

Shooting the Curl

Hopefully you survived the late winter storms that battered the UK and generated some of the biggest swells for years. Summer is now well on the way, you're sat out back, the sun is out, the surf's great and you're taking off on a sweet, sweet wave. Classically kayakers then proceed to bounce in and out of control, twirling paddles over their heads and whooping... and then still wonder why surfers are more than a little annoyed. That's a textbook case of how not to do it!

Whilst on the beach, it's well worth spending some time watching good board surfers. The principles are the same and most of the moves are fairly similar. The main objective is to ride the wave in the most critical section (pocket) along the break line, for as long as possible, and pulling some nice moves along the way.

Diagonal Run

Once you've taken off, the easiest way to ride the wave is in a diagonal line about half way up. Try not to slip to the bottom of the wave, as you'll lose speed. Aim to stay with the pocket and surf along the face until the wave closes out.

With a river boat (especially if you go 'old-school') it's hard to stay high on the wave and so you need to use a stern rudder to prevent slipping sideways down the face. If you've done this you'll notice that when you put the rudder in you get more forward drive and start riding along the wave. The rails and fins on a surf kayak do the same, so if you're riding in a surf-specific craft and you use them, then you don't really need your



High Performance Surf Kayaking:
How to ride down the Line



smoothly link a series of turns from top to bottom. To start with try small adjustments, making a 'snake like' path along the middle of the wave. To increase speed, use more of the wave, turning higher and lower on the face. The higher you go, the more speed you can generate on the drop. As with taking off, if you run too low on the wave, you'll stall (slow down and kayak will stop planning). By climbing and dropping at a steeper angle, you'll stay closer to the pocket and generate more speed coming down the face.

I'll focus more specifically on turning (bottom turn, cutbacks and the like) in next issue's article, but here's a few top tips to get you on your way.

Wherever your shoulders point your kayak will follow, look where you want to go and your shoulders will rotate, in turn rotating your upper body and your hips, which in turn will bring your kayak around.

Use the Paddle for Support

To initiate your turn, put the paddle in a low brace position wide from the kayak and put a little weight on it. This will act as a pivot point and you'll carve



paddle. As you ride along the face make sure the edge is angled slightly towards the wave, engaging the rail and side fin. Using the paddle too much along the face creates extra drag and acts a bit like a brake, so the less you can use it the better.

Almost certainly you'll master the diagonal run pretty quickly and want to start moving...

Climbing & Dropping

The key to pulling big moves, surfing dynamically and even hitting airs, is speed. To generate speed you need to think of the wave like a half pipe and



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around it. Too much pressure and digging in the paddle will act as a brake and you'll stall, so it's something to play around with and fine tune.

Body Position

Your body position will also have a big effect on the speed. As you come down the face and going into the start of your turn you need to have your weight as far forward as you can. Coming out of the turn you should be more upright.

Wave Selection

If you're going to rip it up, riding down the line in the pocket, pulling some nice moves, you need to select a wave that enables you to do that. From a position out back, look out towards the horizon to get an idea for the shape and size of the waves. Waves with a peak, which peel cleanly across the beach, are ideal. The faster it closes out, the less time you've got to do your stuff. To start with aim for the longest rides you can then start mixing it up a bit with some moves.



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All the skills I've covered complement each other and will have limited effect if used alone, so try and practice these as a combination of movements. When it works it feels smooth and effortless... And looks great!

Training Drill:

In smaller surf, leave your paddle on the beach or out back and try surfing with your hands. If you sit in the most critical spot, just before the wave breaks, and use your edges, you'll be able to ride smoothly down the line. Doing this drill really helped me to limit the reliance on my paddle and really feel the wave and kayak. With practice it's possible to do slash turns and off the lip cartwheels without the paddle. **CKUK**

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