, the ramps are always a little different—with extensions and channels and especially now with the X Games they're putting in corners and hips, so you can't really plan your whole run ahead of time—you just figure out the best way to incorporate what you know you have down into the ramp you're on. I usually try to piece all my combos together based on the ramp and then let it go from there.

**Has there ever been a completely spontaneous trick you threw up in a contest and pulled?**

[Laughs] Actually, as a kid, I remember being ten and skating this contest, and I just threw up an invert and pulled it first try. Like, I had tried a few before, but the one in the contest was just a miracle. Recently, at the Mega Ramp contest two years ago, I remember I had bailed all my first runs and I had one more run, so it was kind of like all or nothing and I 360'd the gap, then did like a one-footed McTwist on the wall. I

remember rolling away thinking, "Holy sh-t, I pulled it!" I don't think I had even planned it when I was doing the 360.

**How did you hook up with Darkstar?**

I got sponsored by Capix helmets, which is Chet's [Thomas] company, so I met him through that and we became friends. We started this company called Anex Trucks together, and I was pretty good friends with Gailea [Momolu] since he's from Ottawa and used to come down and skate back in the day. Paul [Machnau] was down, and everybody else was cool, so I just ended up getting on. I'm psyched on where I'm at.

**What's the difference in approach to certain flip tricks on vert versus street?**

Some tricks are a little different. Kickflips and heelflips are kind of the same, but nollie flips, for example, you don't really snap your nose like you would on street. It's more of a bonking your wheels off the coping kind of thing. Most no-handed lip tricks, like a kickflip nosegrind, they're pretty much the same as on street except of course you've got your body

weight moving differently since you're on a vertical wall shifting to a flat coping rather than just going from flatground to a flat ledge. It's a little harder in that respect. That's why we don't do as gnarly sh-t as street skaters, I suppose. But it definitely helps you to learn like tre flip noseslides on flatground before you try it on vert. That's kind of how I try to do it.

**Are there some vert guys out there who could tre flip noseslide on vert but could never even get close to the trick on street?**

Oh yeah. For sure. Some vert guys couldn't even ollie up a curb. But, I mean, most of the younger vert guys can skate a little of both. I think it shows when you skate anyway.

**There should be a word for it, like fake-street-vert or something.**

[Laughs].

**What is your go-to flatground trick when you're not on the ramp?**

Tre flips. I just like the feeling.



Backside lipslide to gap out. photo: Christian.



Alley-oop nollie to fakie five-0. photos: Daughters.

**First setup?**

Mini Vision Marty “Jinx” Jimenez, black Venture trucks, and yellow Powell Rat Bones.

**Is it true your dad bought a skatepark? How was that? Nobody could snake you, right?**

Yeah. In Montreal, we’ve got winter like five months of the year, so it kind of sucked for skating obviously, because you couldn’t skate all winter. So my dad actually went to the city with plans for this skatepark, and the city ended up giving us money to build it and paid the rent on the space for the first couple years. Eventually, it made enough money to pay for itself, so my dad ended up owning the skatepark from ’92 to ’98. It was a blessing, for sure. My dad was a schoolteacher and he was never in it to make money off skating. He just wanted to give us a place to go all year round.

**Have you made some extravagant purchases with all those contest winnings or are you saving it?**

I basically made two—I bought a car and I bought a house.

**Most extravagant purchase?**

The car, for sure. After the X Games last year in September, I ended up selling my old car and buying a Mercedes CLK 500. I’m pretty psyched on it. It’s got a nice little V8 in there. It was something I didn’t necessarily need, but hey, you’ve got to celebrate a little bit, right?

**Who would you consider to be your Hosoi if you were Hawk? Who’s your contest nemesis?**

Recently, it’s been Bucky [Lasek]. He’s pretty on point. He’s got runs that flow real good and he’s a tough competitor. Then on the Mega Ramp front, Danny is obviously pretty hard to f—k with.

**No Shaun White yet?**

[Laughs] I was pretty psyched to hold it down last year for skateboarding. It would be kind of crazy to have a snowboarder come in and beat us skateboarders at vert. He has snowboard tricks and a snowboard style on a vert ramp—like not too many tech lip tricks or anything. But, hey, TV loves it, he flies around, and honestly, what can you say? I’ve got to give him credit. To come from snowboarding and do that well in skating is pretty amazing, for sure.

**What is your own personal 900?**

I’ve got a few. But I’d love to do a Cab heelflip 720. Nollie heel big-spin 540, too. I don’t know, there are infinite little tech tricks I want to do, but those two are my “nines.”

**What is the one basic vert trick you can’t do?**

Damn, frontside inverts and eggplants. Just never got ’em.

**Do you get jitters before your runs or is it pretty routine?**

It depends. During the year, you end up doing one almost every weekend, so you get used to it and it’s like everyday stuff. But the first one every year, when it’s been a while since you entered a contest, can be a little stressful, like, “Damn, I wonder if I still got it?”

**Being part of the contest side of skating, you probably deal with a ton of the corporate “extreme” types? What advice do you have for dealing with those types of people and situations?**

I just try to put myself into a non-skater’s perspective sometimes, because two skaters talking about

**“PEOPLE IN MONTREAL ARE GENERALLY HAPPY WITH A LITTLE LESS.”**

skateboarding is going to make no sense to a general audience. So I try to think along broader lines. If you’re on ESPN talking about your run, you kind of have to dumb it down a little, make it pretty clear for them. Nowadays, it’s getting better because they hired dudes like Chris Miller, but you still have three quarters of the people there not quite sure if it was a heelflip or a kickflip.

**Go-to ledge trick on street?**

I like frontside noseblunt slides.

**What is the biggest difference between Carlsbad, California and Montreal, Canada?**

Aside from the weather, just the little cultural differences—the way people treat each other. It takes a little while to get used to, but I feel at home

in Carlsbad now. There were little things at first, like being forced to drive everywhere and things like that. Back home I could jump on a train to anywhere. People in Montreal are also generally happy with a little less. They just want to do their thing and enjoy life. People in Carlsbad seem to all have some bigger goals and maybe need a little more. But I’m stoked to be where I’m at.

**Chin Ramp or Mega Ramp?**

Mega Ramp.

**How do you feel about this new explosion of stunt skating—like Bob Burnquist at the Grand Canyon or Danny Way at the Hard Rock and the Great Wall Of China?**

I think it’s sick. Everything Danny did was amazing.

He just takes everything he does to the next level. Bob’s thing was cool, too, where he combined his passion for BASE jumping with skating.

**If you got full funding, what would your super stunt be?**

I basically wanted to do like a snowboard cliff drop on a skateboard. Like have a ramp rolling down up top, then like some 50-foot drop into another ramp. Kind of like Danny’s bomb drop but rolling into it. I think that would be a crazy one.

**Personal biggest contest win?**

Instead of a contest win, I want to say my greatest accomplishment has been to be able to leave Montreal, live in California, and make a living off of skateboarding. That’s the biggest win for me right there.

**Hawk or Hosoi?**

Oh man. It’s so hard. But I’ve got to say Christian—by a hair. 🍌