

The Past and Future Off String Yo-Yo Play

By. Dave Schulte

Although off String yo-yo play seems to have burst onto the yo-yo scene lately, it has actually been around for quite awhile. In one basic form or another, it has been around since 1958 when Duncan released its first wooden butterfly yo-yo. According to Dale Oliver, a former Duncan demonstrator, the demonstrators of that time would challenge each other by taking yo-yoing a step further...off the string. One of the first such attempts was with Wayne Lundberg, the inventor of the butterfly yo-yo, Ken Filary, and Dale. They would attempt to play catch off string, throwing the yo-yo back and forth. He said that the few maneuvers they did were never promoted or demonstrated in public. It was just a challenge between the crew, it was never meant to sell more yo-yos or encourage a new craze.

Little did the demonstrators of the late 50's know that they were developing a style that would make such an impact on yo-yos in the late 90's. The recent resurgence can be traced back to 1990, in Tucson Arizona. Dale Oliver showed a small group of people the few off string maneuvers that he and other demonstrators from the 50's did. At the time, he was using an original Pro Yo. (I saw a similar demo from Dale in 1997 using a Viper. The ball bearing is a major advancement in off string play, it allows much more intricate tricks on one throw) Among the people in the group at Tucson, one person was particularly interested, his name was Jon Gates. Jon is one of the people responsible for the push in off string, as well as some of the tricks that have been developed. Jon is a very creative yo-yo player, and when he started working with the limitless parameters of off string, he really shinned. The first yo-yo he tried off string with was an old Playmaxx Premier Monarch.(butterfly shape) He said it worked OK, but many of his yo-yo's were broken because of the nature of off string practice...the yo-yo hits the ground, not to mention everything else in the room. The advent of the soft rubber Henry's Viper yo-yo has really changed that. It is much safer to attempt to learn off string as well as develop more difficult tricks. I have been with Jon on a number of occasions when we would look at maneuvers that are thought not possible, and then we would make it happen. When Jon and I first started, I never thought we could perform a throwdown on one throw, and then off string tricks on the next throw. Or be able to perform regeneration for minutes on end without a catch. Regeneration is definitely the future of off string play, it is exciting to watch, and challenging to perform. During a phone interview with Jon, he said that most of the tricks he knows are due to a collaboration with John Higby. Together, they would experiment, develop, and bounce trick ideas off each other during hours of fun practice time. They drove each other to excel, and had fun at the same time.

Jon and I have been sent to Japan on separate tours called Team Hyper Viper(THV) tours. These tours were to promote the Henry's Hyper Viper. We went with different teams to demonstrate all tricks, but Jon and I concentrated mostly on off string. The tricks we demonstrated were discussed and shown in the Coro Coro Comic books. These comic books are widely circulated in Japan, and were a great help in promoting off string play with the Hyper Viper. My tour was all across southern Japan, with the two big days being held in the Osaka and Fukuoka Domes with thousands of people on hand to watch. On the other days, I was at major stores demonstrating and teaching off string. Jon was all over, but spent a majority of his time in and around Tokyo. He was also at one of the major national events where tens of thousands of people came. We both agree that the best part of touring is meeting all of the kids that are into yo-yos. I was on my tour to Japan when off string yo-yoing was a relatively new concept to them. I was able to teach many of the kids some basic and advanced moves. Some of the kids even talked about Jon and the tricks he taught them. It is so great to see the impact of the work that demonstrators have done around the world. Dale Oliver has also done off string in Japan using a

Tigershark. He was even pictured on the front page of the Tokyo newspaper before the famous 4/4 event doing a behind the back trapeze catch. When speaking with Jon and Dale, we were all amazed at the level of play that off string has achieved around the world. Our work in Japan inspired a group of people to form "Team Off-Strings." (a Japanese team dedicated to the advancement of off string yo-yo play) These kids are amazing, they took the basics that all the off string demonstrators had shown them, and took it to new levels. A quote I remember from my school teaching days said "It is a teacher's goal, and best reward, to see the student surpass the teacher." In this case I think we have all succeeded. In the 1998 US Nationals in Chico, Sky Kiyabu was the first person to put a significant amount of off string play in his freestyle. He won first place in the A division by using great stage presence, innovative tricks, and ending his routine with some off string maneuvers using a Viper. Hironori Mii also used multiple Vipers to take second place in the A division at the 1999 World Yo-Yo Championships in Hawaii. His freestyle was totally off string, and it amazed the audience. A technical error on the music cut his time a little short or who knows, he may have been able to capture first place. Before anyone knew the results of the contest, he was offered the opportunity to freestyle again with the correct amount of time, but being the sportsman he is, he let it stand. At the 1999 US Nationals in Chico, an experimental division put off string as a compulsory trick. This division which showcased the cutting edge of yo-yo play, and was extremely difficult, was called the X-Division. Unfortunately, the contestants had to choose between the X-division and the other traditional divisions and the X-division did not attract enough players to run the contest. Perhaps in the future, the X-division tricks will be fused with the traditional tricks, then off string will be required of the single A National Champion. Hironori Mii attended the US Nationals, but because he is not a US citizen, he was unable to compete. But that did not prevent him from putting on an exciting off string demo for the crowd. It was fantastic. He is truly pushing the limits of off string to new heights.

With the advent of the Henry's Viper yo-yo, off string yo-yo play is enjoying a major resurgence in the United States and around the world. The soft body, and wide gap allows the player to safely attempt mind blowing maneuvers...all off string. Many trick names and maneuvers are similar to normal yo-yo play, like brain twister, man on the trapeze, rock the baby, etc... but with the added dimension of diablo style tricks like suicide, whip catch, etc. The tricks that a beginner can do, however basic, have an added element of difficulty, challenge, and fun. We sure have come a long way since Duncan introduced a wooden butterfly yo-yo in 1958. They were not even thinking about yo-yoing off string, and today it is not only thought about, it is a passion. The only thing left for you to do is try it.

Getting Started

A few tips to help you save time, and get the basics when learning to do off string tricks.

1. Get a butterfly shape yo-yo. I prefer the Viper due to the soft body, wide gap, and long spin, but any butterfly yo-yo will do (Bearings will make it a lot easier).
2. Find an open area with no breakable objects near by.
3. Basic winding of the off string yo-yo . First, attach the slip knot to your finger as you normally would. Next, place and hold the loose end of the string in the gap of the yo-yo, (do not open the string end) and wind the string around it until it grabs and wraps up to your hand.

Note: The forward pass mount is the most basic. The yo-yo will be spinning toward you when it is thrown.

4. Stand with your back to the wall, it should be about 4 ft behind you. This will prevent the yo-yo from rolling very far away when practicing. Most people give up because they get sick of chasing the yo-yo after they miss the string catch.

5. Throw the yo-yo out forward and up, like the first throw of shoot the moon. Using your non yo-yo hand's first finger catch the string **as it goes up** and before the yo-yo leaves the string. This will cause the yo-yo to go up and slightly back toward you. This is tough at first, but keep practicing.

Note: Some people prefer to throw it exactly like a forward pass, but the yo-yo tends to go straight out and not up or back, so it is hard to catch it on the string. It is best to point the yo-yo more up on the first throw.

6. Once the yo-yo has left the string, keep the string in both hands and attempt to align the groove up with the string to make the catch. It is important to leave some slack in the string so the yo-yo has a place to land, and it will not immediately fall off.

7. After you have successfully caught the yo-yo, you should try to wind it up. Take the loose end of the string, and wrap it around the axle just at the end. (you are crossing the string over itself) The yo-yo should return to the hand, ready to be thrown again.

8. Once the throw and wind are perfected....add tricks in between.

Tip: If you find the yo-yo keeps leaning and falling off the string after you land it, try to move the ends of the string left or right, or give it more slack to correct the tilt of the yo-yo.

Mounts

Other mounts currently being used. Not described here.

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| 1. Forward Pass | 4. Drop | 7. Threw the legs |
| 2. BrainTwister | 5. Throwdown | 8. Trapeze |
| 3. Bottom | 6. Over the falls | 9. Shoot the Moon |

Tricks

I believe that most tricks are not invented, they just evolve. I have met so many beginners, who say "look, I invented a trick", and they show Rock the Baby. When a yo-yo is placed on a persons finger, and they are not given any instruction, they will learn/create tricks. The same is true for off string. People all over the world are experimenting with this type of yo-yo play, and the tricks are evolving. Not one person has made up these tricks listed below, they have just been discovered.

All tricks listed are described from a forward pass mount after the yo-yo lands on the string.

- **Throwdown/Forward Pass** - Throw the yo-yo out or down, but before it gets to the end of the string, give it a little tug. The yo-yo should wrap up without going off string. This will amaze the casual observer when the next throw comes off the string.
- **Tight Rope Walker** - Simply stretch the string tight from end to end. Being sure to keep the string straight, tilt one side down slightly and watch the yo-yo walk along the string.
- **Elevator** - Pull the loose end of the string over your yo-yo finger. Pull down and align it with the groove of the yo-yo. Keep pulling down until the yo-yo reaches the top floor.
- **Barrel Rolls** - Take your non yo-yo hand, and pass the finger on the string and under the yo-yo forward and backward. The yo-yo will be passing over your finger in a rolling motion.

- Picture Tricks - Picture tricks can be a lot of fun for an audience, and can be done off string as well.
-Spaghetti, star, eiffel tower...etc.
- Trapeze - Turn your body sideways and swing the yo-yo up over your non yo-yo finger, and land it on the string. For added complexity, add freestyle moves with somersaults.
- Bounce - Bring the loose string ends together to form a large loop. Put both hands in the loop, and tilt it on its side. Being careful to keep the yo-yo straight, bounce the yo-yo up in the air and have it land on the other string...and then go back and forth as many times as you would like.
- Bounce Catch - On a hard, smooth surface, toss the yo-yo up and slightly forward. It should hit the ground and bounce up toward you. Keep the string straight, align it with the groove of the yo-yo, and catch it. This looks great in the middle of a regeneration trick routine.
- Rock the Baby - Hold the loose end in your right hand to form a large loop. Using your non yo-yo hand, pull and twist the outside string forward and down to form a triangle. Rock the yo-yo through the triangle, and you have Rock the Baby.
- Suicide - Turn your body sideways. Swing the yo-yo, on the string, up and to the right (or left for the left handed players) like you are swinging it in a circle. Now the Suicide part....let go of the loose end of the string before your arms cross, and let the yo-yo keep traveling. Catch the loose end as it comes back around....the yo-yo should have stayed on the string. For a dazzling effect, repeat as many times, and as fast as you can.
- Body Hops - Position any part of your body over the string and yo-yo.(Arm, leg, shoulder, neck, etc) When positioned correctly, hop the yo-yo over your body, and land it on the string on the other side. You can repeat this as many times as you like over all part of your body.
- Whip Catch - This is a huge crowd pleaser... it is best done after the "Bounce", but it can be done at anytime. Hold the string in a large loop. (keep all of your finger in the loop to make it as big as possible) Tilt the top of the loop to the side, and throw the yo-yo up and out of the loop. As the yo-yo comes down, swing the loop, held sideways, at the gap of the yo-yo...aim one of the strings at the gap....and make the catch.
- Many, Many more to come - Just start experimenting and you will discover tricks for yourself.

Comments or questions about this article

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Sources:

Phone interviews with

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