

SFBG › Sex SF ›

## Not yo mamma's pole dance

10.26.10 - 1:14 pm | Caitlin Donohue | (2)

 Print           32

... Or should I say, father's? After all, your momma probably didn't get a chance to check out the ladies of the pole in her day -- unless, of course, the parents met at The Lusty Lady. What I'm trying to say here is that sexy on a stick is now an official fitness sport. And its participants are often a lot more athletic than synthetic.

A fact which I learned all about from [US Pole Dancing Federation](#) co-founder Anna Gundstrom, who explained to us in a phone interview why you'll wanna make the trek up to Redwood City for the high holds of the west coast regional championships November 6th. "I'm not going to say its not a sensual form of dance -- that'd be silly to say since it did start in strip clubs," Gundstrom tells me.



High rollers, turn out those pockets: Alethea Austin woulda tapped you dry if tips were acceptable at the USPDF championships  
 PHOTO BY LAURA GANZERO

Competitive pole dancing -- competitive for more than boners and ten spots, that is -- then, is not a rejection of the art (sport? seduction?) form's inherent sexiness, but rather a forum in which it can coexist without conflict with strength. Gundstrom started the federation with business partner Wendy Traskos, who she met at a pole dancing studio. Traskos came from a competitive fitness background, echoes of which can be find in many of the USPDF competitors' hard bodies. Gundstrom and Traskos saw the work being done on poles as deserving of athletic medals as any figure-skating routine -- a sport which eventually inspired the duo's scoring system.

At the time of the league's inception, most pole dance competitions were held in clubs, where Gundstrom says "they were decided by crowd cheering, which wasn't really a fair show. Our goal was to host credible pole dance competitions where people could come and compete and be judged by a fair system." That fair system is a two-round pony, the first dance being a compulsory routine of 60-90 seconds during which the pole dance contestants have to pop, drop, and lock their way into six to eight required poses.



**Amy Guion rides the pony at the 2010 USPDF Championships. Photo by Laura Ganzero**

And what poses they are! Gundstrom elaborates on one, the inner thigh hold. "In this one, you have to have 75 percent of your body weight held by your inner thighs -- what they call a super man pose is one example." Fly baby, fly. Attire is also strictly monitored -- no nudity for the USPDF ladies, no thongs, no tassels, but your heels in the compulsory round rise to titty club altitudes: five inches is the minimum.

Of course, the women aren't spending too much time on their feet. Back-bending, serpentine twirls around the pole blend into iron woman holds on the pole in most routines, the most hard core finding ways to suspend themselves by a single inner knee, or by their two hands, body at an impressive parallel with the floor far below. Songs skirt along lines well-worn by the strip club set, just watch the swear words. "They can pick any music they want, except for vulgar music -- we don't want to offend the audience," says Gundstrom -- who adds that it's mainly women who fill the seats at USPDF events.

Perhaps no athlete embodies the USPDF ethos better than Alethea Austin, 2010's US pole dance champion. Austin isn't one to shy from sexuality -- her pole dancing [website](#) displays downloadable desktop patterns for her fans that feature Austin in splits that would make a body builder blush, and she's performed with one wrist handcuffed to the pole on occasion.

But the intense strength building regimen Austin undergoes belies the notion that she's just a pretty ass. Her routine from this year's national championships, performed to Guns 'N' Rose "Paradise City" saw Austin's stomach "Heartland" tattoo (Midwestern and proud, she is) flip upside-down for a handheld back bend that betrays also a childhood spent in gymnastic training facilities.

Her mirrored five inchers dangle, glittering, overhead. Damn girl, damn.

### US Pole Dancing Federation West Coast Regionals

Sat/6 7 p.m., \$45-\$65

Fox Theatre

2223 Broadway, Redwood City

[www.uspoledance.com](http://www.uspoledance.com)

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