TOOLING UP FOR THE SWELL

WHAT'S MOST LIKELY TO HELP OR HINDER

PETER HART

THE ONLY THING MORE DAUNTING THAN CONFRONTING A MEATY SWELL FOR THE FIRST TIME, IS TRYING TO CHOOSE KIT FOR THE JOB. THE OPTIONS APPEAR OVERWHELMING. FRESH FROM HIS 5 WEEK WAVE CLINIC TOUR OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC, HARTY HELPS YOU PRIORITIZE AND EXPLAIN WHAT'S MOST LIKELY TO HELP OR HINDER.

When it comes to selecting wave kit do not fall prey to 'me-no-good, can't-tell-the-difference' syndrome.

CONFIDENCE CRISIS

Self-deprecation is the windsurfer’s worst enemy. “It doesn’t matter what kit I get because I’m useless and won’t be able to tell the difference” are words frequently uttered by the novice deciding to cobble together some dusty bits gleaned from a garage sale. Hopefully someone plucks them from the jaws of eternal stagnation by providing them with a combo designed specifically for their level. Thereafter they do associate progress with equipment and set-up. They realise that planing and getting into the straps was only possible when rig matched board; and straps, harness lines and boom height were all configured to deliver a constant force into the board vs mastfoot without crouching, teetering, straining or plopping. The attitude to kit should then follow all the way up through the levels – especially into wavesailing.

The harder the discipline, the narrower the appropriate kit window – if you’re fighting the wave kit and struggling just to sail in a straight line, what chance have you when you throw waves into the mix? Wave kit may be different but it should not be difficult. The easier it is to sail, the more you lift your head, relax and sail tactically. Don’t think that just because you have no experience you wont be able to tell the difference between good and not so good wave equipment. You will.

YESTERDAY WAS A BETTER PLACE

Yesterday at East Wittering I counted 50 mostly recreational-al surfer dudes, 100 mostly lackluster surfer dudes, nearly as many with boards under their arms, and no wave kit at all. I don’t want to know what they were there for (not the fantasy of surfing) but in reality to offer a bit more resistance and reduce the spin out, which was a way of life in that era. Tri-fins were also the current trend in surfboards – we weren’t immune to trends even back then.

As far as size, in a rare moment of clarity I shared the lesson I’d learned with surfing which was that you don’t get to ride a wave unless you make it through the break and can paddle fast enough into a wave to catch it early, for which big is beautiful. So we didn’t go too small, 270 cm and about 100 ltrs in today’s money (which actually felt really small for the time.) It was important, we decided, that we could actually sail the things. Tad suggested that as soon as we reached that position where we were catching wave after wave and genuinely felt we were being held back by the design, not by incompetence, then he would make some tweaks.

Anyway, the reason for that rambling anecdote is that the problem of determining where you are on your level progression, is pretty much the same today as you ponder kit for the waves. What do you really want this board to do? Ride, jump or blast? What sea state do you mostly encounter? Swell or wind blown waves? What kit are you used to? What’s your style? Do you have a friend’s kit? Do you care?

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because at this stage I think I need more a clinic and did what I was told (well done Ruth is a relative newcomer to waves // (1) {MASTERCLASS TECHNIQUE} NOVEMBER DECEMBER 2014

Listening to those on the cutting edge of the wave scene is interesting because they take the kit to its limits and really can identify the differences.

PROS EYE VIEW PT 2 JOHN SKYE ON FINS AND BATTENS

The participants of my recent wave clinic in Tiree stand before their favourite sticks. No one was hamstrung by their equipment. Their choices were favouring a quad. There's gigabytes of information out there so it's interesting to hear what informed their decisions.

The market for a multi fin." begins to hold my riding back. I tend to of Perth and the mushy waves of home where single fin would work best both in the chop is 76 Real Wave single fin. windsurf, he's very good. His board of choice is 75 Quadrant Quad, but loses it. "When I first come on my other than the Quad, which is techosetected for me. For me the big thing is still getting the equipment out the waves. I I think the look of the Quad I find I was really only in at all and what helps through the waves. I'm not aware of having to charge my style that much but the real deal is anything that is too small, too wide sail tell us in your early years, which is a size to beam."

1980s, despite doing most of her sailing on a long running 1.315 sail, but perhaps the most dedicated wave board, a 75 Quadrant Quad, but loses it. "When I first come on my other than the Quad, which is techosetected for me. For me the big thing is still getting the equipment out the waves. I I think the look of the Quad I find I was really only in at all and what helps through the waves. I'm not aware of having to charge my style that much but the real deal is anything that is too small, too wide sail tell us in your early years, which is a size to beam."

Due to squillions of R and D hours experimenting with minute improvements of volume distribution and various kinds of rail shape and rocker, they have improved immeasurably. We are now in the happy place today where bigger boards work so much better.

The difference in outline between a modern 75 lr and 90 is not so different. The extra volume has been cleverly hidden in places that aid the float but detract minimally from the performance.

This has changed our relationship with power. Siting higher in the water, bigger boards need less grunt to push them along on and off the plane. Riding hanging onto a lot of power, you can't take up wide angles because you're always resisting the rig. Typically, good sailors use their kit in a way that makes it last them years back. Using a smaller rig widens your cage of movement. It's easier to hide and depower the sail so one reason I find a sail not being as 

"I'm not here to knock old kit. In fact I let every 1900-era relic to some of my old favourite wave boards. But looking at old pics of the good days, it was always very wintry and the kit was tiny. Today my best days are often on a 92 board in winds of 75 knots or less. Thanks to better bigger boards, wave riding is no longer a sale-driven activity."

The main consideration is whether you truly intend to ride proper waves. The reality is that on the best riding days, from Cornwall, to Tahiti, in side or off side conditions, the wind is gusty and often light. The deciding factor is what board do you need to punch through white water and how much volume do you need to bag around comfortably off the plane and perhaps even uphaul? For an 80 kg bloke, it's about 90 but add another 10 or 15 to that if you're challenged in the general trimming and balance department.

STYLES – HOW MUCH CAN YOU CHANGE?

My friend Filippo, who has a van full of the very latest Quads, commented he doesn't know many sports like windsurfing (and wave sailing in particular) where the amateur aspires to use exactly the same kit as the pros. It's an interesting point – and maybe they shouldn't.

Modern wave designs have been developed mostly by young people whose style has been shaped through surfing, freestyle and wave sailing, which means they've never really used a fin. They stand over the board and sail and turn off the front foot.

Modern sailors, on the other hand, come from a freestyle background. They sail off the leech and drive all the power through the back foot against the sail and into that powerful fin, which they use like a safety blanket.

The two styles could be a lot different. A lot are happy to make the transition, but a great amount struggle. The question is how far you prepared to bend towards the new way? On your DNA. It depends on how many hours you can put in to adapt – but also on your DNA.

I am lucky enough to have access to all the new stuff. I've moved with the changes and embrace the front foot, big board, small sail, surfing style – almost. However I spent a big chunk of my formative years competing in slalom where the gale is all about a massive sheet in and driving that power into a long sharp edge and feeling it bite. The thing is, I still like that feeling in my wave sailing and so probably use a slightly bigger sail than is hip, and tend to 'fin up' my boards a little more. There may be an old dog and new tricks issue, but I prefer the word 'heritage.' I can't get over it, I quite like the feeling of a little extra power.
The modern board and rig combo in action in what is now called ‘real world’ conditions – identifiable waves but nothing bone-crunching. One major advantage of the multi-fin design is how the fins pull them into the water allowing you to do tight full rail turns at relatively slow speed – and therefore stay on the wave face and not suffer. Note how the set and design of the sail naturally pull you up onto the front foot.

FreeWaves are the choice for high-wind blasting, jumping and wave riding. But if most of your windsurfing is carving up peeling walls of water, then go for the dedicated wave board and forget the BMW. It’s the versatility of the fsw that you’re buying into. The choice of strap positions allow you to adapt your style gradually, moving them inboard, opening them up millimeter by millimeter as the design. When you’re good enough to feel that point where the fsw is hampering your riding ambitions, you can trust your own decisions about the next step.

The message is to adapt, but not move so far from what you know that you can’t function. If, try as you might, you can’t help but give the back foot the odd reassuring hoof, then don’t be afraid to invest in big fins, err towards a single fin or maybe a freestyle wave board. Now there’s a can brimming with wrigglers to compartmentalise you can say:

- Quads – powerful turns.
- Twins – loose, surfy, skatey.
- Tri-fin (thurster) – powerful turns but more directional
- Four-fins (thruster) – trade-off between quads and twins and work really well.

So the number of fins really depend on what gets the most out of your board – I don’t have a favourite. Fin sizes are a whole new story …!

PRO’S EYE VIEW PT 1. JAMIE HANCOCK AND THE FIN QUESTION.

Jamie is one of our great home-grown talents. At 68kg he’s at the lighter end of the scale – and the smallest board he uses these days is a round 68 ltr to 70ltr. He has this to say about the fin question.

“For me it’s simply a question of what best compliments my board. My Tabou boards come with 5 fin slots so there is an option for any set up. Last year I used quads for added grip and switched to twins for added speed in onshore conditions on the same board.

This year I’m using tri fins as they have a winged tail (steps in the tail). That is what is best for this board. I find thrusters are a kind of compromise between quads and twins and work really well. So the number of fins really depend on what gets the most out of your board. I don’t have a favourite. Fin sizes are a whole new story …!”

I often start my wave clinics by showing people some footage I took of Josh Angulo sailing his couching home break of Punta Preta in the Cap Verdies. To this day you will not see a more impressive display of down-the-line (downwind) wave-riding with full power bottom turns, cranking, vertical, one handed cut-backs under the lip with rail engaged right up to the nose logo, as well as massive aerials. It was 6 years ago and he was using a bog standard, production, 88 ltr board he grabbed from the racks of his hire centre with a 22cm single fin. The message is you have to get into some wildly extreme situations before you will be held back by classic, good, no frills wave kit – even then probably not – assuming it’s the right size for you and the conditions and matched by a well-set rig.

The year before at the 2007 inaugural and now legendary PWA wave event at that very same spot, Kauli Seadi kicked off the multi-fin rush by tucking his new quad fin design into some super tight pockets and drawing lines that no one had seen before. It’s also possible he performed thus because he’s brave and incredibly skilful and that other aspects of his new board design were more influential (the outline, the rocker etc) than the cluster of fins. But it’s also worth noting that Josh won that event on that same 88 ltr single fin.

My advice is not to get too distracted by the question of how many fins. Fins, of course, are very very important but they’re the icing on a big and very complicated cake. If you’re looking for the answer to this question, the answer is probably FreeWave. A Kode 81, 86 or 94, it’s like buying a BMW M3. It’s got four doors, it’ll commute to work and it’ll rip on the track.

“I borrowed a quad off Chris ‘Muzza’ Murray, new school to the core, and when I swapped the 13cm fins for 16s, so incredulous was he that I might as well have poured lemonade into his real ale. But it worked for me”
Single fin – yet more directional, secure, predictable. The first twin I tried about 5 years ago, I hated. I would have more secure going down the fast lane of the M6 on a wet Friday night on a shopping trolley. It would go in any direction but straight. But I love my new one – it’s fast, directional but loose in the right areas. It’s not about the fins, the basic design has simply improved.

Many of the latest models are coming with 5 fin boxes. It seems like a choice you can do without but it’s the best solution. If the board is good it will work with every set-up. Having the options allows you to tune it for different conditions (see the comments of Jamie Hancock and John Skye), onshore or sideshore, riding or jumping – or just settle on a feel that suits your style. And everyone has a style even though they don’t recognise it as such.

WAVE RIGS – AND THE BATTEN QUESTION
If you’ve been in this sport long enough, you will get the odd déjà vu. I happened recently upon some correspondence I had with Roger Tushingham while testing sails in Barbados in the late 80s. It was all to do with the ‘soft’ (sail with leech battens) vs hard (sail with full length battens) wave sail debate. He had sent me the first batch of fully battened prototypes. I didn’t like them. I couldn’t feel what was going on. They were heavier. When you sheeted out they still pulled. The argument was that they were more stable. In the end we reached a compromise and the new sails arrived with the option of either full or half battens.

And that’s pretty much where we are now with the 5, 4, or 3 batten sail debate. At the NWF I was discussing the issue with Sam Ross and we decided only half jokingly that we seem to be in the throes of redesigning the training sail. As a beginner a batten-less sail gives you more feel as well as visual clues (flapping) as to its state of trim. It also bags out to give you a lot of power for its size. But it’s all good, if just a little confusing.

Let us dodge the batten issue for a second, and as with boards, focus on basics.

Match a wave board with a wave sail. It’ll be more robust and likely to stay the course. But the key design features are a flatter foil, which gives neutral and depowers as you sheet out, and a centre of effort which is higher and more forward and lifts you up, inboard and onto your front foot into that ‘ready to surf’ position. A tighter leech and that high centre of effort lifts the board out of the water and allows you to get away with a smaller sail. Compare that to a more speed oriented sail which has more shape in the bottom battens, pushes the board onto the water and encourages a hunkered down, fin-driving, speed stance.

When it comes to battens, the less you have, the more information you get from the sail, (good for tricky wave riding situations), the more low end power it produces (good for multi fin boards where you’re trying to get away with a small sail), but also the less stable it is – not so good for powered up jumping. Currently I have a mix of 4 and 5 battens. I currently favour 5 because, as I mentioned, I like to be a little more powered up than perhaps is strictly necessary and also gives a bigger wind range – a definite bonus when I’m coaching and the van is a long way from the waves.

Harty returns with yet more words of technique wisdom in the next issue. In the meantime check his website for details of the 2014-15 clinic schedule and how to buy a copy of his new gybing DVD or email him to get his monthly newsletter – hartty@peter-hart.com

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