

# FOOTHILLS BMX

city Torrington, Connecticut track director Roger Plaskett

For 15 years, Roger Plaskett and his group of volunteers have helped to make Foothills one of the NBL's most successful. A combination of innovative marketing ideas, a close relationship with the city, and hard work make the program tick year after year.

**When was your track founded?** Our track was founded in 1994 when we approached the "Mayor's Committee on Youth" to bring an alternate sports program to the city of Torrington, Connecticut. Two riders, Tom Johnson and Joe Ooherty, were instrumental in that initial meeting and idea to start a track here. I was the only "senior adult" who was involved with the initial concept.

**What does your track do to keep it fun?** We think we are unique in the fact that we have introduced a number of programs that are intended to make Foothills BMX more than just a race day facility. One program is our bimonthly free rider clinics. Our instructors are our more experienced riders, i.e. 10, 11, 12 Experts and even some of our local Super-Ex guys. Mostly though, it's our Experts who now feel more involved with us and are considered an integral part of the Foothills BMX experience.

**What kind of facilities are at your track?** We are pretty much a basic facility, meaning we have no snack shack and rely on Porta-Potties. We outsource the food vendors and are very happy with the results. We enjoy a decent profit and extend little volunteer resources to make the food situation work.

**What recruitment and promotion methods have you found to be most effective for bringing in new riders?** When our run of number one and number two in the NBL for rider count started nine years ago, it was a direct result of getting into the school

systems. We drew a 50-mile radius around the track on a map and formed a committee to contact the schools (about 50 schools). We send out approximately 16,000 flyers to come to our Open House nights at the track. The last three years we have gotten an average of 80 new riders. Bad percentage, but strength in numbers for sure. Another recruitment tool is our web site ([www.foothillsbmx.com](http://www.foothillsbmx.com)). We get 4,000 page views a week during the season. We post a minimum of 100 pictures after every race and also a complete race story for each event. Kids love to see their photos and they show their friends.

**Who are your local studs? Which local riders have found success on the National level?** They just keep coming. We have had a number of fast hot-rods. John Crossen for example got National #1 in 25-29 Expert a few years ago. Pete Lorenzo is probably the most popular rider right now and nearly unbeatable in our Money Opens. In the younger classes, Zach O'Neil is a three-time former National Champion.

**What's new at the track?** Probably the biggest redo that we did this year was the complete rebuild of our signature first turn. It had a five-figure cost associated with it but was much needed. It has gotten positive feedback from the riders. We will be doing a little bit of a revamp on our second straight during the fall and also some work on the starting hill where the gate meets the track.

**Are there any events in the community that your track is involved with?** We participate in the annual Memorial Day parade and recently participated in the Park and Recreation Department's City Park beautification program.

I personally am most proud of the fact that we are classified with the government as a 501c3 public charity organization. This is a

result of the help and sponsorships we have provided various youths from our communities through OCF referrals, a school for troubled kids, and a local Youth bureau.

**What fundraisers does your track hold throughout the year?** We rely heavily on support from the local business community. We are members of our local Chamber of Commerce and someone from our group attends the Business After Hours social events regularly. We have built a positive relationship through this exposure and have become well-known throughout the community. They support us through the purchase of advertising signs, monetary donations, and even material or service donations.

**Any volunteers you'd like to specifically thank for their hard work and dedication?** We have just finished our 15th season of racing. Over the course of the last nine years, we have been either number one or number two in the NBL for average rider count per race. This is due to the efforts of all of our volunteers both past and present. We have learned that it doesn't matter who does what, as certainly some people do more than others. We look at the staff of volunteers performing as one unit, truly a team effort that, at the end of the season, has simply added another block in our foundation of teamwork that we have been building on for the last 15 years. No one person is more valuable than another. I just want to thank everyone who has ever been involved with us. I would like to thank Bobby DesMarais of The Biker's Edge Bike Shops for stepping up and being our "Title Sponsor" for the 2009 season.

**What are the best features of your track? What sections do the riders like the most? Would you consider your track an Expert or Novice track or a mix?** That's a tough one. I certainly would consider the track a "mix". We believe that our track



We have introduced a number of unique programs intended to make the track more than just a race day facility. We hold bimonthly rider clinics free of charge with the local Experts and Super-Ex guys as the instructors, making them an integral part of the Foothills BMX experience.



» Roger Plaskett uses many ways to make his track a success. It starts with a well-kept and rider-friendly track, but it goes well beyond the dirt and jumps. He has made a priority of building a strong relationship with the City of Torrington by sending representatives to meetings with the Chamber of Commerce. In addition, the track is classified as a 501(c)3 charity thanks to its help with other community organizations and sponsorships for local youth. Their emphasis on getting fliers in every school in the area has guaranteed a solid local program for 15 years and is a simple recruiting method any track can duplicate.

needs to cater to all the proficiencies. All our obstacles are jumpable but also rollable. The signature jump would be our "Step-Down jump". It seems to be the favorite. We could be identified as a "feeder track" where we grow Connecticut BMX by nurturing and "feeding" riders to the Connecticut and National programs.

**How did this season go? What is your plan to grow the program for next season?** This season was just an "okay" season by our standards. Here in the Northeast we

had a tremendous amount of rain. Being a weekend track, it seemed like we were fighting the weather every week, holiday weekends and a lot of Nationals and Regionals earlier in the season. We still averaged 40 to 45 motos each Sunday. We will continue our campaign in the school system next season. This year we had nearly 40 sponsored riders. These kids went out and attained sponsors who paid for the whole season up front. I'd like to break 50 next year. Our motto is: "To keep BMX Racing affordable to the largest population of kids possible". Rider sponsors play a major role in reaching this goal.

**Anything else you'd like to add?** We have enjoyed a lot of success if you measure that success by the amount of fun not only enjoyed by the riders but by the volunteers as well. We strive to make the Foothills BMX experience a pleasant one for everyone who visits our facility. We are also unique in the fact that we have one of the strongest state programs in the country. The four tracks all located within one hour of each other working together as allies instead of adversaries has provided the opportunity for each track to feed each other. **BT**