

The original purpose of the paipo was to get the body surfer up on a more smooth and streamlined plane than he could get with his body alone. For years, Hawaiians have been riding paipo boards at Makapuu, Makaha, and just about any place having a rideable wave. They used a small piece of plywood, often without a fin, and rode on their knees, occasionally standing as though on a surfboard.

Almost twenty years ago, some work in the development of a board having a surfboard-like shape was begun by Bob Simmons, the man who created many innovations in design of the surfboard as we know it today. He built a paipo board that had contoured rails, two fins, and was shaped of balsa.

After Simmons, the small-board concept lay dormant in the United States for many years until a mass produced board of foam with rather large dimensions came on the market. It provided an inexpensive and exciting new aspect to surfing. The small board was also of legal size to surf beaches that were

Unidentified belly boarder and body surfer at Newport. *Alan Rich photos.* ▶

“Paipo” is a Hawaiian word designating a short or small board. Paipo boarding is probably one of the oldest, yet most underrated and underdeveloped phase of the sport of surfing today.

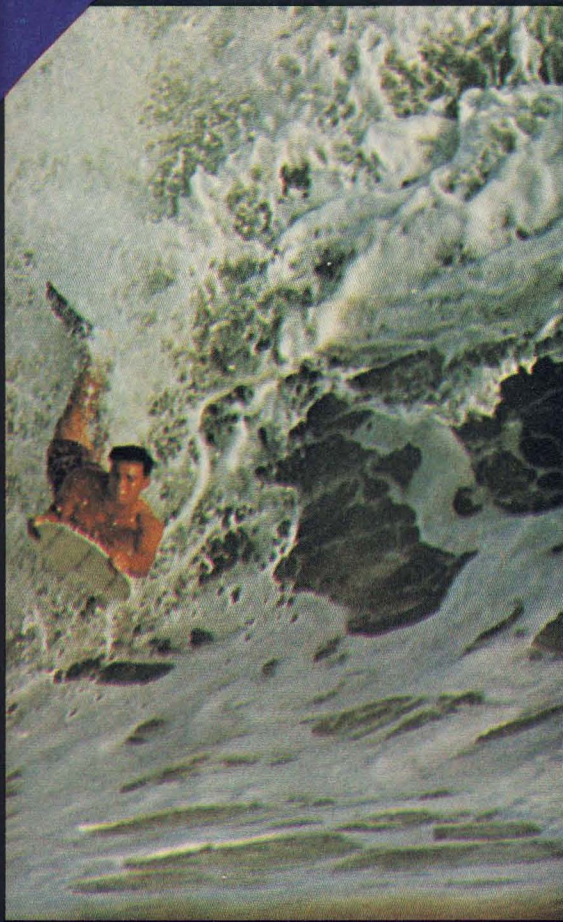
PAIPO: It's not

PART I by Skip Newell

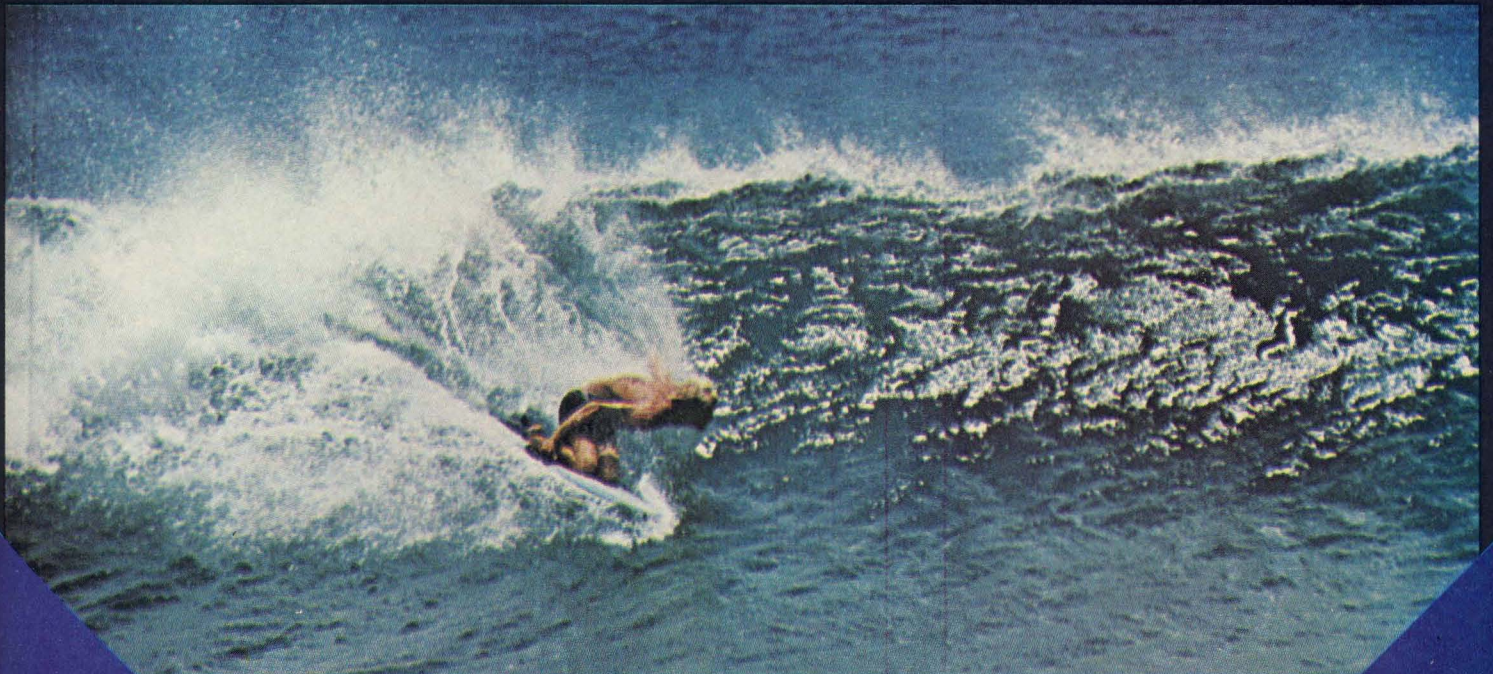
previously closed to surfboards. It introduced thousands to the sport of bellyboarding, and played an important part in the history of the paipo board. However, one drawback to its design was its thickness and length. It was impossible to try to get outside any sizable surf. Due to its mass, it could not be taken under. Consequently the board had to be thrown over waves, which often resulted in their loss.

There was a need for a very thin and very fast paipo board that could adapt to any wave of any shape in the country. A series of foam, hand shaped, high performance paipo boards were introduced by the author early in 1966. Known as the Newport Paipo, they had a flat bottom which ended in a release area at the tail. They were designed to produce as little turbulence in the water as possible. The rails were hand shaped and turned down sharply towards the rear. The idea worked out quite well because with two fins, ala Bob Simmons, the Newport Paipo rode higher in the wave and never spun

Brian Kenling on his knee stick at Rocky Point. *Tex Wilson photo.* ▶



how long you make it...





out on hollow tubes. In an effort to eliminate as much of the human body in the water as possible, experimentation with concave, convex, slot and "V" bottoms was tried. Eventually, the concave bottom proved best. It enabled the rider to slide further up on the board and drag less of his body in the water. With the Newport Paipo Concave Vector, the knowledge of surfboard design was being applied to paipo boards.

Several prominent riders came out of this era of foam paipos. Terry Jay, usually found at the Santa Ana River jetty, was very adept at late take-offs. The incredible speed of the paipo enabled it to beat collapsing sections that would have stopped a surfboard. Rick Newcomb started riding at the Wedge and astounded people by riding on his knees to get more maneuverability out of his board. Hence, the era of the knee machine.

George Greenough applied his knowledge to paipo boarding. His design was radically different than anything seen before. His board is spoon shaped and very thin. The bottom is flat, has one fin, and could be flexed to alter the shape and flow patterns on the bottom. Ridden as a knee board, it is tremendously maneuverable and fast. Thru the medium of films, viewers everywhere were witnesses to Greenough's fantastic displays of surfing. Manufacturers today are duplicating Greenough's spoon board, and paipo boarding is on the rise.

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The paipo offers the surfer tremendous speed and involvement with the wave, whether ridden prone or as a knee machine. These boards can be ridden on almost any type of wave anywhere in the world. Surfing experience is not a necessary requirement, as the technique of

paipo boarding is easily picked up by the novice. As beaches become more restricted, the easily portable and fast paipo boards are the possible answer for many surfers.

BUD HULST manufacturer of the El Paipo "spoon":

"It takes a slightly larger wave, over four feet, to get a spoon to really perform well. The expert can do more things than a board surfer can do. Harder turns, side slips with control, and greater speeds are possible."

SKIP NEWELL Newport Paipo board designer:

"We haven't even scratched the surface. The paipo board is still in the most primitive stages of development; the future is exciting."

TERRY JAY Aggressive paipo-boarder now living in Hawaii:

"My favorite areas to surf are of course lefts: Pipeline, Ala Moana, and a few secret spots. Actually, here in the Islands, knee boarding is not as popular as it could be. The waves are more critical here."

RICK NEWCOMB One of the first to ride the Wedge on his knees:

"Knee machines are only in the beginning stages of development. Here in California, the sport is really picking up. There are many companies surviving, and doing quite well, just on paipo board sales alone."

CON COLBURN Surfboard manufacturer and Newport Paipo board builder:

"You have much more control and you are right in the water, your head is only inches away... it's getting involved, getting tight, totally a whole different perspective."

GEORGE GREENOUGH Designer of widely copied "spoon" board:

"It doesn't matter what you ride as long as you have fun doing it."

JACK HOKANSON of Jack's Surf Shop, first to market mass produced belly boards:

"As beaches become more crowded with more restrictions and curfews, automatically we are forced into a smaller board. Belly boards will soon outnumber surfboards."

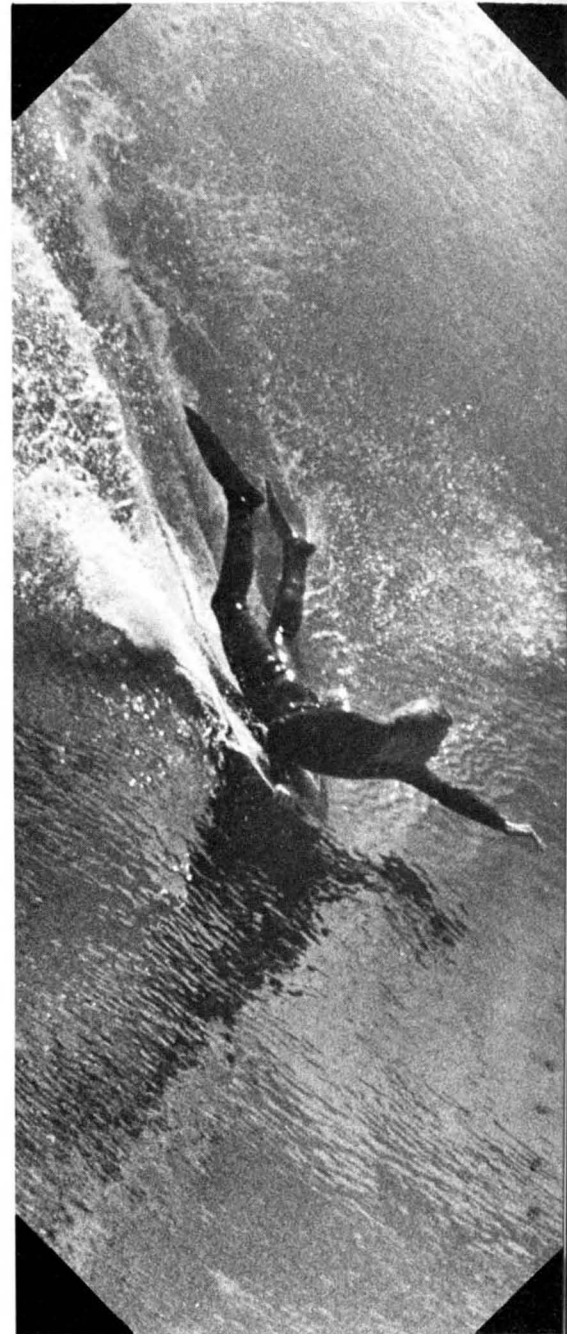


Photo by Ellis.

◀ One rule is never lose your board. Here, the would be paipo boarder becomes a body surfer on a very heavy wave. Alan Rich photo.