

MASTERCLASS TECHNIQUE

Bigger, better wave boards and lighter, more powerful rigs have brought wave sailing to a wider audience and away from the gales. Harty having more fun that is strictly necessary on his favourite 92 twin in just 15 knots of wind. Photo Danielle of GetWindsurfing.



Story PETER HART

TOOLING UP FOR THE SWELL

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 PRIORITISE AND EXPLAIN WHAT'S MOST LIKELY TO HELP OR HINDER.



WITH PETER HART

We looked at each other with all the mutual understanding of a Chinaman and a Frenchman discussing the value of a good forward defensive cricket stroke.

"How much tuck do you want in these rails? How much tail kick? Wings or squash tail? Where do want the entry point?" "Er ... I just want it to go round corners."

The year was 1981. The place was Crantock Street in Newquay, Cornwall and the man standing in front of me with a saw, a block of foam and all the ridiculous questions, was Tad Ciastula of Vitamin Sea Surfboards.

Along with 3 friends, I'd booked a trip to Lanzarote with the sole objective of learning to sail a 'sinker' – the moniker given to boards in that era that didn't support your weight when stationary. We had just seen a video clip from Hawaii of Mike Waltze sailing waves on what looked like a modified surfboard and wanted a piece of that action. They didn't exist in production form so we had to get them made. Someone had put us onto Tad because he was skilled, personable and open to new ideas. But he didn't windsurf; so had to be given at least a germ of an idea of what was needed before he could start having new ones. I had been thrust forward to discuss because I surfed. Well I had a surfboard and could stand up but I was no Kelly Slater. I didn't speak a word of 'shaper-ese' and had not one meaningful syllable to offer him.

But there began a fertile relationship. We backed away from the foam, sat around a table and tried to address the real objectives, not the fantasy. "How much time will you really spend with your edges in contact with a wave face?" Not that much.

"What kind of conditions are you likely to confront (not the ones you want to confront)?" Mush.

Tad grasped the 'blasting about joyfully but meaninglessly' aspect of windsurfing and could see that what we were after primarily were boards that afforded us a little more speed and control in wild winds and rough seas ... but which at least gave us the option of riding waves – i.e. not a surfboard with a mastfoot but a smaller windsurfer with a few more surfy bits. What today would be called a 'freestyle wave.'

We copied footstrap and mastfoot positions from existing boards but added a 12" Malibu fin box as a mast-track to give us greater trimming options. As for fins, we went for a three fin 'thruster' arrangement (sound familiar?) – purportedly to add more grip and drive in steeply banked turns (whatever they were) 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 for 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.

And did these boards work? Absolutely. Well three of them did. One of our band, Aussie Phil, had ideas way above his station. In his deluded mind he was already ripping Hawaiian reef breaks and kept asking Tad what would make the board 'snappier' and more manoeuvrable. "Tail kick you say? Well give me a load more of that mate!" And so Phil ended up with an undersized stick shaped like a court-jester's slipper, which pushed so much water that he planed just once during the whole six weeks we were in the Canaries; and that was during a Scirocco gale.

The last we heard of Phil, he was back in Oz farming bamboo. Anyway, the reason for that rambling anecdote is that the questions asked and lessons learned during that pioneering encounter, are 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 style? Do you want one? Do you care?

The way to approach this is to explain the fundamental concepts of wave kit – and then look at the current frills. It's a bit like buying a car in that first you have to decide on the basic requirements such as size, horsepower, seats for kids and space for dog, kit, partner etc; and then agonise over the details of traction control, size of subwoofer, number of cup holders etc. The approach starts with the self.

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 so that they could line themselves up directly with the power and deliver a constant force into the board via feet and mastfoot without crouching, twisting, straining or popping discs. That attitude to kit should then follow them all the way up through the levels – especially into wave sailing.

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 won't 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 recreation-al sailors out on the water (but it was a Tuesday – so obviously without jobs). It was brutal. The wind was gusting from 15-50 knots and the sea was a mess with a vicious cross chop atop a lazy, intermittent swell. Yet these people weren't just out, they were doing stuff. Popping big jumps, lining up on waves, screaming off down the line, smacking lips. Ten years ago on the same patch, perhaps 5-10 would have braved such conditions of which a couple with lots of logos on their sails, would have been actually doing something. So what has happened in those 10 years? Basically vastly improved wave kit has brought the upper levels within reach. But how?

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THE CHOICES PEOPLE MAKE

The participants of my recent wave clinic in Tiree stand before their favourite sticks. No one was hamstrung by their equipment. Their choices were sound and worked even though some seemed surprising - like 30 year old ripping Mike going for a single fin and 50yr old, lake-dwelling Viki favouring a quad. There's gigabytes of information out there so it's interesting to hear what informed their decisions.

// (1) Ruth is a relative newcomer to waves and living in Cumbria doesn't get to the coast that often. Her chosen boards are 103 and 78 freewaves.

"I had rubbish boards before, got advice from a clinic and did what I was told (well done Jem!). I didn't go for a full on wave boards because at this stage I think I need more allround designs to nail the basics."

// (2) Mike is in his early 30s and having taken a couple of years off to travel and windsurf, he's very good. His board of choice is 76 Real Wave single fin.

"I broke my board in Perth. The Real Wave was available for a good price. I reckoned the single fin would work best both in the chop of Perth and the mushy waves of home where you need speed to do anything. I think it's beginning to hold my riding back. I tend to spin out a lot when I try and crank it which is making me draw out my turns so I'm in the market for a multi fin."

// (3) Rob loves his kit and has improved hugely in the waves since buying a SUP. He's holding a Quad 92. He has an 82 as well. It wasn't something he planned: "I was actually after a twin but there was a 6 month wait so I went for the Quad and love it. I had an 86 fsw but in the waves I just found it too fast and lively. I'm not aware of having to change my style that much but my coach said the Quad has forced me to use my front foot more, which is nice to know."

// (4) Viki, despite doing most of her sailing on a lake running a T15 squad, has perhaps the most dedicated wave board, a 75 Quattro Quad, but loves it. "When I first came on these wave clinics I had rubbish old kit, which felt very technical to sail. For me the big thing is still getting out through the waves. I liked the look of the Quad. I find it really easy to sail and what helps more than anything is that the small fins and wide tail allow me to launch early and get straight into the straps. And for some reason I find I stay upwind."

PROS EYE VIEW PT 2 JOHN SKYE ON FINS AND BATTENS

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.



// I mostly use twin or quad. All my boards are quad, but depending on the conditions I alternate the set up. Twin makes the board a bit more free and pivot better, so I tend to choose this set up when its very light winds (e.g., 5.7 and 92 setup) or when its very small and junky onshore surf. As a quad the boards have more grip and more drive, and the front fins pull the board into the water which also aids control. If the waves are better I find the quad set up can give me more speed through the turns. I haven't played around too much with the Thruster set up, but I feel this give a bit more directional stability and maybe makes the board more settled. But I still need to play with this more and now we have 5 boxes in our boards it allows me to do that.

For me the less battens you have the more reactive the sail becomes. That means more feedback for the rider, which can be a good thing or a bad thing depending on what you are looking for. So in general a 3 batten sail will change shape a lot more as you ride. When you sheet the sail in, typically it will create a lot more power and drive instantly and the same when you sheet out with the power leaving the sail more quickly. In riding this can be a big advantage if you want to use the sail to power you through turns and then release the power at the top. On the other side you have 5 battens. These are less reactive, which can be a positive. If a gust hits, the sail will stay more in control and the rider can forget the sail more and focus on riding. They also tend to offer a more consistent power for jumping. The 4 batten sits somewhere in the middle and is my personal preference, offering a reactive feel when riding, and good control for jumping. It is important to also consider that it is not just the number of battens that effect these things, but also the designed usage of the sail. RRD for example have the Four and the Vogue which both feature 4 battens. However the Four is more reactive and with more power, whilst the Vogue is more controllable and settled.

DON'T MAKE DO! THE GAME HAS CHANGED.

Before you plump for that classic model, a snip at fifty quid though it may be, understand how the overall wave sailing game has changed.

In the past a wave board's manoeuvrability was linked primarily to its size and amount of rocker. Fewer litres meant thinner 'grippier' edges, which held in at speed. More rocker - the curve nose to tail but especially in the tail - helped the board to sit in the water and 'snap' round. But both those features made it slow to plane.

Wave sailing for most was therefore a windy pursuit, 20-25 knots plus. To keep us afloat, we would load little boards with relatively big sails. Big wave boards did exist but they bounced and skipped the moment the going got tough. The problem was that sticking to a relatively long (250 ish) and narrow outline, the only way to build in volume was to thicken the edges.

It was a decade ago that the outlines suddenly changed. Short wide boards weren't an immediate success, but it set us on a right track. They had more curve in the plan shape so you could engage the whole rail in the turn without tripping - like a surfboard. But you had adopt a more surfy style, standing in the middle of the board (more about that shortly)

Thanks to squillions of R and D hours experimenting with minute adjustments of volume distribution and various blends 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 ltr and 90 ltr board 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. Sitting 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 wild angles because you're always resisting the rig. Typically good sailors are using 0.5 sq m less than they were a few years back. Using a smaller rig widens your cage of movement. It's easier to hide and depower the sail allowing you drop deeper into turns, drive the board like a surfer.

Whereas once you were judged by how small a board you used in the waves, now it's by how small a rig you can get away with. But away from the glory of eye-popping off-the-lips, it's the most basic considerations that have the biggest influence. Back to yesterday's gale - as the tide turned, the current inshore started ripping downwind at about 4 knots, yet the majority were managing to hold station. That would never have happened before. Do the modern boards point higher? Not necessarily - but they plane earlier and longer. If you drop off the plane where the current is running (often around the impact zone), for every second you are off the plane, you're losing about a metre downwind. The newer, wider, designs help you get through those rips and fluffy patches. Whether you're learning to carve gybe or sail waves, it's the ability to stay upwind that has arguably the greatest influence on your progress.

VOLUME - THE KEY FACTOR

"Shall I get an 85 or a 95?" The general rule is that the bigger the board, given the general lack of storms, the more use you'll get out of it.

As little as 5 years ago I would have said the 'go to ...' wave board is your weight in litres.

Today I add 7-10 litres to that. At 85(ish) kg my most used board is my 92 which I use with a 5.7, 5.2 an sometimes even 4.7.

But it does depend, of course, on your ability and what you plan to do with it. Some choose wave boards primarily as high wind blasters specifically for use with sails under 5.0. In which case go smaller.

"I'm not here to knock old kit. In fact I get very gooey recalling some of my old favourite wave boards. But looking at old pics of the good days, it was always very windy and the kit was tiny. Today my best days are often on a 92 board in winds of 15 knots or less. Thanks to better bigger boards, wave riding is no longer a gale-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 side off 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 bog around comfortably off the plane and perhaps even uphaul? For an 80 kg bloke, it's about 90 ltrs but add another 10 or 15 to that if you're challenged in the general trimming and balance departments.

STYLEE - HOW MUCH CAN YOU CHANGE?

My friend Filippo, who has a van full of the very latest Quads, commented that 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. Most recreational sailors, on the other hand, come from a free-ride background. They sail off the leech and drive all the power through the back foot against the rail and into that powerful fin, which they use like a safety blanket.

The two styles couldn't be more different. A lot are happy to make the transition, but an equal amount struggle. The question is how far are you prepared to bend towards the new way? 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 gybe 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 hence 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.

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HOLDING IN

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 outrun it. Note how the set and design of the sail naturally pull you up onto the front foot.



// Above It may not feel comfortable for blasting but getting used to widely spaced, open, inboard straps that leave your feet right on the centre-line, is the biggest step you'll make towards controlled riding. Photo Danielle of GetWindsurfing

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

"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"

THE FREESTYLE WAVE QUESTION

When it comes to explaining the wave vs freestyle wave board option, I value the opinion of a man who actually designs them. Tiesda Yo of Starboard.

"If you're asking yourself 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.

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 well as reducing fin size (and on the latest designs, adding some thrusters). The set up, learning to sail upright, leaning forward with both feet on or across the centerline, has at least as much influence on your ability to perform in waves, 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.

FIN MULTIPLICITY – HOW MANY AND WHERE???

I often start my wave clinics by showing people some footage I took of Josh Angulo sailing his crunching home break of Punta Preta in the Cap Verdes. 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 aerals. 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 - and 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 to compartmentalise you can say:

Quads - powerful turns.

Tri-fin (thurster) - powerful turns but more directional

Twins - loose, surfy, skatey.

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 (used to 60ltr)

He has this to say about the fin question.

"For me it is 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 ...!"

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BIG WAVE BOARD OR FREESTYLE WAVE

The new kid on the block is the supersize wave board, some now weighing in at 120 litres – an unthinkable design as little as 3 or 4 years ago. From recent experience I can affirm the one I tried was amazing. But the mistake I have seen some make already is to think they'll double up nicely as chunky allrounders. No, they are wave boards. The volume around the mastfoot is there to help you drift out in very light winds where you might normally only be able to use a SUP. But the rocker line that makes them so maneuverable on a wave, and the wide stance, does not make for particularly early planing or a comfortable speed stance. If you want the option of blasting and speedy gybing, go for a freestyle wave.

// Despite weighing in at a shade over 60 kg Phil Richards loved the 120 wave board for no wind wave riding. **Photo** Danielle of GetWindsurfing



// The outline and straighter rocker of the fw makes it the more versatile option. **Photo** Simon Bassett



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.

Lets 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 goes 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 – harty@peter-hart.com