

Riding Dumpers

When you have become pretty confident in the surf you can even have a go at riding dumpers. As you are hurled down by the wave, bring your arms up in front of you, elbows bent at ninety degrees, palms facing down. As you hit the water at the bottom of the wave, bring your arms down and smash the water with as large an area of your arms and hands as possible.

This tends to make you bounce back up again; at least, by keeping your body straight, it prevents your being turned head over heels by the dumper. As the dumper overtakes you, paddle quickly beneath the surface with your hands; this should bring you out in front of the wave, and with any luck you will be able to catch it in towards the shore.

Another method is to let the unbroken dumper pass by you, and then slip after it, allowing yourself to be dragged forward by the surge of water that follows a dumping wave. As the wave pulls you forward, submerge and paddle after it. You may even be able to catch up with it and ride it as you would any other wave.

But riding dumpers is no sport for beginners. And even if you're an expert, you may still find yourself going down the mine. Put that down to experience. . . .

OTHER SURFING METHODS

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I prefer board riding to any other form of surfing. It has something that, for me, nothing else can rival. But Australians have invented and borrowed many other ways of enjoying the surf, and each of them has its own special kick.

Skis

One of the most popular pieces of surfing equipment over the years has been the ski, an Australian invention which began as a variation upon the paddle board. Skis have been refined a lot since then. The modern wave-riding ski is about twelve feet long, twenty-five inches wide, five inches deep, with a pronounced turn-up at the nose and a deep fin at the back. The racing ski is closer to seventeen feet in length, twenty-two inches wide, and occasionally has a movable fin as well. Both are made of hollow plywood sections, and they are a big improvement on the old, short, heavy jobs.

A standard seven-foot paddle and plenty of muscle power is all the beginner needs to learn to handle a surf-ski. Tie the paddle to the bow so you won't lose it if you are thrown off a wave, rest it along the front of the ski, and push the ski out through the surf until the water is up to your knees or thereabouts. Make sure you stand to one side of the ski as you push it, and not behind it, as otherwise a wave may jam the stern of the ski into your belly. And never let the ski get sideways-on to the waves: even a small wave can slam the ski painfully against your legs.

When the water seems reasonably calm, hoist yourself on the ski, sitting with only the front of each foot

thrust into the straps; then get your balance, and start paddling with the usual canoeist's stroke. As each wave comes at you, lean backwards and raise the nose of the ski over the white water, then lean forward again and throw your weight forward. You should try to keep paddling right through a wave, so before it hits you try to make sure you have some speed up to carry you through it. If a large wave looms up and looks as if it is going to break on you, stop paddling, or back paddle to give it a chance to break in front; then, before it reaches you, start paddling again and regain some speed.

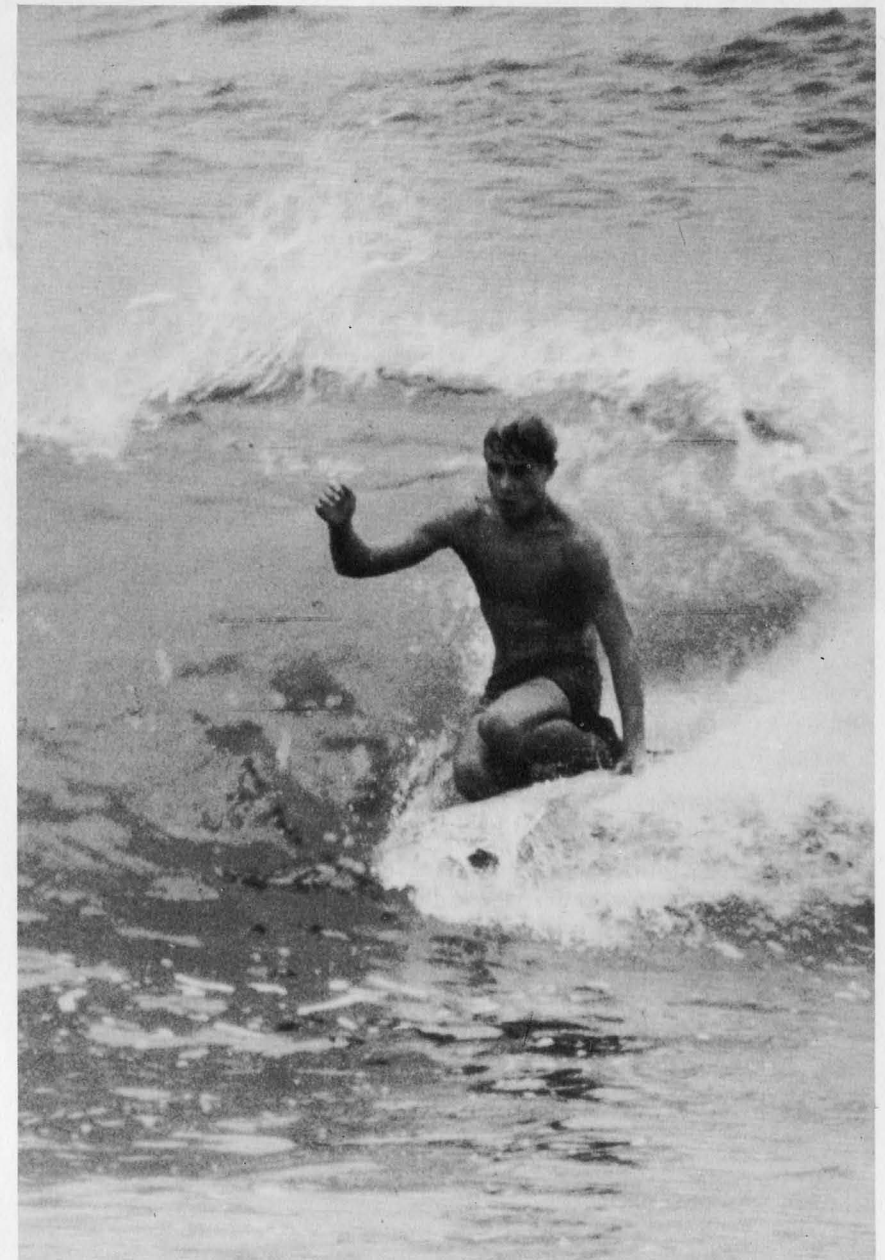
When climbing over a steep wave, lean forward so that the smack of the ski falling down on top of the water on the other side doesn't throw you off balance. And always try to pick a lull between waves to try to beat the break—it's so much easier than battling all the way out.

Catching a Wave

Once you are out past the break, turn the ski around and start paddling for the wave you want to catch, using a series of short, quick strokes. You can catch a wave earlier with a ski than any other sort of surf craft, so you can afford to wait further out the back than most board riders do, and make the most of a long ride in. Once the ski is under way, keep your weight up front until you're sure you've caught the wave; then lean backwards, or move back towards the stern, so that the nose won't plough under the water at the bottom of the slide. If you look like losing the wave, move forward again and paddle hard; it's a good idea to do that anyway at the bottom of a big wave, especially a dumper, so that you will escape the full force of the white water slamming down behind you.

Once you are on the wave you can hold the paddle loosely in your hands or lay it along the front of the ski out of the way. The advantage of keeping hold of it is that you can steer the ski by jamming the paddle into the water on the side you want to go. Thrust the blade in near where you're sitting, and use it as a lever to swing the nose of the ski around. This way you can

Belly-board surfing—and a young surfer kneels on the board as the top of the wave loops over him



on steering. And when mounting a double ski it's a good idea to let the front paddler on first while the rear man stands beside the ski and holds it in position against the oncoming waves.

Snowy McAllister's Ski

Snowy McAllister, of Manly, Sydney, has made the greatest advance in the design of the ski, as far as I know.

Several years ago he started doing research, and produced a shorter type of ski. It's really a sort of ski-board, like a cut-down sixteen-foot surfboard. It's about fourteen feet long, and has footstraps, and it's very easily manoeuvred compared with the conventional ski. It's got a good lift in the front, swells out wide about a third of the way back from the nose, and is eight to twelve inches wide at the tail.

Snowy can handle this ski much the same way as a surfboard rider can handle his board. I've seen him do tremendous pull-outs on this by kicking the back of the board out of the wave, spinning it out so that the back of the board is facing the shore. Snowy then paddles back through the top of the wave with the nose pointing out to sea. It's quite light and easy to handle—I've ridden it myself and have been able to handle it quite well. It corners easily, for it's pretty narrow (about twenty inches), and it's surprisingly fast. You can turn it, ride it in the top of the wave, trim across the face, and kick out.

Mat Riding

The mat, or surfoplane, is one of the easiest of surf craft to ride. An inflated rubber square or oblong between three and four feet long, it is popular with young swimmers. But it also comes in handy in a big surf when the waves are dumping too hard to make body-shooting much of a pleasure.

The most difficult thing about managing a mat is getting it out through the break, because it is so buoyant

that even medium-sized waves push it back towards the shore. Try wading out as far as you can with the mat under your arm or carried over your head; then lie on it with your shoulder about level with the front edge and start paddling with your arms. A shallow paddle, one arm at a time, is better than a deep double-arm action.

When a broken wave comes roaring down on the mat you can do one of two things. You can throw the mat over the wave, submerge, and pick it up on the other side; or else you can stay on it and try to force your way through. If you decide on the second course, keep paddling until the wave has almost reached you. Then grab the mat with both arms, duck your head under the crest of the wave, and try to kick your way forward. As soon as you get to the other side start paddling again, and don't stop till you get beyond the break.

Swim flippers are a big help with mats. They help you through the break, and they help you to pick up speed quickly when going for a wave. You can catch a wave with a mat later than you can in body-surfing; in fact, you may find it worthwhile to wait for the wave a little further in towards the beach than you would if you were body-surfing. As the wave comes up behind you, start paddling furiously for the beach, kicking as fast as you can with your feet, and fins, well in the water. When you feel the wave has picked you up, give a final kick, grab the front of the mat with both hands, and enjoy the ride.

Down the Face

Sometimes you may feel that the wave is passing you by as you paddle for it, and that you're going to miss it altogether. If so, it is worth trying this trick: grab the mat with your hands and shoot it out in front of you so that you look a bit like someone learning to swim by kicking behind a swimming float. This will shoot your centre of gravity forward and it may also tip the mat, if not your body, over that vital curling edge of the wave.

As soon as the wave picks your mat up it's an easy matter simply to haul yourself back on board, but don't do that until you're sure the mat and you are on the way down the slide. Above all, you must carry out the manoeuvre quickly. Shoot the mat forward, give a flurry of kicks, and try to force the mat over the breaking edge.

Something of the same technique can be used when riding a dumper. On a normal wave it's a good idea to keep your weight well forward on the mat, but with a dumper you run the risk of nosediving. Once again, slide the mat forward from beneath your body a little just as you are about to take the shock of the dump, but keep a tight hold. And if you are trying to beach a dying wave, shoot the mat out as far in front of you as you can while still holding to it. This can also help you to force your way through a second break close to the shore.

You can steer a mat by throwing your weight in the direction you want to go. If, for instance, you want to veer to the left, push the front left corner of the mat down and throw your weight on the left-hand side. Use the same technique for cornering, and try to keep the mat high under the curl of the wave; because of its natural buoyancy, it will tend to descend the face of the wave sooner than a body-surfer would.

With the advent of longer, heavier, and more stable mats, many young surfers have found that they can kneel, and even stand, on the mat while catching the wave to the shore. This requires a lot of practice, and it is not recommended for anyone who is more than six or seven stone in weight.

Paddle for the wave in the normal way, lying down—or, if you can manage it, by kneeling. As soon as the wave has picked you up, move quickly into a kneeling or standing position by resting your hands on the front of the mat and using them to balance you while you bring your knees or feet into position. After a lot of failures you will find you can ride the mat sitting on it, lying on your back, or even standing backwards.

Handboards

On many beaches, handboards are banned in swimming areas, but they lead a clandestine life in the hands of enthusiasts, and as long as they are used well away from other body-surfers they are perfectly safe.

The usual handboard is made of thin light wood such as plywood, about a foot long and nine inches wide, with a curved front, straight sides, and a sawn-off rear end. Sometimes a thin strap is fixed to one side of the board, left just loose enough to allow the surfer to jam his hand under it. Swimming out through the break, and again swimming for a wave, the surfer uses the handboard as a sort of paddle.

As soon as you've caught the wave with a handboard, keep the hand with the board in it well out in front of you, and bring the other hand up to join it. You should then be in roughly the same position as if you were skating while body-surfing, except that instead of forcing the heels of your palms down on the water you force the handboard down. Tilt the front of the board slightly upwards, then bring your arms, still straight, back towards your body, so that your shoulders and chest are raised, and you get a planing effect. Steer by swinging the board to whichever side you want to go. The handboard is particularly useful for cornering a wave, and when it is used with flippers the surfer can swerve abruptly to left or right.

Belly Boards

The belly board, as the name implies, is rather larger, and is designed to be ridden face down. It is usually about four feet long, a little under two feet wide, and can be made out of anything that floats well. The surfer lies on it as he would on a mat, paddling with his hands and kicking with his legs. Most of the techniques that apply to a mat apply to a belly board; the advantage of the board is that it is easier to push out through the break, less unwieldy, and more responsive to the rider's control.

The Peipo

The most advanced form of belly board I have seen is the peipo, which has been developed in Hawaii. It's a thin board, usually made of plywood or fibreglass; it has no fins, is only three or four feet long, sometimes even shorter, and is wider at the back than at the front. It has a square tail, and a rounded nose that is lifted radically and dished out—it's almost as though you had cut a dish in half and put one half of it on the front. The reason for this is that the board is so thin that you can't afford to have the front of it digging into the water as you come down the wave. With a surfboard you've got a bit of leeway, because the board is a few inches thick; but if the nose of the peipo goes under you nose-dive straight away.

The first principle of the peipo is the flat surface, which gives it its speed. Peipos have on occasions travelled faster than surfboards, for they have hardly any resistance to the water, and quite often become airborne. They've been ridden in a fifteen-foot surf at Sunset Beach, and ridden successfully. When, however, they encounter choppy waves they become pretty well unmanageable, for they have no skegs to help the rider control them, and they become too airborne altogether. Best method of handling one is to dig an edge into the wave to rise, or lower an edge to come down the wave.

I think that peipos are likely to become very popular. They are simple, and reasonably easy and cheap to make. You can laminate several pieces of plywood together, or use fibreglass, or even solid redwood, as long as you get that little bit of lift in the front to stop the peipo nose-diving.

Fins

For quite a while Australian surfers spurned the use of flippers, or fins, as an "artificial" aid to surfing. Artificial they certainly are, but they have proved themselves so effective that more and more surfers are using them.

The main advantage of fins is that they allow you to pick up speed more quickly when you are trying to

catch a wave, and they allow you to move faster when swimming out through the break. They are very useful in a heavy surf, and in any sort of surf they help the surfer to become more manoeuvrable and better able to catch and hold a wave. When you are on a wave that is losing its first force, and is banking up for a second break, fins can be invaluable, in helping you to force your way on to the second slide.

The larger the fins the more thrust they will give you. But do not buy some that are too heavy for you and will impose too much strain on your leg muscles. Make sure they fit you well—some have an adjustable strap—and if the surf is a heavy one tie the fins to your ankles with ribbon or tape. This will stop you losing them if a big wave drags them off your feet.

The design of fins has changed over the years. American and Hawaiian body-surfers use a longer, lighter, and more buoyant fin than are most of those seen on Australian beaches. It's a simple design—just one strap, with no buckles or tie-ups or anything—anything up to three feet long.

They're very flexible, not too tiring on your feet once you get used to them, and the power they give you is tremendous. You can go for a wave without using your arms at all.

Another advantage of extremely long fins is that they can be used as the skeg on a surfboard is used. When you are travelling parallel to the wave with your shoulder down they will hold the rear part of your body into the top of the wave and help give you stability. This makes them a great help to the body-shooter.