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Exclusive: So You Think You Can (Pole) Dance?

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by [Alex Catarinella](#)



Thanks to Carmen Electra and her “exercise” striptease videos, poles are a permanent pop culture fixture (remember that episode of *Gossip Girl*? those scenes in *The Wrestler*?) and all the hot mamas are getting their lap dance on. But contrary to popular belief, true pole dancing doesn’t involve the shredding of clothes and visible g-strings. It does involve technique, flexibility, creativity and expression; no different from other dance forms.

Founders of [the US Pole Dance Federation](#), Alvin Ailey dance graduate Anna Grundstrom and fitness guru Wendy Traskos (who’s responsible for the sexy back of the likes of Mary J. Blige and Montel), selected 12 pole dancing extraordinaires out of nearly 50 applicants as finalists for [the US Pole Dance Championship 2009](#). Considering the laughable *So You Think You Can Dance?* auditions, we were surprised to learn of a lack of cringe-worthy applicants who took inspiration from Elizabeth

Berkley [in Showgirls](#). In fact, despite a few Nine Inch Nails' song repeats, Grundstrom and Traskos told us that all of the video submissions were creative and professional — dancers who understand that this is a sensual athletic dance form, and not an audition for a spot in a Lil Wanye music video.

To ensure that Saturday's event is not *Striptease 2* (though Demi Moore's age-defying "magic" could handle a sequel), strict guidelines are enforced for the competition: no g-strings, tassles, and other stripper-ly garb. But don't get too comfy: As Grundstrom and Traskos put it, "sexy athletics" are the way to go. "Similar to gymnastics and you get to express yourself and wear heels," explains Grundstrom. First place gets a trip to Sydney, Australia, and performs in Miss Pole Dance Australia 2009. While this sounds like the perfect reality TV premise, Grundstrom and Traskos say that because the finalists are respectful and supportive of one another, a Tila Tequila-ish trash fest would never work. But don't count out any pole scratchin' just yet — they are in the midst of filming a documentary.

So what makes a pole dance champ? Winners will be judged on transitions in-and-out of tricks, technique, extensions, body awareness, coordination, creativity, and expressing oneself... all while heels! There are even pole options: the spinning pole and the stationary pole. They explain that the spinning pole is similar to roller blades — it only moves when you move. This allows for a more aer set sans contact with the floor. The stationary pole is like dancing with a partner — with the pole being said partner. Each approach requires different muscles and different momentum. Who do they think will be the winner of this surprisingly complicated dance off?: "Whoever can bring it all together on competition day."

Grundstrom's first encounter with pole dancing was like most: at a bachelorette party. But there were no greasy, spray tanned WWE rejects in handcuffs. "I went to a friend's bachelorette party with 10 other girls for a pole dance class. We had no idea what to expect — we were just told to bring a pair of heels and work out clothes. They taught us the 'inside hook angel spin' and I was excited like a kid when I got it down." Eventually, Grundstrom would meet owner of New York Pole Studios, Traskos, at Central Park while both were walking their dogs. "I was very impressed by her biceps," says Grundstrom of the very "only in New York" encounter.

Together, Grundstrom and Traskos founded the the US Pole Dance Federation in 2008, with a "mission to break the stereotype," according to Grundstrom, in addition to encouraging all women to take these empowering classes. "It's such a beautiful art form. We both hope that people out there will understand how demanding pole dancing is as you basically have to have the strength of an athlete, but be smoother as a dancer. We too are dressed in sports bras and shorts, like any fitness person or dancer out there," says Grundstorm. "We just don't wear sneakers: we wear heels."

**[US Pole Dance Championship 2009](#)** will be held this Sunday afternoon at the Bleecker Street Theater. [Click here to purchase tickets.](#)

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