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## Consumer Decision Making Contest

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### 1997-98 Study Guide

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## IN-LINE SKATES

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Welcome to the wonderful world of in-line skating! You might have heard the sport called rollerblading or just blading. That's because Rollerblade was the first manufacturer of in-line skates. Similar to instances such as Kleenex (instead of tissue) or Xerox (instead of copy), Rollerblade Incorporated's brand name came to be a generic name for the sport actually known as in-line skating.

In-line skates were actually first developed in the 1700's by Belgian manufacturer Joseph Merlin. These first skates had ivory wheels and were designed as a summer substitute for ice skates. Later, ice hockey players began to use in-line skates for off season training. (In-line skates, as the name suggests, have wheels in a single line rather than side by side like roller skates; this makes in-line skates look and maneuver more like the blade of an ice skate.) With in-line skates, the hockey player could train without an ice rink or frozen pond. Instead, training could be done on asphalt, concrete, or any type of smooth pavement. Soon, in-line skates became popular among ice speed skaters, cross country and alpine skiers followed by runners, cyclists, and roller skaters who saw opportunities for off season- and cross-training. Finally, in-line skating exploded into an exciting sport for anyone willing to strap on a pair of *blades* (as they are often called) and **GET IN-LINE!**

#### Choosing Skates That Are Right For You

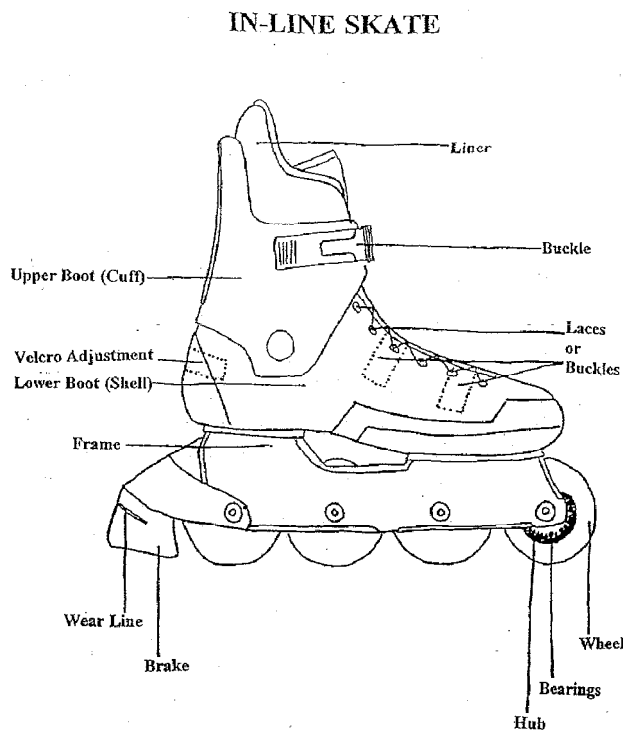
Choosing skates that are right for you is very important. Everyone is different, so a skate that feels good to one person may not be the best fit for another. Take your time choosing your in-line skates. Your comfort is the most important criteria when choosing your skates. There are, however, some aspects you may want to consider when choosing your in-line skates.

#### **Boots**

The boot of an in-line skate looks much like a ski boot, only smaller. Most in-line boots are constructed of two pieces of molded plastic, one going over the foot and the other wrapping around the ankle.

The type of **plastic** varies from one skate to another. Some plastics will be more rigid. This rigidity is important for the support of your ankles and is something you will want to look for in a quality skate. (Ankle support straps can be purchased for additional support.) Ankle support is very important in helping you to stay standing on your skates.

Some boots also have **vents** that help to circulate air around your feet and into the liner to keep it dryer and reduce weight.



## Liner

The liner is a padded insole that fits down into the boot to provide comfort and support to your foot. Most liners are **removable**. Liners can sometimes be used to custom fit a boot if you have trouble finding a boot that fits you comfortably.

Some liners are also **washable**. This is a nice feature if your feet tend to sweat a lot.

## Tightening System

In-line skates utilize **buckles, laces, velcro**, or a combination of these features for tightening the boot across your foot and around your ankle. You will want to try several different tightening systems to see which system secures your foot the most comfortably. Take time to skate around the store; or even better, rent blades several times to try out the different tightening systems and see what works best for you (see Rentals).

## Wheels

The wheels on your in-line skates will greatly impact your skating performance. Because of their importance, there are several characteristics of the wheels that you will want to consider when purchasing in-line skates:

### • Number

In-line skates usually have three to five wheels mounted on the part of the skate known as the frame. The size of the frame and the skater's foot often determine the number of wheels on the skate. Many smaller skates will have **three** wheels. Most standard skates have **four** wheels. Speed skates will have **five** wheels.

For racing, five wheels add stability, but reduce the ability to turn. For in-line **dancing and trick skating** you will need the ability to turn, and therefore, will want a skate with three or four wheels. Four wheeled skates are the most common and versatile configuration. For in-line dancing and trick skating you may want to find out if **rocker adjustments** can be made to the wheels. (Rocker adjustments allow you to move the inner wheel(s) down so that the front and back wheels are not touching the ground.) The rocker adjustment will allow you to turn and spin faster.

You will also need the ability to turn if you want to learn to play **in-line hockey**. For hockey you will

want four wheels, but you will also want a shorter **frame** (approximately a 12 inch frame) than on a standard skate.

### • Size

Wheel size (measured in millimeters) will be marked on each wheel. The size wheels you choose can drastically effect how you skate. **Smaller wheels** (62mm to 72mm) keep you closer to the ground and provide a lower center of gravity. This lower center of gravity will help the beginning skater feel more stable and make balancing over your skates easier because you are not so high off the ground.

If you plan to skate longer distances and want a good aerobic workout, a **mid-size wheel** (72mm-76mm) might be a good choice for you. Keep in mind, you can always upgrade the size of your wheels. Start on wheels that you feel comfortable with and can learn the fundamentals on.

Wheels that are **larger** (78mm to 82mm) are the fastest and longest lasting; however, they are less stable because of the added height. You will probably want to wait until you are a more advanced skater to try these larger wheels.

### • Durometer

Durometer is a measure of how hard the wheels are. Ratings of the hardness of the wheels range from softest 75A, to hardest 93A. The most popular durometers are 78A and 82A. Keep in mind, a **softer wheel** will absorb more vibration on rough surfaces and has good traction for executing turns. A **harder wheel** will be faster for racing, but will not absorb vibration as well. Also, a heavier skater will compress a soft wheel more and may want to use a higher durometer (e.g., 82A to 85A for individuals over 160 lbs.).

### • Hub

The hub of the wheel is the stiff material in the center of the wheel that keeps the wheel from flexing under the pressure of skating. The hub is most efficient if it is **spoked** and makes up a good portion of the wheel's **diameter**. This hub is more efficient than a smaller hub that only outlines the center of the skate because it keeps the urethane wheel cooler and more rigid. (Note: Urethane is the hard rubber-like material of the wheel that actually makes contact with the ground.) Some inexpensive in-line skates may have wheels with no hubs at all. This is one area where a manufacturer may try to reduce costs.

Wheels without hubs do not roll as well as those with hubs.

#### • Bearings

Bearings are the metal casings on either side of the wheel that fit into the hub and allow the wheels to move smoothly. There are five kinds of bearings: AA, A, BB, B, and C. High performance AA bearings are needed for racing skates. For the most part, however, you can assume that *quality* in-line skates will have *quality* bearings.

If you hear any **noise** in the wheels when skating, this is an indicator that the bearings need to be cleaned or replaced. This noise in the wheels is something to listen for when purchasing or renting skates. The wheels need to spin freely without disruption, otherwise your skating performance will be hindered.

#### Getting the Right Fit

When trying on skates, the boot should be snug, but not tight. (You will want to be sure to wear your cotton sports socks to see that the boots fit correctly.) After tightening your boots with buckles, laces, or velcro, try moving your toes. You should have enough room for your toes to move a little. When you stand up your toes should barely touch the end of the boot. While standing, bend at the knees and squat down. Your toes should pull back away from the front of the boot slightly.

#### Getting the Right Price

Warning: Buying a model of in-line skates just because they're cheap may not pay off! Of course, buying the most expensive pair of blades you can find based on the myth that "*price always means quality*" may not pay off either!

In-line skates currently range in **price** from \$30 to \$400. Anticipate that over the life of the skates you will need an occasional set of new wheels, depending on how hard and how often you skate. Good *quality* in-line skates - maintain a high resale value.

A pair of skates under \$100 may be a good option for kids that are still growing and want to try the sport. When purchasing a less expensive skate, make sure the frame is aligned straight onto the lower boot shell. Purchase a skate made of rigid materials so that your ankles are held tightly in place. The

tightening system you choose will also contribute to ankle support. If you buy a less expensive skate with buckles, make sure the buckles are also made of rigid materials and are mounted tightly on the skate's shell. A less expensive skate may also come with wheels that have no hubs. This is one way manufacturers cut down on costs. Keep in mind, you can always buy new wheels for any pair of skates. Just make sure there is no noise when the wheels are turning. If you hear noise, most likely, the skates' bearings are bad.

Another option for less expensive skates is to buy them used. In-line skates can be found at resale shops, garage sales, and sporting goods shops that supply rental skates. Sporting goods shops will often sell used rental skates. (Note: Try an extra pair of socks if the boot of a used skate feels slightly large. Again, make sure the skates fit snugly and comfortably.) If the wheels are worn out on a used pair of skates, don't forget, you can always buy new wheels.

Note: If you grow out of a pair of skates, don't leave them in the back of your closet...sell them! In-line skates are getting more and more popular, try selling yours at a resale shop or garage sale.

For "older kids," aged 16 to 106 (remember, you're never too old to don a pair of *blades*), you may want to invest a little more. Quality skates will be comfortable, have a stiff outer shell, a comfortable inner liner, good wheels, and quality bearings. These skates will usually range in price from \$99 to \$400, but don't base your decision on price alone. Try them on and test them out around the store. Rent a pair if possible to get the full feel of the skate.

Getting the best pair of blades for your money will be a matter of trying different skates and shopping for price and services. Lower quality blades will cause you to work harder and tire faster; this will leave you less inclined to get back on your blades. So, look for quality in the skates you choose.

#### **Safety First**

The same day you purchase your skates you will want to purchase protective gear: wrist guards, knee and elbow pads, and a SNELL- or ANSI-approved helmet. You should find the SNELL or ANSI approval sticker inside the helmet. Be sure to figure the purchase of protective gear in when budgeting for your skates. Protective gear will cost from about \$15 to \$30 per item or \$50 to \$100 for a protective

gear package, which includes three or all four of the items. You may already have one of the protective items. Your bicycle or skateboarding helmet is great for in-line skating. Very few helmets are actually made specifically for in-line skating. Just make sure your helmet is SNELL- or ANSI-approved. All pieces of protective gear should fit correctly for maximum support.

#### **Other Considerations:**

- Warranty - do the skates have a warranty? If so, what does it include - parts & labor, only parts, only labor? How long is the warranty?
- Is there a skate/sporting goods shop in your area that repairs the skates you are considering or will you need to return them to the manufacturer for service? For repairs you may be able to do yourself, is there a shop that sells parts for the skates you are considering?
- Ask skate/sporting goods shops if they offer discounts/rebates for purchasing a skate and protective gear package from them.
- There is an option to buying your own skates. Many sporting goods stores offer in-line skates for rent. **Rentals** usually cost \$6 to \$15 per 24 hours. Some stores will let you have skates for an extra day (e.g., if you rent on Saturday and they are closed Sunday you may get to keep the skates through Monday at no extra cost). Some shops will offer only one model of skates for rent. This is okay for your first time, but if the skates you get feel uncomfortable don't be discouraged, you may just need another style of skate to feel comfortable. If you're looking to buy, the best place to rent is a shop that allows you to rent different styles of skates. This allows you to discover which skates work best for you before spending the money. In addition, skating around a store for a short period of time does not give you a good idea of what the skates will feel like after a half hour out on the pavement.

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#### References

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