

Turning it around

To level up his mastery of the double flair and nail a world-first triple flair, this British BMXer first had to send his thinking on a full 360

Words CHARLIE ALLENBY Photography EISA BAKOS

It's 8pm on a freezing evening in January this year, and Kieran Reilly is getting cold feet in both senses of the term. The 20-year-old freestyle BMXer from Gateshead is at Asylum Skatepark in Nottinghamshire, staring down a custom-built roll-in towards an imposing 3.18m quarterpipe and the challenge of landing the world's first triple flair.

There's a reason why this trick has never been achieved before. Three full backflips followed by a 180° rotation, the triple flair requires not only a specialist set-up to provide enough time for all that spinning, but also a specific mindset capable of taking the risks – and bruising hits – that come with the inevitable repeated failures. Reilly himself had attempted it in May last year, without success.

"I crashed so many times that I started assuming I was going to crash – I couldn't get past the mental block," he recalls of that occasion. This time, he says, "I have a feeling of déjà vu." Then the miracle happens. After hours of almost-theres, Reilly flips, spins and plants both wheels perfectly on the landing, literally sprinting over his handlebars as he roars in triumph.

If there were any doubt that he could achieve this trick, it wasn't from those who have watched the ascendency of this phenomenal rider: from the YouTube video of an 11-year-old Reilly pulling off a 720 over a spine at his local skatepark in

2012, to signing up with BMX legend Bas Keep's Tall Order team and entering his first international tournament, the Festival International des Sports Extrêmes (FISE) in Montpellier, France, six years later. In December 2020, Keep himself handed Reilly his own official Red Bull helmet.

"That was definitely one of the best moments," Reilly said at the time. Rest assured, there are more to come.

THE RED BULLETIN: When did you realise you might have a knack for BMX?

KIERAN REILLY: When I started entering amateur competitions at 10 or 11 and saw where other people my age were at. I enjoyed the competitive side, but I also liked knowing I'd put in more work than other kids. It was a good feeling to see it paying off.

While growing up, was there ever pressure to 'get a proper job'?

My parents are so supportive, but they wanted me to have something else to fall back on. They were just looking out for me, like all parents do. So I did joinery for three years, but I didn't like it at all. It unlocked a new mindset, though; I realised that if didn't push hard when I was riding, I would be stuck in that job. I became disciplined and put a lot of pressure on myself. I would go to the skatepark on my own. I wasn't going there to socialise; I was there because I wanted to become a professional rider. And in order to do that, I had to work as hard as, if not harder than, all these other guys.

What has driven you to continue improving in your sport?

When I ride, I enjoy it more when I'm pushing harder. I'm quite an aggressive rider and I like being scared and the feeling of getting over it. Sometimes the mental side is really hard, so when you do get past it there's a real adrenalin rush.

A lot of your tricks require you to manoeuvre while also spinning at incredible speeds. How are you able to slow things down in your mind?

It's not 'Spidey sense', more muscle memory. You've done similar things for such a long time that you have more aerial awareness and know where things are going to be.

How does the triple flair compare with previous tricks you've learned?

I went into it thinking it was going to be the same as transitioning from a single flair into a double, which wasn't as tough. But I couldn't have been more wrong. My first thought when landing it was, "I don't have to go through any more pain to do it." I was exhausted, I'd taken a beating, and I was stoked that I'd finally done it.

What did you have to do to get over that line?

I started doing CrossFit. I changed my diet up and worked a lot on the mental side, trying to understand fear rather than let it take over – turning it into excitement. And I did a hell of a lot more double flairs to get used to the rotation.

What has the experience taught you about yourself?

It humbled me. If it was easy, it wouldn't have changed my outlook on fear or kickstarted me to get where I am now. I've been at that edge and red-lined. From now, I'm going to compare every future challenge with this one.



To watch Kieran Reilly's successful world-first triple flair, scan the QR code



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