

A Defense of Bodyboarding: A Manifesto

There are at least 20 times more bodyboards than stand-up surfboards in America.

Nine out of ten people who own a bodyboard don't know how to use it.

There are hundreds of books that tell you how to use a stand-up surfboard.

Yet there are none that teach you how to use a bodyboard.

This situation must be remedied.

Almost everything you can do on a stand-up surfboard, you can do on a bodyboard. Notice, I didn't say "almost anything you can do on a *surfboard*, you can do on a bodyboard" because a bodyboard *is* a surfboard, even though stand-up surfers sometimes call them "sponges" and bodyboarders "spongers." Ignore them. Sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you.

They're just jealous that you can do with such ridiculous ease what they can do only by considerable practice and athleticism.

When you were a kid, you didn't start your self-transportation life by learning to drive a car. You first learned to ride a bike. Every human endeavor is like that: it makes sense to start the easy way.

But riding a bike is not a compromise. It's better than driving a car. It's simpler, cheaper, healthier, more environmentally sensitive, and more fun. It plunges you into nature and other people rather than isolating you. You actually talk to the people you pass. You slow down and smell the flowers. Ignorant or jealous drivers may call bicycles "training wheels," or "kiddie cars," but cyclists just ignore them and enjoy themselves.

The parallel with the bodyboard is obvious.

* * * * *

Here are seven reasons to choose to use a bodyboard.

1. I prefer a bodyboard to a stand-up board for the same reason I prefer an open convertible to a closed car, a glider to an airplane, and a bike to a car: to be closer to nature.

Body-surfing is closest of all, but bodyboarding is a close second in closeness. (And it's *much* harder to get long or fast rides body-surfing than bodyboarding.) On a bodyboard you get real "up close and personal," or real "down and dirty," with the sea. Your whole body is in it, not just your board. You're more like a fish. Bodyboarding is like riding a horse bareback; stand-up surfing is like riding a horse standing up in the stirrups.

2. It's egalitarian. Bodyboarders, or boogieboarders, are plunged into humanity as they are plunged into the sea. Not everybody can surf, but everybody can boogie. And millions do. Even me. I'm old. I'm clumsy. I can't dance or ice skate. But I can boogie. Ninety year olds can boogie. Two year olds can boogie.

3. When you bodyboard, since your whole body is in the water, your soul is too, since your soul is where your body is. (Unless you're having an out-of-body experience, and if you have an out-of-body experience in the ocean and your soul leaves your body, your soul will not go to the land. It will *become* the ocean.)

4. It's natural. Dolphins, ducks, seals, and fish don't stand up riding a wave.

5. It's easy. It's great for your self-esteem. It takes at the most a few hours to learn good bodyboarding; it can take months or even years to learn good stand-up surfing. And as you're learning to be better, you're already riding nearly every wave. You feel like a success from day one.

6. It's safe. There's no hard board and no sharp fin. Your head won't get knocked unconscious by a little torpedo and your jugular vein won't get cut by a rudder.

7. Best of all, it lacks prestige. Board surfers are so jealous they call us names. They call us "spongers." This to me is a plus, not a minus. There's a whole bullshit surfing culture out there, but there's no such thing as bodyboard culture.

We could also add that if you're a man on a boogie board, you are the boogie man. So you don't have to be afraid of the boogie man any more.