



*Ryan (left) and Joel Zink walk the dog while walking their dog, Pogonip.*

# The Brothers Yo-Yo

BY LISA ACTOR

Ryan and Joel Zink walk the dog (both kinds), rock the baby and hop the fence with the best of 'em. (And they show how you can too!)

It's Joel Zink's last chance, the last trick in the advanced division of the 1998 World Yo-Yo Championships.

Joel tightens the string around the middle finger of his right hand. He steps into the trick circle, throws out his yo-yo and loops the flying string around his left index finger.

The yo-yo lands on the string and spins in place—like a trapeze artist balancing—then snaps back to the 12-year-old's hand. Joel has nailed his “man on the flying trapeze” trick!

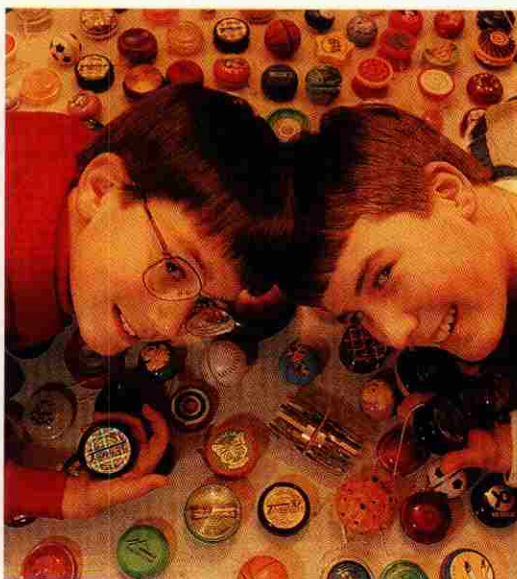
In the next circle, Joel's competitor performs the same trick perfectly. And Joel couldn't be happier.

Joel's competition? His little brother, Webelos Scout Ryan Zink of Pack 153, Reno, Nev.

## World Class Yo-Yoers

Joel and Ryan, 10, can rock the baby, walk the dog and hop the fence—all with a yo-yo, of course—better than just about any kids in America.

While the Zink brothers are the only ones to nail all the tricks in most contests, the competition is tougher at these World Championships. Seven competitors have perfect scores. Joel and Ryan must



James A. Bugari

*Ryan (above left and below right) and Joel Zink each have at least 800 yo-yos in their personal collections. That gives them plenty to choose from when it comes time for competition, like the 1998 World Yo-Yo Championships in Primm, Nev.*

enter a “loop-off”—a tie-breaking contest to see who can do the most loop-the-loops without a miss.

Joel loops his yo-yo around his hand 186 times to come in third. Ryan completes 165 loops to take fifth. The winner had a dizzying 222 loops.

## Hooked on Competition

Third and fifth in the world isn't bad for a couple of kids who discovered yo-yoing just two years before.

“We saw a friend demonstrate some tricks,” Ryan says. “We knew we had to try it.”

“We bought two Terminator Technics and each learned a trick,” Joel says of their first yo-yos.

Ryan mastered the gravity pull—throwing the yo-yo down and bringing it back up. Joel learned the sleeper—spinning the yo-yo at the end of the string.

Then they heard about the national contest, in Chico, Calif. “We got the trick list and started practicing,” Joel says.

Two months later they entered the nationals. Ryan missed one trick and was out. But Joel finished second in the nation for his age.

“That got me hooked,” he says.

Since then Joel and Ryan have col-



Frank DeLapina/USA

# HOW TO GET STARTED

**N**eed advice on how to start yo-yoing? Might as well get it from kid champs Joel and Ryan Zink. They're even featured in one yo-yo company's how-to video.

► Find the right spot. The ideal place to yo-yo is outdoors. If you must yo-yo indoors, look for a spot with a high ceiling. Keep a safe distance from lamps, picture frames and people.

► Slip the yo-yo string on your middle finger, between the first and second knuckles. Pull it tight. Use medical tape around your finger if the string cuts into your skin.

► First learn the "gravity pull." Hold the yo-yo with your palm up. Bend your arm at the elbow like you're making a muscle. Move your arm down and throw the yo-yo downward with a flick of the wrist. When the yo-yo gets to the bottom of the string, turn your palm down and give the string an upward tug. The yo-yo will return to your hand.

► Next learn the "sleeper." Do a gravity pull, but wait a few seconds before tugging the yo-yo back up. The yo-yo will spin or "sleep" at the bottom of the string. The harder the throw, the longer the sleep.

lected yo-yo trophies in nine states and Washington, D.C. Most contests came down to a tie-breaker between the Zinks, as in the 1998 World ProYo Championships. Joel took first place and Ryan second in the age 15 and under division.

## VIDEO STARS

**T**here's more to yo-yoing than competition. Last fall Joel and Ryan Zink were asked to perform in a country music video. The video, "When I Grow Up," stars singer Clint Daniels and features yo-yoers ages 3 to 63.



Joel and Ryan yo-yoed for hours in front of burning-hot lights. The result was a three-minute video. "I couldn't believe it when I saw the finished product," Joel says. "It was great!"

"I loved the way they matched the music to the yo-yoing," adds Ryan.



The best part? Teaching yo-yo tricks to a big-time singer like Clint Daniels (above, with guitar). "He didn't know you could do so much with a yo-yo," Joel says.

## Sweaty Palms and Sore Fingers

"In competition you get only two chances to make a trick," Joel says. "Do it on the first try and you get five points. A second try earns three." A perfect score can send you to a tie-breaker.

"You have to control the sweaty palms," Joel says.

"And listen to the judge," says Ryan. In one contest Ryan did just one rock of rock the baby. The judge had asked for two, so it was a miss.

Ryan practices 30 minutes each day. Joel puts in at least an hour. It takes weeks, sometimes months, to master a new trick. "Your string finger gets really sore after a while," Joel says.

Both boys get string burns. And Joel once got a nasty black eye. "The yo-yo came back too fast," he says.

## Brothers First

Although they're competitors, Joel and Ryan still help each other out. At one contest they stood together. "Joel whispered for me to do my best," says Ryan. "I said the same thing back to him."

In their spare time Joel and Ryan collect yo-yos—at least 1,600 so far. Joel performs at birthday parties. They've both appeared on television in Reno, Nev., where they live.

Joel is now mastering two-handed tricks—performing with a yo-yo in each hand. He's also developing a freestyle routine—a series of yo-yo tricks set to music. "It's the most exciting part of competition," he says.

Advice for other boys who want to compete? "Keep cool," Joel says. "And practice your tricks." ✦

## YO-YOING IN SPACE

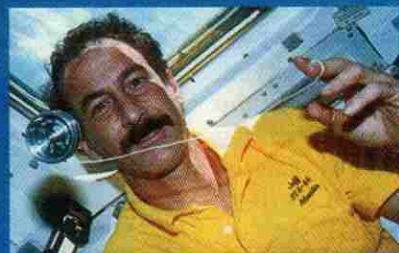
**I**f you think walking the dog on Earth is fun, imagine trying the trick in zero gravity.

Sound crazy? Astronaut Don Pettit (right) has tried it aboard NASA's KC-135, a training plane that creates moments of weightlessness by flying a roller-coaster pattern through the sky.

"I wanted to walk the yo-yo across the ceiling," he says. "That's impossible on Earth."

But the trick doesn't work in space. Why? Yo-yos won't sleep in zero gravity.

"It takes a taut string to make a yo-yo sleep," Dr. Pettit says. "Without gravity the string stays loose."



Astronauts David Griggs and Jeff Hoffman have also tested yo-yos in zero gravity, aboard the space shuttle. Yo-yoing in space helps the astronauts learn more about their weightless environment.

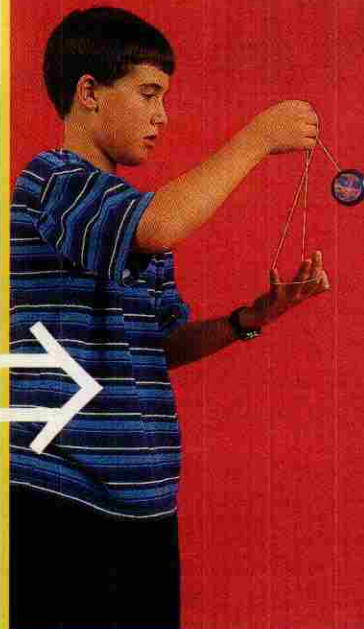
Dr. Pettit discovered a phenomenon he calls the "zero G bonk."

"It's when the yo-yo returns too fast," he says. "Bonk is the sound of the yo-yo hitting you in the head!"

## WALK THE DOG



## ROCK THE BABY



## TRY THESE TRICKS

Once you learn the basics like throwing a sleeper (see "How to Get Started"), you can move on to bigger and better tricks. Joel and Ryan show you how.

### WALK THE DOG

- 1) Throw a sleeper (the key is to relax your arm and wrist).
- 2) Set the spinning yo-yo gently on the ground.
- 3) Let the yo-yo "walk" a short distance.
- 4) Give a tug to bring the yo-yo back to your hand.

### ROCK THE BABY

- 1) Throw a sleeper.
- 2) Using four fingers of your free hand, grab the string about halfway between your string finger and the yo-yo.
- 3) Using the thumb and index finger of your yo-yo hand, pinch the string about two to three inches above the yo-yo.
- 4) Lift the yo-yo up with your yo-yo hand while dropping your other hand down. Spread the string apart with your four fingers to form a triangle or "cradle."

- 5) Swing the yo-yo back and forth through the cradle.
- 6) Drop the yo-yo and tug it back to your hand.

### TIDAL WAVE (also called Skin the Cat)

- 1) Throw a sleeper.
- 2) Slide the index finger of your free hand under the string while pulling your hands apart.
- 3) When your index finger is within an inch or two of the yo-yo, lift it up and throw the yo-yo out.
- 4) Loop the yo-yo around once before returning it to your hand.

## TIDAL WAVE

