I have an almost unnatural relationship with my 103 freestyle wave board. It has its own passport; lives in the spare bedroom and in the past 6 months I’ve probably seen more of it than my family. If I got points for the water-miles I’ve covered on it, I’d be able to fly around the world for nothing. I’ve just come back from Tarifa, where for 7 days the ‘levante’ blew between 15-30 knots – sometimes over a head high swell. Backed by 3 sails and 2 fins, I could handle every situation with the one board. I blasted; I rode waves; I did the odd trick (very odd in some cases). Yes a 103 is about 20 litres too bulky for 30 knots but it still offered so much more than pure in and out survival. When things get tricky, often the best board to sail is the one you know really well. A good freestyle wave covers so many bases that you get to sail it a lot and get to know it really well. You may have already surmised that I’m a bit of a fan. I can’t think of one reason why someone looking to experiment with styles, widen their general repertoire and become a more rounded windsurfer, wouldn’t have one. So, remaining as impartial as possible, over the next few pages I aim to clarify the concept and then explain how to make it perform in various areas. But first, to appease aging sceptics, let’s quickly turn the clock back.

‘WAVE/SALOM’ AND ‘CHAMELEONS’

Windsurfers of a certain vintage may wish a pox on the whole cross-over concept having been corrupted by early interpretations – ‘do everything’ boards which ‘did nothing’ very well.

In the 80’s and early 90’s design features were more polarised. Speed came from sharp, slab-sided rails and straight narrow outlines. Manoeuvrability came from soft edges, and heaps of rocker. Hence in that era, speedy boards carved only long precocious turns and wave boards were slow to plane and just ... slow.

The new category, ‘wave/salom’, therefore sounded oxymoronic. Shapers, who were asked to fashion this all-rounder, felt they’d been burdened with the impossible task of building the perfect partner for the sexually confused teenager. What they came up with was a hairy, beer swilling rugby type wearing scarlet lipstick and a tutu – i.e. something that failed to appeal to those on either side of the fence. It stank of compromise.

Rigs were the issue. They were still quite ‘draggy’ producing a lot of sideways force that had to be resisted by long edges (260cm plus) and relatively big fins. The only way to make a board more manoeuvrable at speed was to make it smaller and thinner and load it with a smaller sail, which then demanded high winds. Hence the whole cross-over concept ran out of legs in boards much above 85ltrs. The deciding factor was, and still very much is, the fin. If you have to fit a big fin to resist the forces of the ‘grunty’ sail you need to get planing, the ‘wave’ bit of the ‘wave/salom’ evaporates.

Cutting to the modern chase, the gradual development of ever more efficient rigs that produce less and less lateral drag, has allowed us to shorten the outlines. Losing 30-40 cm of edge brings huge benefits:
- shorter boards turn better.
- there’s less resistance, less sail to tip over, they conform better to a curved wave and fit between chop.
- there’s less dead wood. The volume is more usable. It’s under your feet and in extra width, which means that smaller boards feel more stable and bigger boards are more controllable.

The development and continual improvement of the freestyle wave board is surely one of windsurfing’s greatest success stories. Peter Hart tells you how to tweak technique and set-up to exploit the full range of possibilities.
Today you don’t have to shape a board like a court shape AND the fact that more efficient rigs allow the blend of outline, rail profile, underwater detailing – and the blend of outline, rail profile, underwater detailing – and the blend of outline, rail profile, underwater detailing – and the blend of outline, rail profile, underwater detailing – and the blend of outline, rail profile, underwater detailing.

LIVING WITH THE 103
Fsw’s are many things to so many people depending on the size of the person and board, sailing location and style. I am going to share my experiences of sailing and taming my 105 for today’s conditions. They are not necessarily the steps for managing – but it’s a start. I have chosen the big dog of the wave set – 110 litres about the chunkiest available – because they offer the wider possibilities. As you go under 90 litres, the need for control, usually in lumpy seas, mean they’re often almost indispensable from wave boards.

If you fear you’ll be spending half the day on a board with the wrong fin, constantly re-levelling, let me reassure you that you can easily change your boards

The thick rails make it bounce and trip – and easier to learn on a freestyle wave than a dedicated freestyle board because its softer edges are less likely to catch.

THE FREESTYLE WAVE SAILING OPTIONS
Some are less robust to go down the flat water, but NOT over-power your feet. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want. They’re not good or fear of what it might say about them – i.e. they don’t know what they want.
Upwind sailing always demands the correct trim. Foils have a flatter rocker and a hard release edge that bins. But it's nice, if you're an ex-foiler, that you have to begin to impale that back foot. If you're really powered up, you can run a flat board and push the fin quite hard. But just controllably planing, you may have to unweight the board and push the fin quite hard. But just control the tail, move the hips further forward and sail more naturally favour the front foot more and more, to even less coming under your back foot, you should give the edge a bit of a misguided kick. With all of them, notably these big ones, you must每 every combo planes (under the right guidance). Looking to go more new skool, you can sail and board match each other perfectly. Because the back strap is so far back, you can set the foot to just under shoulder, which allows you to drop on top of the boom and apply that mastfoot pressure as soon as you lean the rig into the turn.

But the biggest change is to shove the front foot deep into its strap and initiate turns with the toes of the front foot. To do that you have to bend the ankle, which projects your whole body forward and put you in a far better position to control the exit. A good exercise is to practise edge to edge carving across the wind. Leave both feet in the straps. Because the back strap is so far back, you have to favour the front foot or you will fall out.

**NEWER SKOOL**

We've in the glorious force 5 zone where pretty much every combo planes (under the right guidance). Looking to go more new skool, my alternative in the same wind is to go for a bagged 5.2 and replace the 26 with a 22cm freestyle fin. This is a good intro. to the 'big board, small rig' style of sailing. Less power makes many tricks easier, especially upwind rounds involving a sail transition - eg duck tacks, push tacks, upwind 360s.

The emphasis changes to fast, fun carving tacks for a 5.7 and a 26cm wave fin. Sail and board match each other perfectly. For those coming off bigger kit, the fin feels small. As one guy said as he stepped on such a set-up for the first time, “has this fffff thing got a fin?” It's not a board you're looking to tuck, Kauli style, into the pocket of 15ft pitching Punta Preta lip. Its extra speed creates dynamism out of dead situations. On days when you might have taken a SUP with a rig, you could take it up a notch with a foiley fin. For the amateur, the advantages are more obvious. For the expert it's the best option on semi-planning days when the swell is lazy. In extra speed creates dynamism out of dead situations. On days when you might have taken a SUP with a rig, you could take it up a notch with a foily fin. For the amateur, the advantages are more obvious. 90kg fixed分为en Steve Maher, learning to love the waves, describes his love for it (his 10). It gives me confidence to get out and survive the flats - but what I most like is that it's flattering. You can give the edge a bit of a misguided kick and it will keep going!

When it comes to turning on the face - well you keep pushing until something catches. In general it's good to favour more of a back foot style - that's pressure back, not weight back - to stop the straighter edges catching in the face. The lower nose on some models means you have to be a little more cautious taking steep drops.

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**SCENARIO 3 – INTO THE WAVES**

Read Tim Bont's fine review of 105 freestyle in this very issue and you will note that few is a pretty broad category - they are all equal in the waves - but some are more equal than others. Much depends on the stable and the shaper - some have taken their wave designs and made them a bit straighter - others have taken their freestyle designs and made them a bit curvier.

With all of them, notably these big ones, you accept what they are and play to their strengths. It's not a board you're looking to tack, Kauli style, into the pocket of 15ft pitching Punta Preta lip. For the expert it's the best option on semi-planning days when the swell is lazy. In extra speed creates dynamism out of dead situations. On days when you might have taken a SUP with a rig, you could take it up a notch with a foily fin. For the amateur, the advantages are more obvious. You lull - but what I most like is that it's flattering. You can give the edge a bit of a misguided kick and it will keep going!

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The Thruster Option

Design advances are gradual but fsw's seem to have come on enormously in the last few years – notably their wave performance. Many now come with an option for thrusters (small side fins). I was a little suspicious when I saw these appearing in the bigger models, believing they may be a market-led addition. Thrusters pull the tail into the water, which is just what you don't want when you're trying to get a big board to release in marginal winds. So they're not really a flat water option – unless it's howling. Interestingly, as you will read in this issue’s free review, several brands (Fanatic, Goya, Quatro) provide thruster boxes, but only supply the board with a single fin and blanking plates for the thruster boxes. So the option is there but with reasoning that single fin is best for most. But they really do help on the wave face giving you the confidence to push a little harder without the rail skipping out – they also keep the board driving round and stop the board stalling during the cutback.

Conditions permitting, in the next issue Harty will be looking at ways to get into and improve your wave riding when it’s onshore (and probably cold). Spaces on his courses are few and far between these days so check out the schedule on his site www.peter-hart.com and book early!

The FSW as a Wave Machine

The bigger fsw’s (100 ltrs +) are generally designed towards speed and early planing but still work brilliantly in small waves, especially in baggy and side conditions when you have control of speed and power. You need to be sympathetic to its design and favour a ‘pivoty’ style to make sure the stick rails don’t get stuck in the face.

Blessed by a FSW Case Study

Doug is a bit of an athlete. In between sessions in Ireland, while I took the group on a SUP tour, he followed … swimming. It’s that sort of bloke. It’s an attitude that was mirrored in his sailing. He loved the physical challenge and therefore counted speed and big powerful kit, which was fast but not when it came to tackling waves and especially not when the wind was fluffy. The first step to de-grunting him was to suggest a 103 ltr. But his first move, despite my suggestion, was to turn it into a free-ride board by loading it with a slalom 7.0 and having a 34cm fin specially made. It didn’t work that well. The big sail shoved it too deep. Since then he’s completely lightened up. In Kerry this year we reduced both fin and sail and he’s now using the fsw as nature intended – standing taller, sailing more and more on the toes, needing less and less power to achieve the same speed and above all, sailing and gybing more and more off the front foot.

GREG

Greg arrived on a wave course having learned his craft free-riding with huge kit on the lakes of his native Hungary. Short lines, seat harness, hunkered stance; he was the model of 90’s technique. He’s a very bright bloke (consultant cardiologist) and extremely fit and sexy. His approach was to buy a wave oriented 95 ltr with thrusters. We changed his basic setup, longer lines, higher boom, waist harness to get him off the back foot. The rest came just from meeting to a new feeling. After a year, he’s now riding down the line with the best of them. “The fsw is fantastic,” he says, “it forces you to sail differently but at the same time isn’t so different and radical.”

Harvey, resident of Tarifa where wind is plentiful and waves are sporadic, favours a small fsw for its speed and versatility. PHOTO Hart Photography.