

THE STORY OF SURF ALOHA

By Gary Budlong

It seems like Surf Aloha is part of the beach tapestry on Oahu, but it's not always been that way. In the 1990's there was a flickering of interest in a sit-on-top surfing contest to be held in Hawaii. Such contests existed in Australia for wave skis, South Africa for the same, and California and Florida for deck boats and sit-on-tops.

Luckily, my wife, Peggy's friends from California had visited us and told us of the Kayak Surf Festival held in Santa Cruz, which we decided to then attend. My goals were to find out how to put on a surf meet and to surf. What a great event! There were kayakers from all over the globe competing, sponsors giving away prizes, manufacturers showcasing their latest and greatest equipment. For Ocean Kayak that newest product was the Rrrapido.

In Hawaii, Hunt Johnson was already building a totally bizarre ski; it was a sit-on-top with a rudder system that resembled and oversized surfboard, which, at that time was unheard of. Within the corporate world of plastic kayaks, companies were looking for new, diverse products to offer the market. People were already surfing the Scrambler and it made sense to develop more high performance, surfing vehicles. At that time, the Sit-on-Top market was the fastest growing segment of the kayaking industry; hence, the Rrrapido was born followed by Cobra's Strike and Wilderness System's Kaos.

To introduce the Rrrapido to the kayak surfing market Ocean Kayak sponsored an event at Santa Cruz: The top riders from other categories (wave skis and deck boats) and myself on a Rrrapido, made up an 8-man heat.

I was in the first heat of the first day of the contest. Organizers told me not to "drop-in," but I had no idea what that meant!

Wearing a wetsuit, I looked like the Pillsbury Dough Boy, only dressed in black. I had to carry the kayak down 15 feet of huge, sharp-edged boulders, drop it (and me) into freezing water and paddle out. Only one problem: I had to pee.

So, off to the men's room I went, and peeled off my rubber suit so I could do my business. By the time I got back to my wave ski, Peggy was yelling at me to hurry up and get in the water, as it was my turn to surf! So out I went. And out. And out. And out. Out so far, I was almost double the distance out to sea from my competitors! But that's where the waves were wrapping around the point. Only later would I realize that that's where the MONSTER waves were, and that Beginners should stay on the inside!

I was hanging outside, watching an otter dive into a kelp bed and come up with a clam and calmly slide up and down the wave faces on his back. And all of a sudden, they were BIG wave faces! HUGE! I grabbed the first perfect mound. As I was screaming down the face, the wave started to tube and curl toward the shore where the "Beginners" were. Oh crap! Who has the right-of-way? Me? Him? This wave is HUGE! I went right to miss him, surfed down the face, popped out through the white water, caught a little air, and paddled back out. I was so impressed with myself! I knew I was the best.

On the next big wave, I paddled in. Deep in the barrel, I'm charging, getting the ride of my life when all of a sudden, the wave closes out in front of me! I slice through the lip, just to be picked up by YARDS of bubbling, frothing, tumultuous foam.

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