



Surfing

a beginner's guide

second edition

Alf Alderson



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SURFING

A Beginner's Guide

2nd Edition

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PREFACE

Since the early 1980s the popularity of surfing has grown almost exponentially, and thanks to improvements in wetsuit technology there are few coastlines in the world that haven't been surfed now - even Alaska and Norway have resident surfers these days.

Despite this, surfing is still one of the hardest sports to learn and master. So in this book you'll find all the basics you need to get you going - what you won't find is the lowdown on how to pull aerials or ride 15-foot reef breaks - by the time you're ready for that, you won't be needing an instruction book.

One of the world's top young pro surfers, Flynn Novak, is captured in action by world-class surf photographer Sean Davey in step-by-step sequences that beautifully illustrate just what it should look like when you get to your feet for the first time or pull off your first cutback. And hopefully the words alongside should help to bring it all together in one neat and easily assimilated package!

If the surf conditions are right, you're reasonably fit, a competent swimmer and determined enough, you should be able to reach a basic level of surfing within two to three days. You may not be ripping the waves apart, but you will be standing up on the board with a modicum of control. Then it's a case of practice, practice, practice and lots of commitment. I've known people who changed their entire lifestyle to improve their surfing, but once you've got the basics wired you can still have a great time in the surf even if you never get beyond being a 'weekend warrior'.

Whatever your aspirations, there are few sports that get you hooked the way surfing does. It doesn't matter whether you become a contest hotshot or a mellow soul who wants to cruise along on gentle beach breaks - once you're riding waves you're guaranteed to be having as much fun (almost . . .) as anyone can without their clothes on.

Alf Alderson

St. David's, Pembrokeshire, Spring 2008

Equipment



‘There’s no sport that I know of that has all the ingredients of pure enjoyment that surfing does.’

Peter Cole, legendary big wave rider

The majority of surfers are still riding shortboards, despite the resurgence of longboards, mini-mals, funboards, and a widerange of ‘hybrid’ designs in recent years.

Choosing the right board is essential if you want to make good progress as a beginner, but it’s not just a case of walking into your friendly local surf shop and sauntering out again 15 minutes later ready to rip.

Surfboard design is an art form in itself, and no two surfers will ride the same board in the same way or get the same out of it. This is not the place to go into detail on the intricacies of board design (see Chapter 7), but we

can take a look at the most popular board designs out there.

SHORTBOARDS

The majority of shortboards will be three-fin 'thrusters', usually within the size range 5 ft 8 in/1.70 m to 6 ft 8 in/2.0 m. Bigger surfers may go for slightly longer boards; longer shortboards (excuse the oxymoron) are used in bigger surf; and some surfers will opt for shorter, high performance models.

Shortboards are basically for more experienced surfers, being highly manoeuvrable, but at the same time more difficult to control. Various features of the board will be designed to suit a surfer's riding style. Thickness and width vary from board to board, as do rocker and vee. Rails may be hard or soft, the board may have channels, the fin configuration can differ, and tail shape will also vary. (If all this is as clear as mud, see Chapter 7 to understand the terminology.) As you can see there's a lot more to a surfboard than meets the eye, and a lot of time and money is spent on board design and development.

You should forget about getting a high performance shortboard if you're just starting out - it may look cool on the beach, but it will do you no favours in the surf. You'll find it difficult to paddle, difficult to catch waves with, and difficult to ride. What you should be looking for is a funboard or a mini-mal.

A modern epoxy shortboard.



A modern custom-made fiberglass shortboard.



FUNBOARDS

Funboards sit mid-way between a shortboard and a longboard. They'll usually be around 7 ft 6 in/2.30 m in length, and be wider and thicker than a shortboard, with a more rounded nose. These boards are basically designed for having fun on, as the name implies. They make it easy to catch waves, but are still manoeuvrable enough to allow you to challenge yourself in the surf, and they're a great option if you surf in an area where the waves are generally small or lacking in power. They're especially good for beginners but are often used by experienced older surfers looking for an advantage in catching the waves.

A custom-made fibreglass funboard.



LONGBOARDS AND MINI-MALS

Longboards are the boards that are associated with the halcyon days of the '60s, when they were known as Malibu boards after the famous California point break. Everyone who was anyone 'rode the nose' at every opportunity and drop-knee turns were the only turns worth doing. They were superseded in the late '60s and early '70s by shortboards, but made a come-back in the late '80s, and now most breaks will have a number of longboards out in the line-up.

A 'longboard' is generally considered to be over 9 ft/3 m in length with a much more rounded nose than the previous two categories, and a wider and thicker template. They may have one or more fins.

Mini-mals are kind of 'short' longboards of between 7 ft 6 in/2.30 m and 8 ft 6 in/2.60 m in length, and they're another good option for learning on as they offer a lot of flotation and stability and are easier to paddle. However, in big surf they can be bulky for beginners to handle.

A modern epoxy longboard.



Longboards are the least manoeuvrable of the three main categories of surfboard and are ridden in a different way. The style is generally much smoother and more graceful than that of the shortboarder, with an emphasis on 'walking the board' (moving up and down on the deck of the board) and nose riding (surfing with five or ten toes over the nose - 'hang five' and 'hang ten' respectively). Having said that, high performance longboard surfing, featuring shortboard-style moves is becoming increasingly common as well as easier on modern, lighter, performance-oriented models.

POP-OUTS

A pop-out can be any of the above designs produced from a mould, whereas a custom board is shaped and finished by hand. A pop-out makes an excellent first board for a number of reasons. For a start a new pop-out will be about a third of the price of a new custom board, as well as being much sturdier and far less prone to damage. Pop-outs don't have the same smooth flowing lines as custom boards, being thicker and wider and somewhat more rough and ready due to the moulding process, but at this stage you don't need the design refinements that custom boards provide.

Cheap n' cheerful - a 'pop out', great for beginners.



SOFT BOARDS