A PRODUCT OF NEW YORK

PONY

40 YEAR RETROSPECTIVE 1972–2012
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But first, let’s rewind this story to 1969, a year of monumental unrest and social change in the USA. Richard Nixon was elected president, Neil Armstrong stepped on the moon and New York was at the epicentre of a rare sporting triple triumph. The New York Mets took home the World Series, Super Bowl III was won by the New York Jets then the following year the New York Knicks bagged their first title. It was an incredible sequence.

Meanwhile, the staid athletic industry plodded away, cobbled together myriad models for esoteric Olympic sports, prompting Muller to have a vision that would become the foundation of his fledgling company. Certain that casual sportswear would be the new wardrobe staple, he pitched the idea to his investors and Pony was born. As far as revolutionary foresight goes, Muller’s hunch seems an absolute no-brainer, but bearing in mind the ‘lifestyle’ category barely existed at this time, it was still considered a gamble. Sweat-pant chic was light years away. Sports shoes were strictly for the court, not the street, but Muller was adamant. He always was.

Born in Manhattan back in 1972, long before anyone gave a flying Swoosh, Pony was founded by Uruguay-born entrepreneur Roberto Muller, a charismatic maverick who lived life by the seat of his pants. Literally the heart and sole of the company, Muller created Pony in his own image, which is to say it was equal-parts energetic, rambunctious and oh-so-ambitious. Within a few short years, this self-styled Yankee swagger had Pony strutting the globe at the vanguard of a new era in athletic colonialism.
Reggie Jackson belts his 500th homer wearing Pony.

1984

FOOTBALL & BASEBALL

When it came to the great American pastimes of football, baseball and basketball, Pony was a magnet for extroverts. Pittsburgh’s Franco Harris wore Pony when he caught the ‘Immaculate Reception’ to clinch the Steelers’ first-ever playoff victory in 1972, a play that still ranks as one of the greatest in NFL history. Not to be outdone, the ragtag Oakland Raiders plundered the 1976 Superbowl wearing Pony, epitomising the brand’s freewheeling whatever-it-takes ethos. The 80s were also dominated by the arm of Dan Marino, who wore Pony cleats on the field and snazzy Pony deck shoes on his day off!

Baseball legends don’t get much bigger than Hank Aaron, who wore Pony on his way to hammering a new home run record. When you think baseball though, you naturally think New York Yankees. In the 1970s it was Reggie Jackson, Mr October himself, who carried the torch for Pony in the Big Apple, causing hysteria whenever he appeared in public. Even after leaving Yankee Stadium, Pony stood by their man as he spanked home run number 500 in 1984.

THINK BIG

Thinking big was Muller’s other signature move. His personal legacy includes a dynamic role in the commercialisation of both the Olympics and World Cup soccer, stories that will deservedly be told another time. He also upped the ante with lucrative endorsement deals for professional sportsmen who had previously been paid in nickels, dimes and free sneakers. The first to fully realise the potential of global production, Muller also pushed the performance envelope with a number of innovations including a secret inflatable cushioning system that predated the Reebok Pump by more than a few years. With research labs in multiple locations, Pony was deadly serious about staying one step ahead of its competitors.

THE ENTERTAINERS

A quick study of the raw talent on the company roster in the 70s and 80s reveals a surprising number of household names. Pony athletes, like the brand, made it to the top on their own terms. They were the individuals; the entertainers; the iconoclasts. More often than not they were winners as well. But being a true Pony athlete meant being a team player – Muller fervently believing that was where the human sporting spirit shone brightest. While other athletic brands focused on solitary pursuits like running and tennis, Pony was all about making the team.
It was in basketball though, that Pony truly excelled. At one point they reportedly had 200 NBA stars on their roster, including such greats as Bob McAdoo, Cedric Maxwell, Earl Monroe, David Thompson, John Havlicek, Darryl Dawkins and the all-time phenom, Wilt Chamberlin, aka the Chairman of the Boards.

Perhaps Pony’s most memorable hardwood moment came when pocket-rocket Spud Webb took out the 1986 NBA Slam Dunk contest. An amazing achievement that contradicted his 5ft 7in frame, Webb’s tenacity and competitiveness came straight from the Pony playbook. Selling his pro-model known as City Wings with the slogan ‘Why get air when you can fly?’ was another balls-out indication of Pony’s cocksure confidence.

To be fair, Pony wasn’t just about endorsements at the elite level. Targeting football-mad Southern and Midwestern states like Texas, a seeding campaign that laced high school quarterbacks with a new model known subtly as ‘The Stud’ was typical of Pony’s inventive approach.

This cleated-turf-trainer-hybrid-boot became a fashion bonanza and a breakout success, selling millions of pairs. Over in New York, as the don of basketball sneakers Bobbito Garcia notes in his interview, Pony was also the first brand to be active at a local amateur level by sponsoring New York’s iconic Rucker Tournament. At the same time, Pony reps were flossing promising up-and-comers with free sneakers, an unheard-of marketing innovation at the time.

Pony athlete David Thompson was rumoured to have a vertical leap of 48 inches.

**ENDORSEMENTS**
THE PONY HALL OF FAME.

MAY 1976
Pele sets a world record for most goals scored by a single player (1,245) in PONY shoes.

MAY 1976
Australian tennis great Ken Rosewall joins PONY Advisory Board.

JULY 1976
PONY participates in Olympic Games for the first time, winning gold, silver and bronze medals in basketball, boxing and track and field in Montreal.

SEPTEMBER 1976
Ken Norton fights Muhammad Ali in front of 31,000 fight fans at Yankee Stadium and 250 million television viewers around the world.

OCTOBER 1976
PONY honors Pele's world record 1,250 goals with the golden PONY shoe award.

JANUARY 1977
Oakland Raiders, many wearing PONY, defeat Minnesota Vikings to win Super Bowl.

FEBRUARY 1977
Over 50 NBA players switch to PONY.

MARCH 1977
PONY becomes the official shoe of the American Amateur Softball Association.

APRIL 1977
Giorgio Chiniglia, North American Soccer League's top scorer, joins PONY team.

NOVEMBER 1977
Rodrigo Valdez becomes first champion to win world boxing title in PONY shoes by beating Benny Briscoe.

JANUARY 1978
Radhouane of France wins Sao Paolo race in PONY while Bill Emmertron finishes 2.001 mile run (original PONY Express race) in PONY.

FEBRUARY 1978
Leon Spinks wins WBA heavyweight title in PONY shoes as he upsets Muhammad Ali.

JUNE 1978
Larry Holmes captures WBC heavyweight championship over Ken Norton with both fighters wearing PONY.

JUNE 1978
Heisman Trophy winner Earl Campbell joins PONY prior to his rookie season with Houston Oilers and becomes NFL MVP in same year.

AUGUST 1978
New York Cosmos, with seven starters wearing PONY, win second consecutive NASL championship.

FEBRUARY 1979
David Thompson of the Denver Nuggets joins PONY and wins NBA All Star Game's MVP award the same day.

MARCH 1979
Boston Celtics' president and general manager Red Auerbach, greatest coach in NBA history, joins PONY as chairman of Basketball Advisory Board.

APRIL 1979
Sharif Kahn wins 10th North American Squash Championship with PONY.

JULY 1979
PONY signs exclusive contract with Major League Baseball Umpire's Association.

SEPTEMBER 1979
Tracy Austin wins U.S. Open on her way to reaching Women's Tennis Association No. 1 worldwide ranking in PONY.

OCTOBER 1979
Dave Parker, Willie Stargell and PONY lead Pittsburgh Pirates over Baltimore Orioles in World Series.

OCTOBER 1979
Franklin Jacobs wins high jump gold medal with PONY at Pan American and World Games.

FEBRUARY 1980
Mexican national soccer team signs exclusive contract with PONY.

MARCH 1980
UCLA basketball team, and PONY, reach NCAA basketball finals.

SEPTEMBER 1980
New York Cosmos win fourth NASL title by defeating Fort Lauderdale, 3-2, with all three goals scored by PONY wearers Chinaglia and Romero.

OCTOBER 1980
Larry Holmes and PONY retain WBC heavyweight championship with technical knockout over Muhammad Ali in Las Vegas, in richest fight in boxing history.

JANUARY 1981
Ron Jaworski quarterbacks Philadelphia Eagles to National Football Conference Championship in PONY.

JANUARY 1981
Uruguay wins mini soccer World Cup with seven players in PONY.

FEBRUARY 1981
PONY wins 'Sporting Goods Dealership Award' as outstanding athletic goods manufacturer.

MAY 1981
Boston Celtics' forward Cedric Maxwell and PONY win MVP of NBA playoffs.

APRIL 1981
Texas State Legislature votes Earl Campbell as state's fourth hero, alongside Sam Houston, Stephen F. Austin and Davy Crockett, after he wins third NFL rushing title in succession in PONY.

AUGUST 1981
Uruguay national basketball team wins South American championship with all players in PONY.

AUGUST 1981
Team PONY wins championship of Rucker Professional League, oldest summer basketball league in the nation, in New York City.

SEPTEMBER 1981
Tracy Austin wins U.S. Open in PONY again.

TODAY:
Millions of athletes all over the world make PONY the fastest growing athletic shoe in the world.
burgeoning b-boy and double dutch scene. High as a kite on street style, models like the MVP, Slam Dunk, Pro 80, Starter and City Wings were dipped in suitably full-flavour colourways.

As the disco era came to a close, Pony rolled with the punches. By 1986 however, Muller would reluctantly sell his share of the company to longtime friend and business rival Horst Dassler, son of adidas patriarch Adi Dassler. Lacking the guiding faith of its founder, Pony’s star gradually faded, changing hands and shedding its mojo year by year.

Some 40 years after the brand was born, Pony is back in the game. With its New York attitude restored and the official blessing of its founder and guiding force, this authentic sports brand is poised to once again deliver the goods.

Let’s rewind the VHS tape to a time when Pony was king and relive the glory days of this groundbreaking sportswear brand. It seems improbable in hindsight that this uptown upstart could seriously challenge the entrenched German giants adidas and Puma, but as Pony would prove many times, a healthy ego combined with fearless audacity certainly went a long way. That drive to win, no matter what the odds, reflected the unflinching conviction and verve of Pony’s founder, as you’ll read in our interview.

Casting the sporting search wider, Pony was also active in soccer, helping to bring the European game to the American heartland. Having first met Pelé while playing junior football in Uruguay, Muller made sure the Athlete of the Century was wearing Pony during his stint with the New York Cosmos. Pony also signed the controversial Paolo Rossi, who ended up leading Italy to the 1982 FIFA World Cup title, scoring six magical goals and winning Golden Boot honours in the process. Giorgio Chinaglia was another Cosmos player to wear a chevron on the pitch.

Despite Muller’s team-first decree, individuals would become part of the Pony family as the brand pressed on into new realms. Boxing was one sport earmarked by Pony, with Larry Holmes, Leon Spinks and Muhammad Ali floating across the canvas in Pony, complete with giant silky chevron shorts to match. Gold-medal winning Mary Lou Retton somersaulted her way to Olympic fame with Pony emblazoned on her leotard. In tennis, Pony signed Tracy Austin, who won the US Open in 1979 and 1981. Big servin’ Roscoe Tanner and Australia’s Mark Edmonson were other Pony tennis signings.

With the enigmatic Muller always keen to embrace the counterculture, there is another dimension to the Pony story we uncovered during research for this book. A Thrasher magazine cover from July 1986 featuring Jesse Martinez wearing suspiciously red, white and black Pony hightops is evidence of a latent skateboarding chapter to this story. According to Muller, hip hop and Pony also snuggled up, flashing on the feet of Manhattan’s burgeoning b-boy and double dutch scene. High as a kite on street style, models like the MVP, Slam Dunk, Pro 80, Starter and City Wings were dipped in suitably full-flavour colourways.

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1984 PONY
BREAKDANCE
COMMERCIAL
“FIRST THING YOU
GOTTA DO IS STEP
INTO PONY’S
WINNING SHOES.
P-O-N-Y!
POUND THE STREETS,
TOUCH THE SKY!
P-O-N-Y!”
Tell us a bit about your background. You grew up in Uruguay, is that right?

I was born in Montevideo, which is the capital of Uruguay. It’s a tiny country between Argentina and Brazil. Our passion for sports and our desire to go out and win is unbelievable. It comes from the native Charrúa Indians, who were never defeated. That underdog spirit helped us win the World Cup. Twice!

You played a bit of soccer yourself growing up?

I played for the club Atlético Peñarol in Montevideo as a youngster. All Uruguayan youngsters dream of playing for the national team, La Celeste, but my father quickly snuffed out that dream and sent me to boarding school in the UK!

From Uruguay as a teenager, how did you make it to the United States?

In Uruguay I was a little rebellious and I even occupied my school because I believed in Fidel Castro’s revolution! A lot of South America was in turmoil at that time. If I’d known the kind of problems it would cause in the future, I certainly would not have done it. My father sent me to Europe to be educated, otherwise he thought I would end up being a bum.

I didn’t know a word of English but I graduated and was fortunate enough that sports were my outlet. Somehow I earned my chemical and textile engineering degree from the University of Leeds. It was a great education that would help me develop the Starter model and other technically advanced Pony shoes. It also helped with the sourcing of production from Taiwan and Korea, something that Pony pioneered. I came to the

Hailing from Uruguay, Roberto Muller was a gifted sportsman who turned his rebellious streak as a youth into a successful corporate career. Based on his hunch that the sports-lifestyle industry would soon infiltrate fashion, Muller founded Pony in 1972, turning his Product of New York into an international brand. With a lifetime spent in the company of athletes such as Pelé and Muhammad Ali, Muller is an amazingly charismatic raconteur. Whether it’s punching Sylvester Stallone, signing Larry Holmes or bribing players with hundred dollar bills sawn in half, Muller was a ‘player’ with cajones to match. His passion for life burns as brightly today as it did when he reluctantly sold the company in 1986. As he says, ‘I put a lot of me in Pony’.
INTERVIEW

United States to research synthetic fibres in the hope of enrolling at Harvard. I got the call from my attorney who said my papers would make me eligible for the Vietnam draft. I flew straight back to Uruguay, leaving my total worldly possessions, which consisted of a 1956 Mercury sedan and a record player. Montevideo was obviously not a place where you could start a career, so I chose Argentina and started at DuPont. At 26 I became general manager of a petrochemical company. For some reason that is beyond me, I was head-hunted to become the president of Levi Strauss in Argentina. Back in the 60s if Coke was the drink of the world, Levi’s was the dream. It was a very progressive company. All managers worked for three weeks in the factory learning how to make jeans, to respect quality and hard work, something I carried for the rest of my life. This is when the seeds of Pony were planted.

What happened next?

Well, executives were being kidnapped in Argentina, so I was moved to Miami from where I could run Latin America. Within a year I was in charge of diversified product development. Australia was considered the same as California 20 years ago and so I decided to launch the first Levi’s sneakers there and it sold one million pairs in one year. The entire company was in awe! I don’t think Australia had 10 million inhabitants in 1971. Now you have to understand the context. At this time, adidas was turning over $12 to $18 million, Nike didn’t exist and the largest company was Keds in all types of different sneakers. There was no apparel, because the first tracksuit was only done for a Peter Sellers movie.

Before that, the national team of Germany had one tracksuit and a bag but they never marketed them. Look at the photos of the Olympics in the 1930s, 40s and 50s – there were grey sweats with USA or Australia written on them, which were warm-up suits made by Champion and Russell. So here was what I believed was the next revolution, which was the application of sport into leisure time. I told the Levi’s board that we should create a sports Inc in 1971. They chose to focus on their core denim business, but offered to help me go it alone in the American market. I said great!

Was there a catch?

No, no catch. The owner Walter Haas was very supportive. They were really a great company. It was my school, where I learned about marketing, business decency, respect and the team. One of the great things about the creation of Pony was that it was set up as a team. I was an entrepreneur who came from corporate life who understood that you cannot do everything yourself – making the shoe, selling the shoe, producing the shoe, marketing the shoe and putting it on players – it just doesn’t happen. The management team was built when I moved to New York, after I realised that San Francisco was not a mecca where a sports company could be built. Bob Schott, my first senior executive, was the head of Uninoyal, the absolute premier sports and sneaker company. They had real distribution with PRO-Keds and their famous 69er.

The deep connection between sneakers and the tyre business seems an unlikely one.

Yes, vulcanised shoes were made at rubber factories that were originally tyre factories. If you take Dunlop and Converse, they both came out of the vulcanised concept that invented tyres. The concept of a cold cemented shoe for sports was totally alien – except for one company in the world and the guy who invented that was Adi Dassler. He did the Superstar and the Stan Smith, and then his son Horst stole the idea and set it up in France, which is a true story.

What made you believe Pony, this new upstart New York brand, could take on Adi Dassler and win?

I was absolutely crazy! I was 30 years old and thought I could do no wrong. Sometimes you really have this faith in your destiny. I was desperate to pay the IRS and our salaries. One day I went to the bank because we needed some money and they somehow managed to lock me in overnight. They forgot I was waiting and I ended up sleeping there! When one financier dropped us there’d be a mini miracle and someone would save the day and allow us to pay everyone in full. I always believed that somehow we would make it because there was a huge market opportunity. When you come from South America with 100% inflation, volatility is not something you’re afraid of.

How did you build Pony’s identity?

Pony sounded great, like a real American horse in the wild, and the letters reminded me of ‘Levi’. We placed them at the back of the shoe and made sure that it captured the imagination of the consumers. If you see adidas, Puma and Nike shoes, all of them have the logos and icons at the front of the shoe. That’s also why we picked boxing, because for two hours you have that Pony chevron all the time in your face. Many of those things were done strategically and thoughtfully, they weren’t happenstance. We were a brand that was borne out of

“...and the letters reminded me of ‘Levi’...”
creating something counterculture, but at the same time with value, with the right characteristics and the right DNA. We didn’t want to be adidas, which was the institution, and we didn’t want to be crazy Nike, who only serviced running. We wanted to be street. But at the same time, we were all about performance. You saw this at the Montreal Olympics where Puoy was number two on the medal tally.

Why is New York so important to the Pony story?

The first Pony office was on Madison Avenue and 59th, then we moved to 250 Park Avenue South. In the 60s it was all about the West Coast, but in the 70s the trends were all coming from New York. In sports you had the rise of the Jets, Knicks and Cosmos. It was an international city, which allowed us to form a relationship with Mitsubishi who would manufacture our shoes. Being close to Europe helped us quickly sign an agreement with Hutchinson-Mapa, the largest French company in sneakers at the time. We signed in Italy and also with Pentland in England. We were in over 100 countries after a few years! That made us the second most distributed athletic brand in the world behind adidas. We were really pioneering! In France we were number two, ahead of Puma. Armin Dassler, son of Puma founder Rudolf, had to give up France in bankruptcy because he couldn’t compete with adidas and Pony.

Do you remember the very first Pony sneaker that rolled off the assembly line?

Actually we had two at the same time. The Starter, which was one of our best models, was a vulcanised version of a leather shoe, and we also had a similar version called the McAdoo. Very early on we made running shoes, then basketball, and in the second season, we made cleats for baseball and American football. We felt that ‘team’ was the thing that brought the qualities of sport to life. The individualism of running and tennis is great, but it isn’t what gives quality to sport. So basketball and cleats were the core of the brand and that’s what we stood for. Yes, we had running and tennis and we were the number one shoe in badminton and squash, handball and women’s hockey, but we also had a phenomenally successful football shoe that became a fashion shoe.

Was the success of the football shoe a happy accident or part of a deliberate strategy?

We were trying to capture the imagination of the high school kids and influence them into not buying a Nike, Reebok or a Puma. So we made a studded shoe with a black chevron and we did it in suede so that you could actually match it with the colours of your school. We gave it to the captain of the high school team for free and we sold one million in each style!

Anyone outside the US might not understand how big a deal high school sports is.

Football is a religion in Texas. High school football is the ultimate religion, it is not college, it is not NFL, it is the state high school championship and it is unbelievable! If you’ve seen Friday Night Lights it’s nothing compared to the real thing. They play the finals in front of 75,000 people at the Astro Dome. These kids are selected to go to some of the greatest schools and once those kids started to wear our AstroTurf shoe, it became a rage. Foot Locker and Foot Action were driving us nuts. We couldn’t make enough shoes, we were flying. It was crazy. We sold a million and a half pairs of those shoes. It was a phenomenon.

You had similar grassroots success with softball too?

The Challenger was a softball shoe that sold huge numbers in the Midwest. It was a time of economic turmoil and labour disputes, and softball became a regular daily pastime for striking workers. Pony was the blue-collar, hard-working, value-for-money sneaker of America.

Athlete endorsements were always a key part of Pony’s approach. Who was the first athlete that Pony signed?

The very first serious signing was Earl ‘The Pearl’ Monroe from the Knicks. Again, following the idea of Clyde Frazier, Monroe was equally famous, so we made a shoe called the MVP, because he was Most Valuable Player in the year the Knicks won the championship. $5000 was a huge contrast at the time. Subsequent to that, we had a very interesting episode at the Olympics. Converse had exclusive rights and adidas and Pony were thrown out. Our shoes were thrown out into the parking lot.

This is Montreal in 1976?

Right. I actually talked to a guy who was a former athlete and he was able to get into the changing rooms and get the two best Olympic basketball players. I gave them envelopes with 500 cut-off hundred dollar bills and said I would give them the other halves when they joined the NBA if they actually wore Pony Sneakers in that last game! So they switched shoes just four minutes before starting the game.

THE PONY JUMPSUIT

The year is 1985. The location in Wimbledon. The suitably named Anne White is playing Pam Shriver in the first round and it is cold. After taking off her warm-up tracksuit White reveals a stunning one-piece Lyca bodysuit made by Pony. The crowd gasps in astonishment. The match proceeds through the first two sets but as play is stopped due to bad light, the umpire tells White to change her outfit the next day. The incident is all over the news and though White loses the match, 25 years later she is still famous for her white suit. Recently she said, ‘I realise now that I was ahead of my time, but I was just doing something I believed in: staying warm.’
PONY #1 AMERICAN SHOE AT WORLD CUP

World Cup finals were seen by over 2 billion people worldwide. Argentina.

REGGIE PICKS PONY (see pg 3)
Mr October! Controversial, but a great guy. Not a guy as well. Reggie Jackson was a larger-than-life Pony personality who sadly passed away with cancer a decade later. Underdogs. Their win helped make Pony a special brand. The ‘cardiac kids’ at North Carolina State. When they won the Final Four in 1983 with Lorenzo Charles’ shot on the buzzer it was a huge upset. They were coming off five come-from-behind games in a row and were super underdogs. Their win helped make Pony a special brand. I was friends with their larger-than-life coach Jimmy V who sadly passed away with cancer a decade later.

Reggie Jackson was a larger-than-life Pony personality as well.

As I told you, I left Uruguay because I was rebel. I would probably have ended up in jail. A lot of people will tell you that I was an asshole. Obviously that kind of personality doesn’t go well in corporate life, where you don’t make waves and you play nice with everybody. That’s important. We always believed that we were different.

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Speaking of personalities, how did you take Pelé away from Puma?

Ali wasn’t one of our favourites. There were boxers like Larry Holmes and Kenny Norton who loved Pony. They would do anything for us! Ali was a guy that only cared about Ali and he wasn’t getting anything from adidas. He had heard that we were paying Larry. We gave Larry $1000 even though he was under no contract at all. He was still nobody. He came to us at the office in New York all the way from Philadelphia. He said, ‘Nobody has ever given me any money for anything!’ The whole story went around, everybody heard it.

For us, boxing was all about promoting the Pony chevron. Carlos Monzon was a street fighter, and he helped make us the first brand to bring NY street appeal to Europe. Monzon made Pony a celebrity symbol. Back then it was very snobish to be in the front row of a fight. It was like a Lady Ga Ga concert. When Monzon fought in Monte Carlo it was the greatest event in Europe. Prince Rainier and Grace Kelly were there along with Jean-Claude Bonttier, Brigitte Bardot and Jean-Paul Belmondo. It was all very elitist.

We even signed up Sylvester Stallone for Rocky IV, but then adidas were very upset and they sued him. We talked to him a few times but he got very aggressive with us. We ended up getting into a fist fight in a club in Los Angeles.

It definitely was a mistake, but it was a mistake committed by adidas. Puma and Pony. You have to understand that running was perceived by the entire world as full of crazy masochist guys up in the north west of America willing to run 40 kilometres. It was a small group of fanatics before the New York Marathon. What changed the running world wasn’t Nike, it was Runner’s World magazine and its founder Bob Anderson. He made the competition between Brooks, Saucony, New Balance and Nike. He put Nike at the bottom and made New Balance number one. That created the battle and people started talking.

During the 70s and 80s, one of the great social conversations was sports sneakers. They were the fashion of the moment. So whether you were a Pony fan or you were a Nike fan depended very much on your personality. If you were a geek, and you were thin, you liked to run, you chose Nike, Saucony or Brooks. We had running shoes, but we weren’t treated as part of the running community and neither was adidas.

To be honest, we missed the revolution of eight million runners. I was much more focused on the team, that’s my sphere. I think if Michael Jordan hadn’t been who he was, Nike would still be a running company. Phil Knight is still a running guy. He likes tennis and running and John McEnroe really helped but he really wasn’t into team sports. Subsequently, obviously, Nike did everything, but if you look at his history he went from running to McEnroe to Tiger Woods.

New York in the early 1980s: hip hop starts to grip. When did you begin to take an interest in what was happening on the streets?

We were born on the streets! Not only were we cognizant of the teams and the players, but we – even ahead of signing star players – had a basketball team in the
“I was absolutely crazy! I was 30 years old and thought I could do no wrong. Sometimes you really have this faith in your destiny... I always believed that somehow we would make it because there was a huge market opportunity. When you come from South America with 100% inflation, volatility is not something you’re afraid of.”
Harlem League. We had Lower East Side teams and teams in the Bronx. Then when breakdancing came we sponsored 90% of the breakdancing crews and all the events that happened on the streets of New York. And we became the number one skateboarding shoe, way before Vans and everybody else! We held inner city skateboarding and breakdancing events. The very first hip hop guys were all Pony.

Russell Simmons and his group Run DMC went to adidas. But during the initial era, on the streets you could say it was 70% Pony. There was no Nike at all, it was only adidas or us, the Superstar or the Pony Legend or the Pony MVP. Whether it was double dutch tournaments, breakdancing or hard-fought, really crazy basketball tournaments in the Rucker League where we won the championship. You know we actually brought NBA players in during the off season? We let them grow beards and shave their heads so people couldn’t recognise them and we won championships! I have three or four Rucker League championship trophies in my garage, because I played two or three minutes, just to say that I played! Not that I can play... I can’t do basketball.

Can you name names? Who did you recruit to the Rucker tournaments?

Peter Vecsey was our coach and he wrote for the New York Post. He’s the premier writer in basketball in America today and he also wrote the Pony Express. We had guys like Maurice Cheeks from Philadelphia and Orlando Woolridge play a couple of times. At one time we had 200 to 250 NBA players, so it’s hard for me to remember specifically who we recruited. Whenever there were strong inner city tournaments in LA, in Watts and so on, we had tournaments sponsored by Pony.

You mentioned the Pony Express, what did that publication do for the company?

At this time there were no communication systems like today, you didn’t have an intranet in your company and you couldn’t communicate to retailers through websites. The idea was to create a magazine that combined Pony athletes with a little bit of gossip. Not only the stats, but what they’re doing, where they’re going out, are they going to get married etc? There were no sports magazines so the retailers were really eager for it.

We were sending 20,000 issues a month and it was a very, very efficient vehicle to showcase new models, our campaigns and posters, highlighting our athletes and competing consistently against campaigns that were much larger than ours.

In the 80s, technology became essential to the sneaker industry. Was Pony able to compete in the escalating tech race with other brands?

We were so advanced that the first shoe with air in the world was made by Pony! Spud Webb’s shoe was an inflatable design that I patented... Now the problem is, you couldn’t play a whole game with it, but it had a valve and you could inflate it to 40PSI. So when you talk about the first patent of an inflatable shoe, Pony did it. When you talk about the first double-mesh shoe, we did it. When you talk about the separation of tongues, where we could have a tongue that was baseball or rugby using Velcro, we invented that. Chevron logos that were removable? We invented that. We had three labs when Nike didn’t have one! We had one in New York, one in Taiwan and one in Korea.

We also searched for materials in Germany and Japan. We looked for new components, new compounds, new breathable materials. We invented the first snow shoe for football. Every time it snowed, didn’t matter whether they were with Nike or anybody, they would switch to our shoes. I think I made as good a running shoe as anybody else, but the perception, the image of Pony, was not there unfortunately.

You obviously have a great deal of pride in what you created with Pony. Now that the brand is coming back with its New York roots intact, how do you feel?

Elasted... hopeful. I’ve tried this twice before, but never put my name to it. I’ve never done this interview for anybody else ever since I sold the company. It’s the single most important period of my life. Of all the things I have done, nothing matters to me except Pony. I always regretted having sold it. I always regretted signing the option for the sale, I did that out of friendship and out of being grateful, because I really needed $20 million then.

To be here, giving you this interview, it is one of the most emotional experiences in my life. I really am... I’m sorry. I put a lot of me in Pony. Pony was my life, it was my family’s life. I think it’s a legacy that deserves better than what it’s got. It was a pioneer in many, many aspects. No other brand went global from scratch. It took 30 or 40 years for adidas to do that and we did it in a matter of two, three years.

I’m grateful that I had the opportunity, because I’m more humble today... I was an arrogant son of a gun! I’m very proud to have been a part of its inception and to have been invited to participate in its future.
Roberto’s mention of a patented Pony Air unit in the soles of Spud Webb’s shoes sent us scrambling to the US Patent Office for confirmation. We did indeed find an application for this patent back in 1982!

This is the description: 'A shoe of the inflatable type having a midsole supporting member with a number of hollow downwardly extending support posts intercommunicated by channels recessed in the upper surface of the member. The upper surface is covered with a layer of natural rubber, to form enclosed air spaces with the hollows of the posts, and (in cooperation with the channels) conduits providing restricted passageways interconnecting the hollows of the posts. A valve extends from the exterior surface of the heel of the shoe to permit inflation by injection of air into the posts and conduits.'
Before we get into it, should I call you Spud or by your real name?

You can call me Spud. If I say Anthony, people will still ask me 'Hey Spud, what’s your real name?' So either one will do. [laughs] A lot of people think I was named after a potato, but it was actually the Sputnik satellite, which was then shortened to Spud. It was in 1963 when the Russian spacecraft went out into orbit and I guess people think they have this great sense of humour who give you a nickname, you just got to live with it!

Speaking of living with things, you’re famous for several reasons. First of all, you can jump. Do you remember when you first slammed a basket?

It was during the summer before my senior year in high school. To be honest, it wasn’t something that I paid a lot of attention to because every guy in my neighbourhood could dunk. So it really didn’t matter. You more or less did it because you could just do it.

Were you a David Thompson fan. He had a massive vertical leap.

Well I went to North Carolina State College so we went to the same school. Back then, you would hear the stories about him at campus and at practice and in games, but I never had the opportunity to see him play live in person.
INTERVIEW

CITY WINGS HIGH 1986

Secondly, I have to ask you about the dunk competition in 1986 when you beat Dominique Wilkins. The footage is crazy. It was a huge upset at the time. What does that moment mean to you?

I didn’t ever watch too much of it. They show a little bit of the footage when they introduce me when I attend events but I was never really big on the dunk contest back then, because all I wanted was just to play basketball. It’s been a moment that has stuck with me all my life and not many guys got the opportunity to win one, that’s for sure.

Michael Jordan’s reaction is priceless. He just can’t believe what he’s seen. That’s an incredible accolade in itself.

Like I said, those dunks I’d been doing since the twelfth grade. So it wasn’t like it was something that I just made up on the day. But yeah, I can see how Jordan would have had that type of reaction because he had never seen me dunk a basketball. I probably would have got those reactions from my teammates too, because they hadn’t seen me dunk either. I was too busy trying to make the team! Trying to prove to people that I could jump high was not what I was about. I wanted to be a basketball player first and foremost.

Do you still have the trophy that you won on the day?

Yes I do. I think it’s at my mom’s house. I rarely keep that sort of stuff around.

Thirdly, at 5ft 7in, you defied the odds. You must have had incredible determination and willpower to play at the elite level for 12 years. You also had 110 career blocks. Are there any particular stats that were most important to you?

At the time, there were no other guys my size playing in the NBA so it wasn’t like I had something to compare myself to. I would just go out there and play. I didn’t really care about who I was up against, I just wanted to play basketball. The only thing back then that was important to me was winning. I mean today, it’s a different story, it’s all about scoring more points so you can get paid. Bottom line, all I cared about was winning. I didn’t really care much about stats, I never really did follow them. I just hoped that I did enough to help my team win.

1991
This collectable figurine from the early 90s is testament to the profile Spud built in the NBA dunk comp.
Well you definitely did that. I also want to ask you about the photos of you together with Manute Bol, from the Washington Bullets. He was 7ft 7in and it is incredible to see you two together. Do you remember the day they were taken?

All I remember is that I had gone down there to train and I was hanging out when they took the picture of us together. Manute was a good friend and we knew each other to the day he died. I was more into basketball than the circus aspect of the game. So when people want to talk about those photos, that’s their conversation. If they want to talk about dunking, that’s their conversation. I mean that’s why I never went into dunk contests anymore because I wanted to be known as a basketball player, not a sideshow.

I hear you. Although the dunk contest was a great memory for a lot of people, you obviously feel it overshadowed your career?

Absolutely it was a big deal. Coming out of college, all I read about was guys playing in the pros and the shoes they wore and signing contracts. So for a rookie like me that didn’t get drafted, who was a free agent and trying to get into the team, to get endorsed — well, you don’t hear much about that. It was real special to perform for Pony when I wore their shoes.

You wore the City Wings model, but I’ve also seen photos of you wearing quite a few different Pony shoes over the years. What are your memories of the shoes?

Not many people had the City Wings sneakers. It’s just something that people still remember. I mean, you were special on the East Coast if you had a pair. I remember it was me and Darryl Dawkins who wore them but most times you would see Pony being worn by boxers or track stars or baseballers. In basketball, I was probably the most well-known guy wearing Pony.

You were. We actually tracked down a vintage pair of the City Wings for this book. It took us over a year, and we had to hustle to find them.

Really? I don’t know where you could get them from these days? [laughs]

You gotta love eBay. Finally, what are you doing these days? Are you still involved in basketball?

Yeah, I still love the game. I’m part of basketball operations with the Dallas Mavericks. It’s a minor league team called the Texas Legends and I have been doing that for the last three years.
1985 CITY WINGS COMMERCIAL
Featuring Orlando Woolridge and Spud Webb
When did you first see Pony on the streets?

I can’t pinpoint the exact moment but it would have to be in the late-70s. I was struck by the Bob McAdoo model with the gorgeous navy blue suede and white chevron. I loved Bob McAdoo. We were both born on September 25th! I also remember a gold suede pair with UCLA blue, which had a gold stamp in the front. From afar, you couldn’t really make out what the embossing said, but it just looked brilliant. I would say in general, anybody I saw wear Pony was really a ballplayer. Not just a casual player, but more than likely somebody who either was a super dedicated pick-up player or somebody who was really nice. I also loved David Thompson’s game. Pony also sponsored Holcombe Rucker, the first game I played.

Your memory for detail is nuts, tell us more about the Holcombe Rucker and Pony connection.

In 1981 I played my first season in the Holcombe Rucker Memorial Youth League, and Pony was a sponsor. It was the first time I ever got a summer tournament shirt in New York – the most prestigious place to play in the world – and it had Pony on the back. I was number 11 and the shirt was eggplant. I can literally remember what it smelt like when my coach from Douglass Projects passed them out. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever put on my body and it had Pony on the back. [laughs]
Pony really predates the whole commercialisation of basketball. How influential was what the pros wore on the court in terms of what you were digging?

My generation, up until the age of 15 or 14, really paid attention to what pros wore. Once you got to high school in New York though, it didn’t really have an effect. You were more an individual, but I was still up on what David Thompson was wearing. Cedric Maxwell (Boston Celtics) was another Pony athlete. You have to understand that players in the NBA at this time wore sneakers that weren’t commercially available. It’s completely opposite to what happens now, where brands outfit the players and they want you to buy the same thing. Maxwell wore the Pony #1s in all-green with a white chevron. I’ve never to this day seen those anywhere! Those were impossible hard to find. Sneakers were like equipment for the brands that were outfitting the pros, unlike today, where everything is thought of as product placement and how many views that image will get, etc.

So where did you hit up in New York City if you wanted to find Ponys?

My book *Where’d You Get Those? New York City’s Sneaker Culture: 1960-1987* explains how there was a store called Carlton Imports on the third floor of Spring Street and Broadway, which had no storefront at all. Think of your most secret boutiques ever and times that by 150 in terms of being top secret. You just had to know. You were not going to walk by that building and know that there was a bananas amount of rare sneakers on the third floor.

The other spot was Paragon, which is the oldest independent retailer in New York that’s still in business to my knowledge. It’s all in my book!

I know you used to customise your sneakers. Any Pony sneakers get the Bobbito touch?

I remember I bought a pair of Ponys in white-on-white. Back then, white-on-white was actually white leather with suede, which you could colour if you used a permanent marker. That was the first sneaker I ever customised. I took an aubergine, deep purple marker and I coloured them in perfectly. When I played ball the next day, the marker rubbed off on the leather which totally screwed them up! It sucked because I just had a new pair of sneakers and then I had to take Griffin Shoe Polish, which was the nastiest stuff, to try and revive them. It was horrible. Two years later, I guess it was 1982, I wore the Pony #1 sneaker, which had three rings, like three stitches on the high top horizontally. I painted the chevron black, but this time I used acrylic paint because I learnt about that stuff. I wore them in the Holcombe Rucker Memorial Youth Tournament. There’s a picture of them in my book with a huge Pony banner on the fence at 145th and Lennox.

You’ve mentioned some great athletes and I’ve got to ask you a little bit more about Bob McAdoo. Tell us about his career and why he’s still so fondly remembered.

McAdoo was a scoring machine at North Carolina and then the Buffalo Braves, which had that dope light blue uniform. Ernie DiGregorio was their point guard – Ernie D they used to call him – he was a fancy dribbler, behind-the-back passes and all that. The Braves were really fun to watch. Then they changed franchises and became the San Diego Clippers. McAdoo played for the Knicks for a couple of years and I believe he won an NBA championship with the Lakers. He was a 6ft 11in scoring machine; a finesse quick shooter. He got a lot of lift on his 10 to 12 fountains off the ground, but wasn’t a dude that dunked a lot though. He was just basically like, ‘I’m going to get buckets!’
David Thompson was another notable Pony athlete. Tell us about him as a player.

David Thompson is about as great a leaper as anyone could ever imagine in the history of basketball. So just think about what I just said. He’s up there with Dr J, Michael Jordan and Vince Carter. I mean, you name any leaper in any era and David Thompson is right up there. Think about David Thompson and North Carolina State. UCLA won nine titles in 11 years, a feat that had never been accomplished before or since. But one of the schools that they lost to in the championship during that reign was North Carolina State, led by Thompson, so it just gives you an idea how bananas good this dude was! He was just the best.

Did you see Thompson play many games?

I didn’t get to see him play that often but I got to see him at an All-Star Game. When he played for the Denver Nuggets, they weren’t on TV every weekend. There was no NBA TV or highlights on ESPN. I might have seen little glimpses of a highlight once a year but that was it. But I’d read about him and I think it was him and George Gervin one year, they had a race for the scoring title, an average of over 30 points a game.

Think about those numbers, it’s just insane! If anyone averages 20s, they’re like ‘Oh my God, he’s killing it!’ These guys were averaging 33 points a game, maybe 35. It was crazy.

Roberto Muller told us that Pony were fielding NBA pros in the local tournaments. They used to make them grow beards and shave their heads. Did you ever hear stories about that kind of chicanery?

Not really. I could tell you though that Pony, to my knowledge, was one of the first brands here in New York to market to playground basketball. One of my tight friends, who’s a Rucker Pro Hall of Fame coach, had Julius Erving and Tiny Archibald on his team, both NBA hall of famers. And he told me that in 1977, a referee at Rucker Park would go into his car trunk and literally hand out free Ponys to all the players. That type of outreach just wasn’t done back then. Pony saw a value in what the street could do for the brand. When I found out, I felt really good about that.
1974
BENNY BRISCOE VS
RODRIGO VALDEZ
World
Middleweight
Championship
Campiono, Italy
Photographer, cool substitute teacher, Frozade vendor extraordinaire and a New York original... Ricky Powell’s antics and life are the stuff of legend. Beginning his career photographing the Beastie Boys in the early 80s before hosting the cult Rappin’ with the Rickster TV show, Ricky continues to document New York street life with his trusty point-and-click camera. As a product of New York himself, it was only natural that Ricky would one day hook up with Pony, as we found out when we dropped by on a frazzlingly hot New York summer’s day.

For those who don’t know, who is Ricky Powell?

Oh my God, that’s a complicated question. First I get up, I put my pants on, and then I get out the house. I just try to make a living, being a cultural observer, if I may, and it works out. I’m not classically trained for anything except playground basketball, but I guess my background helps solidify my opinions on things and people. I just want to take pictures and do interviews. I don’t like regular conventional jobs. You know I used to be the cool substitute teacher? Kids used to love having me because I used to smoke joints before going to work. And get all open. I did that for four years.

So life’s pretty casual?

I’m the lazy hustler. I do just enough to get by. I was a 70–75 grade student at school, always doing just enough to get by. That’s how I still do it.

Was art a big part of your life growing up?

I grew up a single child, only mom, you know, a single parent. My mom used to bring me home sports magazines, and I would tear out the full-page pictures and put them up on my wall. I was into football and I was into classic rock, which wasn’t classic yet.

You’ve got your transistor radio with you. Do you always take that around with you?

My Jewish boombox? This is my little friend. I have ADD so it helps me calm down. I like the oldies, I like classic rock, I like the jazz station, basically. And the news.
To me street photography is like my transistor radio. The
playlist is infinite. You dig? That’s why I love street. I don’t
want to be known as the Beastie Boys photographer or a
hip hop photographer or a celebrity photographer. I want to
be known as a serious street photographer. That, with my
background, says that I’m not into celebrities or whatever.
I just like real street life.

Which camera do you use?

I use a pocket digi now… just a point-and-shoot. You got
to be prepared if you’re a street photographer. I hate when I
miss a photo op because I don’t have my camera. I punch
myself in the face. A street photographer should always
have his camera, and I don’t right now, so I get a slap.

You’ve captured some amazing people over the years.
What are some of your favourite pics?

Ahmet Ertegun, he was the founder of Atlantic Records.
I once snuck into a party at the Waldorf Plaza Hotel and
then I snuck into a stairway to smoke a little methernature,
and he was in the stairway smoking cigarettes, so we kicked
it for five minutes. I got pictures of him in that stairway.

From 1986, Keith Haring with Andy Warhol. That’s
an important shot, because to me it’s two generations of
pop culture hanging out. You know, Warhol was a god to
Keith Haring. I knew Keith. He was cool. My shot of Cindy
Crawford is important. I shot it in the bathroom at this club
called MK, when I was a busboy. She came out of the toilet
stall, and I was like, ‘Hold up, yo, can I get a picture, lady?’
And she was like, ‘OK.’ Actually I took a lot of my classic
shots working bullshit jobs. I think that’s the beautiful
irony of a lot of my shit.

Does hanging out with these people make you a kind
of celebrity?

I put myself out there and people like my taste. I’m someone,
objectively speaking, who’s kind of known. I think I’m good
for culture. Because you know, most shit is just mad corny,
and most celebrities are mad corny. I mean, listen – I’m not
into sports. Pony came into my life in college. I interviewed
him five years ago for a book they reissued called Gentlemen of Leisure.
He shot all the pimps and hoes. That was exciting man. I
love interviewing. I love Ron Galella, the king of American
paparazzi. George Kalinsky, the photographer for Madison
Square Garden. I also want to make a movie called The Village by Ricky Powell. And I want to interview old timers who grew
up around Greenwich Village, because I’m a historian.

Do you spend most of your time hanging out in the Village?

I’m a Village kid. I don’t really go far. It’s funny. I owed
a guy on 72nd Street $100 for about a year and I can’t
make it up there for some reason, but I’ll go to Japan,
Europe… I just don’t go out of the Village. I stay within
a radius. It’s weird. I’m a cook. I’m a weirdo. I’m kind of
stuck in the past.

What other projects do you spend your time on?

One of my ideas for street photography is that I’m going to
do a series of portraits of people with awnings. Because to me,
awnings create a little oasis of their own. They have a
personality. You like that? Awnings? I always have to keep
coming up with ideas for street photos.

I like to give my prints to artists, and they get busy on them. I always love to see what they’re going to do. I love
collaborating with nice people. I like bringing up young
talented kids. The ones that have stank attitudes, I shit on
them, but that’s a whole other thing. You don’t want to get
on my bad side. I have a short fuse. I have short tolerance
for people who are wack. Gassed-up cornballs. And I always
love giving props to nice, proper, young people.

On the subject of nice, let’s talk about Pony. Where do they
fit in with your New York sneaker memories?

You know, I wore all kinds of sneakers. I was into sneakers
by the time I was nine – Converse, P&H-Keds – I remember
the summer of 1973, I had Clydes. I had every kind of
sneaker, you know? When I was coming up you couldn’t wear
Skippies. You had to have one of the major brands, especially
if you were into sports. Pony came into my life in college. I
remember watching ‘Cornhead’ Maxwell who played for the
Celtics. I liked his style; hightop black suedes.
“The Slam Dunk reminded me of the sneakers I wore to basketball camps in the 1970s. It’s cool, without being overdone, simple yet sophisticated. I chose the materials because I liked the look of the padded canvas, and I thought a coated mesh would be cool as well as practical, you know, like in case it rains, they would be water resistant.”

You’ve got your own Pony sneaker coming out soon.

Yes, I’m psyched. Very psyched. Pony are having their 40th anniversary. So I feel really good, like I’m going to be their Joe Namath. I feel like I found a home in the sneaker world, a good one.

Did you have a picture in your head of how it was going to look?

Well, first of all, I’m really glad they approached me. They’re very nice and I like the sneaker, but I really love what it stands for – Product of New York – that’s me! We went over the design shit yesterday, loosely. The sneaker we’re going to do is a hightop, tentatively speaking, and it’s going to be canvas with some mesh. It’s going to be kind of midnight blue-ish. I’m really happy because it’s not going to be leather or suede – I’m vegetarian – I love animals. I always felt hypocritical wearing leather sneakers. So I’m real happy I got to do an animal-friendly sneaker.

Do you have any pets?

Currently, no. But I’ve had many. I take strays in and stuff. Spanky’s an old cat. But see, when I get them, they hit the jackpot. I have a nice back garden, and so it becomes like their personal forest. What’s a juicy question? Come on, don’t tell me I’m making you nervous?

Not at all.

That’s what we love to hear at The Rickford Institute. That’s a university I made up in my mind.

Do you hand out diplomas from the Rickford Institute?

You know, one thing I like about Facebook is I get to pull songs and shit off YouTube. I always add the little caption: ‘For the Rickford Institute layup line.’ It’s like if I had a university and we had a basketball team, we’d be playing funky joints for the layup lines. Or when people have birthdays on Facebook, I go, ‘Yo, happy birthday from the Rickford Institute of Unconventional Styles!’ Or ‘The Rickford Institute of Dusted Photography.’

Any final thoughts?

Do you! When I sign, ‘Do you!’ it means ‘be you, create your own universe.’ You know, fuck conventional shit. I think Pony’s going to be big. I think it’s going to be very significant. Like two fish looking for each other in the ocean... we found each other.
Finding fame by making loveheart jewellery with Lego blocks, twin brothers Dee and Ricky have parlayed their signature over-the-top style into a creative juggernaut. Working with everyone from Casio to Kanye, the brothers are now riding Pony uphill to create a pair of tripped-out kicks, complete with custom Velcro letters and leopard spots. We caught up with the two larger-than-lifers in Berlin for an interview that veered from the sublime to the telepathically ridiculous.

How long have you guys known each other? [laughs]

DEE Since we were in the womb, we were sperm.
RIC RIKY 29 years and counting.
D Split embryos!

How important is it for you two to be together?

R Basically right now it really is important, you know, because we’re a brand.
D Yeah, it’s the key… our faces are the key.
R If he cracked his head open, and there’s only one of us, the brand really wouldn’t exist. So that would all come to a screeching halt.

How do you describe the Dee and Ricky show?

D I would describe my style as really whimsical, fun, innovative, forward thinking. It’s like New York, man.
R Past, present, future. Always changing.

Was the Lego jewellery the first thing you guys did as serious business?

D Yeah! Probably. Designing and making brooches, pins, stuff like that.
R We did things like stitching on back pockets.
D The most creative though, was probably the Lego brooches.
R Creative? Oh, yeah, yeah. Definitely the brooches, they were a huge hit.
How does working with G-Shock compare to doing stuff just as Dee and Ricky?

D You really can’t compare it, because it gets kind of corporate, with contracts and stuff. We really got to push forward and force brands, to let them know that this is what we do, this is our style, so we want to be innovative, to show how different we are.

R We really don't have to listen to anybody else. And a lot of people don't 'get' our creativeness.

D They don't see our vision. It's really hard working with a lot of companies, because they try and control you. They can't change that, they can't change us.

Is Pony a brand you guys had an affinity for as kids?

D Yeah, I had Pony growing up. My uncle always used to buy me a whole bunch of Pony – like sneakers, sweats, and I don't know, I just always had it in the back of my closet or something, you could always find a Pony piece.

R It was like either Pony or Cortez.

Tell me about the shoe you designed, Dee.

D Basically, the whole sneaker is Velcro. I was just thinking, how could we make a Velcro shoe? Because we were working with Lego, the sky is the limit, you can do anything with Lego. You can build a car, create shoes out of Lego, so I was like, how can I match my sneaker to actually be similar and build off it?

So I did a Velcro hightop, all black. I wanted to add some Dee and Ricky flair to it, kind of subtle, but with colour, so yeah, it's got multi-coloured letters, numbers, shapes and all that stuff, just so you can stick 'em on the side, you can spell your name out, write 'f*ck you' or whatever you want. Have fun with it. Have fun with your sneakers.

Did you just say the words Dee and Ricky and subtle in the same sentence?

D Yeah, subtle. But whimsical.

I think your idea of subtle might be different to most people's.

D Yeah, definitely.

Tell me about your sneakers Ricky.

R I'm actually not wearing them right now, but mine's a leopard print, so we used a jungle vibe. I took a leopard and I added a few multi-coloured pieces and there's going to be Velcro on my chevron, so you can put the letters from Dee's shoe on top of my Pony chevron.

Leopard print is a bit of a disco staple, it's like camo.

D Cheetahs are cool.

What's next for Dee and Ricky?

R Right now, we're working on a Dee and Ricky restaurant, we're doing furniture, flatware, tableware. Our new G-Shock comes out in November.

D That and speakers with a French brand.

R We're doing a laptop desk and speakers.

D We designed a few jewellery pieces for Barneys. We've been working with a jeweller and he's doing a lot of jewels for us.

You guys are busy bees.

D We're never not working.

R Never not working class heroes.

D We got a lot of stuff to do. Pipe's clogged up, so just trying to drain it. About to go purchase some Draino after this.

I hear you guys worked on a Jordan that never came out?

D Wow. I don't know, man.

R You tell him about that?

D Yeah. We were working on a Jordan, but...

R It fell through.

Damn! This interview is supposed to be about Pony.

R Yeah.

D We should deal with that.

R Yeah, I know.
SADDLE UP AS WE TAKE A GALLOP DOWN MEMORY LANE AND CHECK OUT SOME VINTAGE PONY JOINTS. FROM BASKETBALL TO TENNIS AND RUNNING, PONY WAS AN INFLUENTIAL PLAYER, RACKING UP ENDORSEMENTS WITH SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN AMERICAN SPORT. THESE ARE THEIR SHOES!

VINTAGE PONY SNEAKERS
Here’s a ball shoe with minor changes from many other Pony models released in the 70s and 80s. It’s a little cleaner and the reduction in paneling seems to be the only amendment. The ‘measuring tape’ laces are a remnant from the first owner’s custody of this vintage relic.
Two curious models we dug up during our research for this book are shown here. Billed as John Havlicek pro-models, we say curious because no one can remember either of them and we couldn’t find any other record of their existence. The use of a double chevron makes them even more intriguing. During his 16 years on the Celtics’ list, Havlicek won an amazing eight titles. He is also the highest scoring white player in NBA history. Eat your heart out Larry Bird.
With its elegant, upright stance, Pony’s Court Hi epitomises the early basketball sneaker aesthetic. Carved from rugged white canvas and capped with a sturdy rubber toe, this silhouette will be familiar to anyone who pounded hardwood back in the day. Shown here in remarkable vintage condition, the Court Hi remains an authentic survivor of Pony’s glory days.
After leading North Carolina to an undefeated season in the NCAA Men’s TRS Basketball Championship in 1974, David Thompson etched his name in the history books. Blessed with the nickname ‘Skywalker’ on account of his towering 44-inch vertical leap, he also perfected the alley-oop pass with the help of teammate Monte Towe. Turning pro for the Denver Nuggets, Thompson then became the highest paid player in the game in 1978. How good was he? Michael Jordan is his biggest fan and inducted him into the Hall of Fame. Now that’s legit. These are his shoes.
At 6ft 9in, Bob McAdoo was tall timber, well endowed with a very cool name. Starting his pro-career with the Buffalo Braves, McAdoo won the 1973 NBA Rookie of the Year Award and earned three consecutive NBA scoring titles. As Bobbito Garcia notes in his interview, he was a ‘scoring machine’ who played with the Knicks, Celtics, Pistons and the Nets before winning titles with the Lakers in 1982 and 1985. These McAdoo Ponys seem to have only been produced in navy suede, an unusual choice for this era.
If innovation truly occurs in tiny steps, it might explain how so many shoes that were released in the 70s and 80s look so similar. Almost identical. Witness the Slam Dunk Hi, a kid cousin of the Court Hi, another white canvas baller. White with a red chevron will always be a classy statement.
As Pony headed into the 80s, they expanded upon their turf trainer series by adding the Linebacker to the Pony production line. With its golf-style lace flap and knobbly sole, the Linebacker is particularly fondly regarded in the United Kingdom, where its NFL branding made it a serious shoe for the US sports fan. Thanks to the guys at U-Dox in the UK, we have images of this super rare trainer.
No prizes for identifying Pony’s Cricket model as an all-white version of the Linebacker. This vintage pair features a cricket bat insole and rather oddly, an American flag swing tag. This is another super rare piece that may have only been released in the United Kingdom, for obvious reasons.
With canvas the everyman material of choice for ball shoes, elevating models to premier status by using white leather was a common tactic within the athletic footwear industry. The Pro 80 was a simple design and with the trademark chevron blazed across the ankle, spectators in the upper bleachers were under no illusion as to the player’s affiliation.
On a roll with the Pro 80, Pony decided to numerically go one better and release the Pro 90.
With a swag of runners in their lineup, Pony made a decent play for market share in the running explosion of the late 70s. The Montreal and Racer were honest attempts to win fans, though none managed to quite nail down franchise status. Note the ghillie lacing system on the model known as the Joggy.
Tennis and basketball equipment are a million miles apart these days but in the 80s, sneakers designed for both sports shared overlapping design cues. The addition of a pinked (sawtoothed) panel was the main modification to a pretty basic tennis silhouette.
#1 was a killer name to give this classy hightop from 1982. As Bobbito Garcia notes in his interview, he loved his #1s so much, he painted the chevron black for added effect. Dressed in white leather and sporting a perforated toe, it’s the gum sole that creates the sense of flair. A Pony classic.
A cousin of the Stud model, the Astro Leather was a turf trainer destined for baseball, gridiron football or even field hockey. The white leather upper on these is remarkably well preserved.
The City Wings was made famous in 1986 when Spud Webb routed Dominique Wilkins to win the NBA Slam Dunk Competition. Most people remember the hightops, but a low cut was also released, and it’s this version that was actually worn by Spud in the final.
Aerobics was on heavy rotation in the 80s and Pony looked to capitalise on the ultimate female fad by releasing the Retton Hi. Named after Mary Lou Retton, the Olympic gold-medal-winning US gymnast, the shoe had an ‘uncanny’ resemblance to another classic women’s trainer from this era. Say no more! Retton was a household name in the 80s, so this endorsement was a pretty big deal at the time.
1985 would prove to be a remarkable year for basketball, and basketball sneakers in particular. Not many people remember the Pony Profile model, possibly due to the fact that 1985 also saw the release of the first Jordan.
Pony signed Earl ‘the Pearl’ Monroe in the early 70s. Famed for his silky-smooth style and backcourt combination with Walt ‘Clyde’ Frazier, Earl set a mountain of records during his career with the Knicks and Baltimore Bullets. With Clyde signed to Puma, Pony laced Earl with his own shoe known as the MVP. This is the second version of the shoe from the mid-80s.
With their emphasis on team sports above personal glory, Pony was a major player in the cleated boot industry. This model was known as the Steeler and was just one of dozens of cleated models that sold by the millions.
As consumers began to demand more visually complicated designs, Pony attempted to up the ante by releasing the tech-sounding M-100 model. With a busy upper complete with plastic breathe holes and a ‘linear motion’ logo, the M-100 certainly offered a more dynamic presence than its Pony predecessors. It also riffed a little off the cross-training aesthetic that was coming through at this time.
As the sneaker wars hotted up, Pony tried to keep pace. Throwing pink and baby blue over the M-110 model was a late play for the *Miami Vice* x LA Gear hightop aesthetic.
BIG NAME ATHLETIC ENDORSEMENTS UNDERPINNED PONY’S METEORIC RISE. LARRY HOLMES, FRANCO HARRIS, REGGIE JACKSON AND EARL MONROE WERE AMONG THE GREATS TO ROCK PONY’S CHEVRON. HOWEVER, IT’S THE ADS FEATURING DAN MARINO, KEN ROSEWALL, SPUD WEBB, MARY LOU RETTON, EARL CAMPBELL AND PELÉ THAT HAVE SURVIVED AS A LEGACY OF THE DAYS WHEN PONY WAS ONE OF THE BIGGEST SPORTS BRANDS IN AMERICA.
“Whoever said, ‘It’s only a game,’ never played on my team.”

THE OFFICIAL SHOE OF THE GUY WHO PROVED HE’S NO SMALL POTATO.
**PONY HAS A HOT NEW NUMBER.**

Introducing the Pony All American, The Shoe With Custom Numbers and Letters and Much More.

There's a hot new number in basketball. We call it Pony ID's. Pony ID's are super-stick decals that you can apply right on the shoe patch of your new All American basketball shoe. Now you can put your number or your school's initials - in your favorite colors - right on the hottest basketball shoe in the game.

But Pony ID's are just part of what's hot in basketball this year:

- **PONY** has a hot new number in basketball.

The big story is the performance features we've built into our new All American basketball shoe.

- Put your feet in our All Americans, and the first thing you'll notice is their incredible comfort and fit. There's no stitching on the inside of the Perma-Smooth toe box so there's nothing to rub against to cause blisters.
- Lace'em up and feel the support that their new "U" lasting system and 30mm, shoe height delivers. Then turn loose a few moves to feel the lateral support shock absorption and traction you get with our super grip two-color sole.
- But the best news of all is that Pony ID's and All Americans are at your favorite Pony dealer NOW!
WHEN SPORTS ARE MORE THAN JUST A GAME

JIM BUSH, HEAD TRACK AND FIELD COACH, UCLA
SAYS, "THESE NEW PONY RUNNING SHOES
FOR MY ATHLETES IN TWENTY-FIVE YEARS!"

WE DON'T MAKE GREAT CLAIMS.
WE MAKE GREAT RUNNING SHOES!

EXPRESSION PONY
INTRODUCING THE NEW TARGA: PONY

WEAR PONY RUNNING SHOES AND RACE THEM FOR YOURSELF!
The PONY® California: Scientifically tested to get you to the finish line faster!

The BIG WINNER IN THE STAR WARS

THE SHADOW.

Highly recommended.

THE MARSHALEE.

The PONY® '79 Run In The Sun Sweepstakes

Your chance to run with the best athletes in the sun, sea and world come to play.

The PONY Racer is simply the fastest running shoe ever made. It’s designed and built to go faster, farther, and last longer than anything else you can put on your feet. It’s the kind of shoe every competitive runner dreams about.

Every runner!

So we also make the Ms. Racer—the same great shoe—only with the perfect fit for women. Now we make the best for both. That way everybody wins.
1978 was quite a year. Grease, Animal House and Damien: Omen II are released into cinemas, while the Sex Pistols played their final gig in San Francisco.

Over at Pony, the brand was close to their peak condition. Pelé was scoring in New York in his King Pelé boots and the brand was number one with Super Bowl champions. Sue Barker’s tennis shoe was also on court and things were sunny-side-up. Airbrushing vans with images of naked women with swords and Bengal tigers was also huge in 1978; no doubt inspiring Pony to create this artistic catalogue.
(left) 1982 is classic Pony – basic white canvas and leather basketball and tennis sneakers with a simple chevron.

(right) By 1983, the brand was obviously looking to crack the fashion-forward Japanese market. With yellow and mauve highlights, the Santa Monica II runner still looks bananas. As the tag says, Pony was ‘#1 in the 80s!’
Pony obviously had high hopes for their deal with gymnast Mary Lou Retton. Soft shoes, lipsticks, aerobic hightops and Miss Dorm casuals – the range bearing her name was certainly substantial.

As was typical of the era, brands would produce a fleet of runners with different names, even though they looked pretty much identical. The Noraster in burgundy was one of their better looking efforts.
As the cross-training fad began to bite in the 80s, brands quickly moved into the fitness realm. Velcro straps and white leather hightops with vivid colour pops signified the look. Later, urban brands such as British Knights and Troop would popularise huge tongue prints and incorporate shield designs as logos. That influence is particularly evident in Pony’s Street Beat range. Check the faux elephant print on the Omnishoe!
STREET WALKER
SKY HI
M-41 HI
M-40 LO
STREET WALKER COMFORT
M-41
LADY T-30
T-30
LADY M-35
T-30
LADY XT-40
1991
(left) Pony was still big in team sports in the early 90s, as this catalogue stuffed with cleats and ball shoes shows.

(right) Single-coloured shoes for leisure were hot property in the early 90s, and this range of hiker-inspired boots in bright tones is a great example. Interesting to see the Aerofit name used by Pony, as Nike also used that name for their total knock-off of the Reebok Freestyle. Will we ever see a return to fashion along these lines?
Here’s another selection from a Pony Japan catalogue. As amateur athletes demanded more from their shoes, the result was tech-sounding innovations such as Actilite, whatever that was. Meanwhile, Agassi’s range over at Nike was also clearly inspiring the direction of Pony’s tennis range.
Carl Banks from the New York Giants shows off his guns.
DUST OFF YOUR COLOURED PENCILS, FIRE UP YOUR FELT TIPS AND THRASH OUT YOUR OWN COLOURWAYS OF THESE PONY CLASSICS.
GLOSSARY OF SHOE TERMS

ADHESIVE (CEMENT)
Substance capable of holding materials together by surface attachment.

AGLET
Metal or plastic tip of lace.

ANILINE
Leather tanning finish.

APPLIQUÉ
Logo or other ornament in the form of a piece of leather or material sewn to the shoe.

ARCH CUSHION
(Cookie) support pad for the medial arch of the foot.

ASYMMETRICAL
In shoemaking this applies to lasts and patterns that have uneven shapes, the right side different from the left.

AUTOCLAVE
Vessel or oven in which chemical reaction of cooking takes place under pressure such as in the vulcanising construction method.

BACKING
Lining material.

BAGGED EDGE
Clean inside seam hiding stitching.

BAL (Balmoral)
Design where quarters meet and the vamp is stitched over the quarters at the front of the throat.

BELLOWS TONGUE
Outside attached tongue to prevent snow entry.

BIAS CUT
Cut away upswept heel.

BLOWING AGENT
Chemicals added to plastics or rubber that generate cellular structure.

BLUCHER
Design where front quarters or tabs are stitched over the vamp for a short distance at the throat.

BOX TOE
Hardener that maintains shape of front toe area.

BREATHABILITY
The ability of the upper to transpire, thereby ventilating the foot.

BUCKSKIN
Leather or deerskin with suede finish.

BUMPER
Rubber toe strip attached over front toe area.

CALENDAR SOLE
Sheet sole pressed between rollers.

CALFSKIN
Leather of young cattle.

CHROME TANNING
Leather, mineral tanning process.

CLEATS
Metal studs extended out from the sole.

COLLAGE
Fibrous protein layer of hide.

COLLAR
Top line of the shoe quarters. Many are padded.

COMPRESSION MOLD
Shaping materials by heat and pressure.

CONVEYOR
Arch pad in shoe.

CORRECTED GRAIN
Leather-type finish added and embossed to correct blemishes, etc.

COWHIDE
Leather from cattle.

CREPE RUBBER
Natural rubber soling material.

DENIER
Weight of synthetic fibers. (Measure of fineness)

DENSITY
Weight per unit volume of a substance.

DERBY
Design quarters overlapping vamp and tongue.

DIE CUTTING
Cutting of upper or sole materials with metal dies.

D.I.P. CONSTRUCTION
Direct injection process.

DOUBLER
Interfacing between upper material and lining.

D-RINGS
Lacing rings (for speed lacing).
DUROMETER SCALE
A method of determining material hardness on a scale of 0-100. The lower the reading, the softer the material.

DVP
Direct vulcanising process.

ELASTOMER
Term used for synthetic rubber.

EMBOSSING
Depressing a specific pattern in leather or fabrics.

E.V.A.
Ethylene-vinyl acetate.

EYELETS
Holes for lacing (blind) with metal reinforcements or eyelet hooks.

EYESTAY
Reinforcement around lacing holes.

FINISHING
End of manufacturing process.

FLARED HEEL
Wider flanged heel for landing.

FOXING
Rubber striping bonded to the upper and sole around the shoe.

GHILLIE LACING
Form of speed lacing with plastic loops.

GOODYEAR WELT
Construction method of stitching uppers to sole.

HEEL COUNTER
Stiffened heel cup inserted between lining and upper material.

HIGH CUT
Over the ankle shoe design.

INSOLE
Padded sock inserted into shoe next to foot (not to be confused with lasting insole).

INSTEP
Medial inside arch area of the shoe.

KANGAROO
Leather from Kangaroos.

KID
Goat skin.

LAST
Three-dimensional facsimile of the foot.

LACING INSOLE
An insole used to attach an upper to an insole before bottoming; the bottom surface of the upper.

LATERAL
The outside area of the foot.

LATEX
A milky liquid exuded from rubber trees.

LOCKSTITCH
A method of sewing the upper to the bottom.

LOW CUT
Below-the-ankle shoe design.

MCKAY
A shoe construction method that uses tacks and a stitched sole.

MEDIAL
Inside area of the foot.

MESH
Woven or knitted nylon material for uppers.

METATARSALS
The long bones of the foot between the toes and ankle.

MIDSOLE
The sole between the insole and outsole.

MOCCASIN
A method of construction whereby the upper is placed under the last and extended up and around to form the quarter and vamp.

NEOPRENE
An elastomer, polychloroprene.

NUBUCK
An imitation full grain leather backskin made from cattle hide.

NYLON
The generic name for all synthetic fibre forming polymides.

ORTHOTIC
Corrective device inserted into shoe to aid functionality.

OUTSOLE
The outside sole area in contact with the ground.

PIPEING
Rounded braid sewn between seams to cover raw edges in upper materials.

POLYMER
A molecular compound, natural or synthetic.

POLYPROPYLENE
A tough lightweight plastic.

PU
Polyurethane (cellular plastic).

PVC
Polyvinyl chloride (plastic material).

RAYON
A general term for cellulose fibers.

RESIN
Solid organic products of natural or synthetic origin.

RUBBER
An elastomer or natural rubber compound.

SADDLE
A piece of leather extending from the shank up to the vamp.

SILICONE
A slippery polymeric material used in treating shoes for water repellency.

SNEAKER
The American name for a vulcanised, canvas rubber shoe.

SOCK LINING
The material (regularly called an insole) inserted between the foot and lasting insole next to the foot.

SOLE
Bottom or ground contact area of footwear.

SPRINGS
Metal appendages protruding from the shoe sole.

STITCHDOWN
A method of sewing the uppers to the bottom.

STUDS
Large knobs protruding from the sole.

SUCTION CUPS
Indentsations on the outsole that provide traction on smooth surfaces.

SUEDE
The buffed reverse or flesh side of leather.

TANNING (TANNAGE)
A method of preserving skins prior to finish and colouring.

TOE CAP
An additional protective device on the frontal toe area.

TONGUE
The flap that extends up the front of the shoe to protect the foot from the laces.

TORSION
The stress caused by twisting a material.

T.P.R.
Thermo plastic rubber.

TRICOT
Lining, skinfit.

UNIVERSAL LAST
A standard last used by sport shoemakers for all width fittings.

UPPER
The material making up the ‘top’ part of the shoe.
Born in Manhattan back in 1972, long before anyone gave a flying Swoosh, Pony was founded by the Uruguay-born entrepreneur Roberto Muller, a charismatic maverick who lived life by the seat of his pants. Literally the heart, and sole of the company, Muller created Pony in his own image, which is to say it was equal-parts energetic, rambunctious and oh-so ambitious. Within a few short years, this self-styled yankee swagger had Pony strutting the globe at the vanguard of a new era in athletic colonialism.