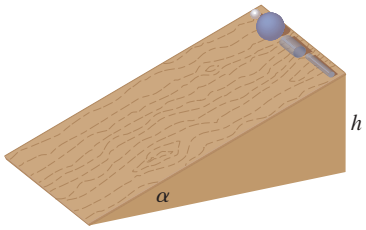
12.7 APPLIED PROJECT: ROLLER DERBY

This project can be completed anytime after you have studied Section 12.7 in the textbook.



Suppose that a solid ball (a marble), a hollow ball (a squash ball), a solid cylinder (a steel bar), and a hollow cylinder (a lead pipe) roll down a slope. Which of these objects reaches the bottom first? (Make a guess before proceeding.)

To answer this question we consider a ball or cylinder with mass m, radius r, and moment of inertia I (about the axis of rotation). If the vertical drop is h, then the potential energy at the top is mgh. Suppose the object reaches the bottom with velocity v and angular velocity ω, so $v = \omega r$. The kinetic energy at the bottom consists of two parts: $\frac{1}{2}mv^2$ from translation (moving down the slope) and $\frac{1}{2}I\omega^2$ from rotation. If we assume that energy loss from rolling friction is negligible, then conservation of energy gives

$$mgh = \tfrac{1}{2}mv^2 + \tfrac{1}{2}I\omega^2$$

1. Show that

$$v^2 = \frac{2gh}{1 + I^*} \qquad \text{where } I^* = \frac{I}{mr^2}$$

2. If $y(t)$ is the vertical distance traveled at time t, then the same reasoning as used in Problem 1 shows that $v^2 = 2gy/(1 + I^*)$ at any time t. Use this result to show that y satisfies the differential equation

$$\frac{dy}{dt} = \sqrt{\frac{2g}{1 + I^*}}\,(\sin\alpha)\sqrt{y}$$

where α is the angle of inclination of the plane.

3. By solving the differential equation in Problem 2, show that the total travel time is

$$T = \sqrt{\frac{2h(1 + I^*)}{g\sin^2\alpha}}$$

This shows that the object with the smallest value of I^* wins the race.

4. Show that $I^* = \frac{1}{2}$ for a solid cylinder and $I^* = 1$ for a hollow cylinder.

5. Calculate I^* for a partly hollow ball with inner radius a and outer radius r. Express your answer in terms of $b = a/r$. What happens as $a \to 0$ and as $a \to r$?

6. Show that $I^* = \frac{2}{5}$ for a solid ball and $I^* = \frac{2}{3}$ for a hollow ball. Thus, the objects finish in the following order: solid ball, solid cylinder, hollow ball, hollow cylinder.