



CATCHING A WAVE



# wannabe a Wavesailor



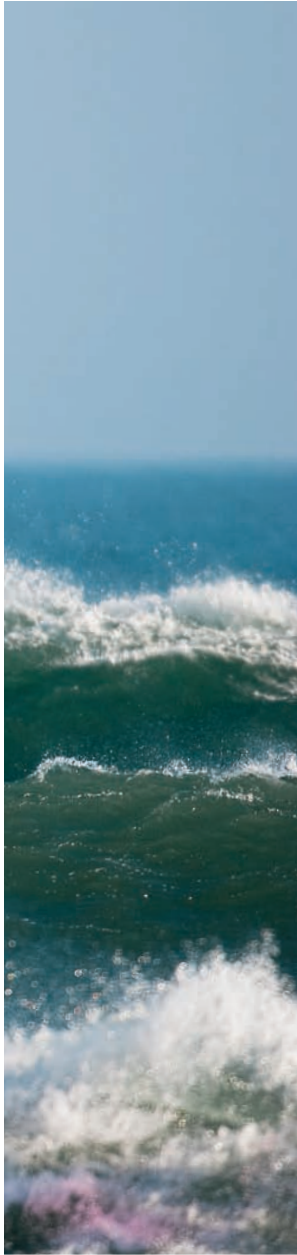
Jem Hall continues his fully frontside series as he gets you on the right wave in the right place at the right time – and in the right way. Alright?

**A** big well done to all of you who got out the back last month. Now you're out there let's look at what to do with all these waves coming your way and assist you in catching some sweet rides.

## SURF CHECK

First up, your best opportunity to spot a good wave is on your way out, so take advantage of that please. Now that you're crossing the void and putting away those offshore sailing passes, you'll be looking to catch the best waves – and using their most useful parts to give you speed, power, and of course some sweet turns. To enjoy the best part of wavesailing (i.e. riding) you'll need and WANT to have excellent wave selection. This starts with becoming more of a waterperson, so yes, I **am** imploring you to get out there – shock-horror – on alternative watercraft. Didn't you know everyone's going surfing nowadays?

After a good long surf check you're now in the best position to assess where the waves are forming and see your best route out. You can also observe and ask other riders.



**OPPOSITE:** On the wave and ready to ride  
**HERE:** Gunning down-the-line as the wave walls up  
**BELOW OPPOSITE:** Jurgen ¾ up the wave, heading upwind and waiting for the peak – PHOTOS: Clark Merritt / SoloSports

## BUS STOP

From the beach and while sailing out, look for an area where the swells form up and start to get steeper with a view to breaking. This is called the 'peak'. If you know where this is you'll get the best waves and the most rides – and the more surfing you do the better your knowledge of this will be.

This area where all the fun is happening is the 'bus stop', because there's nothing for a while and then three come along at once! And if you want your ticket to ride then you'd better be there and catching the right one to your destination.

You'll need to wait at the bus stop to catch the right wave, so please have some patience. You may have to sail quite slowly up / across wind to let the wave come to you, and if you really mean business then you'll prowl in this area until you spot your prey, and only then will you set off. Blasting into the beach with your arms apart and looking at the sail is not what wave catchers do. Waves do not move as fast as you, so keep calm, keep those eyes peeled, and remember you are now in the mindset of a young Jedi wavesailor.

## AHOY

Depending on water depth, tidal height, wave size, direction and speed, this peak will vary from being closer in to a lot further out. Once you've gone past the peak you're 'out the back' and therefore in a safer area. This can sometimes be a long way out, and it can be quite eerie out there. The water's flat, all is quiet ... and then **boom!** Three big monsters are heading your way. So err on the side of caution and ensure that you're outside the breaking zone when waiting. Slower waves are easy to catch but faster waves mean you'll have to get motoring. This can catch people out, and as for all areas of wavesailing: good judgement comes from experience and experience is the result of poor judgement.

## TACHYCARDIA

Now the fun really begins as these free rollercoasters come your way. You have three options to catch one:

- 1.** Tacking onto a wave as you see a nice set starting to form. From here you are upwind and going slowly so you can choose which wave to ride in on. (We did say that you needed to learn to tack.)
- 2.** Gybing onto a wave. This is a great fun way of using the ocean for a planing gybe, and can be done quite late or nice and early to ensure you catch it. This can easily be mistimed though, so please practice it a lot as it's a whole lot of fun.
- 3.** As you're sailing in, you can slow down or even stop and let a wave catch you up. This is the easiest method, and again gives you options as to which wave to choose for your ride in.

Your observational skills will have noted which waves in the set are breaking best, and exactly where you should be to make sure you catch the wave. It's best to choose the last or penultimate wave in the set so as to avoid a beating (sorry, 'learning experience') should it all go wrong.

Just as in surfing or SUPing you need to paddle (i.e. accelerate) early to bank on catching your chosen wave. However, in windy conditions you'll have to slow down to score your ride (20-25mph rider vs 10-15mph wave), but not so much as you go off the back.

In lighter winds you'll need to bear away more and earlier to get that all-important speed as you pump to get on the wave, so add this skill to your armoury please. Make sure you have your front foot pointing forward and next to the mastfoot and get down really low to pump. You'll need to be smooth getting into the straps once you feel the board accelerate, so leave the bench pressing for the gym and the foot gazing for your salsa class.

## FREE RIDE

Now that you're on the wave you're experiencing not only wind-driven energy but also water-borne power as the wave pushes you along. But your work is not yet done, as you need to be in the right place on the wave. Too low down or in front of the wave and you lose speed; too high up and you're out the back of it and likely to be eaten by the next one. You'll need to take a mid to high line on the wave and be angled either up or downwave – if you head straight you'll outrun the wave (as you soon learn on any surf-craft).

It's easier to catch waves in cross-onshore conditions, but these waves are often messier and slower and not easy for this 'down-the-line joy' I keep going on about. When the wind is cross-shore the waves will normally be better quality, cleaner, and (relatively) easy to catch.

As the wind turns cross-offshore (clean down-the-line joy, just like in Punta San Carlos, Baja) it can be a lot harder to get on the wave, so get your speed early and keep at it. Look to experiment with the board's take-off angle, as there's a fine line between being too far off the wind to catch the wave and too far into the wind to get enough speed. In this wind direction the waves will be at their cleanest, and you'll have the most opportunity to get lots of speed along the wave and therefore make some of your fastest turns.

If you're out of position and don't catch a wave, go back out to the bus stop and be patient. Coming in waveless, like returning from the bar without refreshments, is somewhat futile, and means you have to go through all that effort again to secure your



## “What you want, you have to be”

**Tony Ford –**  
[tonyfordcounselling.co.uk](http://tonyfordcounselling.co.uk)

So if you want to be a waverider then you'll be at the right beach with the right kit, and you'll get out the back and then select and ride the best wave for you. Huge long grooveriding runs will lower your wave count per session, so, please – be a wavesailor!

# CLIENTS' CORNER

These topmost tips from my very own bunch of weekend warriors are gleaned from insights they gained during my PSC, Baja, wave clinic in 2009 and, most probably, other coaching weeks as well. I didn't prompt them in any way, so there may be some repetition as they say it how they see it (although I had to edit some of their ruder comments).

### Stephen Hay

First clinic for this grizzled wave traveller who's now landlocked in Switzerland for his sins. He really stepped it up throughout his two weeks.

“Don't take the first wave of a set, and – seeing as we've just had panto season – look behind you! Something might be peaking upwind of where you are.

“When on the wave position yourself at 3/4 of the wave height to get speed and energy.

“Learn to sail front to sail out the back rather than coming in or doing a full tack, then you can loiter at the bus stop for a wave.”

### Lou Mason

Well known on the South Coast and has been, it seems, everywhere, including two or three clinics with me a while back. Very keen and determined.

“Be very quick at tacking out back. Often overlooked is the ability to be able to balance patiently while waiting for the set and then timing your approach.

“Being able to gybe or tack consistently when heading out to catch a wave back inshore – right move, right time to catch the wave in the right place.

“Knowing the correct sailing line for the wind and wave formation to catch it early so as not mistime the ride.

“Once you've caught the wave, take the right course along it. Don't head straight at the beach, but stay on the wave until it and you are ready to ride.”

### Martin Batstone

This sarcy Aussie doctor and surfer, who loves to smack it and get the rotations in, has benefited from three clinics.

“Look for waves – easier to see if you're going out rather than coming back in.

“Loiter out the back and have patience.

“Gybe or tack much earlier than you think if it's cross-off as the wave can easily pass you by.

“If you're French or Italian you don't need to do any of the above – all you do is look for other sailors. It's likely they are already on a wave and then you just join in with them and share it. Everyone loves sharing.” [Hmm – I think this is written with a heavy amount of Aussie sarcasm – Jem]

### Mario Gozzetti

Super-keen Italian wavesailor who loves going for it and enjoys the beatings when it's necessary to take them. Blossoming after his third clinic, and loves his bottom turns.

“Gear: always use a slightly bigger sail than you'd normally take out. This ensures you catch more waves until you get better.

“Timing: often it's more important to know when to go wavesailing. It's extremely important to know how the spot works and go out at the best time. Often the tide state makes a big difference between a good wave and a messy one.

“Zoning: watch the spot before going out and look for the best riders. Look at where they wait for the waves. It's a good reference, especially if you're new to the spot. Take a reference point on the beach to use when you're in the water.

“Every time you're not riding a wave take the opportunity to look around you to understand the waves and keep looking out for the best places to be.

“Always be the fastest and the most upwind wavesailor to be in the right place for your right of way. You have to be able to spot good waves – but you also need to be the one who has the right of way and able to choose the set wave. Do not fall on your gybe or tack. [So your tacks and gybes better be spot on! – Jem]

“Before you go out, understand the spot, decide your strategy, and go for it. Look for the biggest waves and go only for the peak. Don't waste time going downwind if the wave is crap.”



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**OPPOSITE:** 'Jeri' Hall gybing onto a wave in Brazil – PHOTO: Dave White  
**BELOW OPPOSITE:** Mario G bottom turning – PHOTO: Clark Merritt / SoloSports

target. Once again, catch the right wave in the right spot and in the right way!

## FULL SPEED

While on the wave you should be looking upwind and downwind along it for the peak where it steepens up. This may require you to: a) be patient and head upwind to wait for the wave to form more, or b) get downwind pronto as the peak could be further down-the-line, and you'll miss an opportunity by hanging out on a 'fatter'/ slower part of the wave.

If you're late onto the wave then the peak could be upwind of you and chasing you hard, so you may have to escape its clutches and head to a more amenable section.

## RIDE 'EM, COWBOY!

If you're learning to ride you'll wait for the wave to get a bit steeper (but not vertical and gnarly), and then make some easy turns along it on the blue open face as you experiment with toe and heel pressure, timing and position – and what exactly your head and hands should be doing throughout

all of this. Rest assured that we'll get onto riding frontside in forthcoming issues. As you look to progress you can get upwind of a peak to hit the steeper breaking section hard or try an aerial, and we'll be covering these wickedly fun stunts too.

Full-on stunt-masters will get way upwind of the peak, ready to fly downwind at mach 10 and then smack it, as they're confident of making big vertical turns and performing aerials or other stunts on the wave.

Throughout you're looking to be in the right place at the right time to get on the right wave and then feel the joy that waveriding has to offer. At all levels making turns on a wave and utilising its energy feels fantastic, and will see you enjoying perhaps the best facet of our great sport.

## next month...

**We will look at the front bottom turn.**

## HALL'S HOMEWORK

Winter's here so it's time to put your feet up and relax. Well, maybe if you're a kiter! If, however, you WANT to be the best wavesailor you can be then you'll be taking on a nice block of fitness to keep yourself sane and ready for battle. Wavesailing is a time game, so to perform you have to do your training. How about setting yourself some (realistic) targets? Like a two-mile run time of 13 to 20 minutes, and/or a 4000m time on the rower of 15 to 20 minutes – and beating these times as often as possible. Once you get into measuring and competing against yourself in your fitness then you'll realise that setting targets – like catching five proper set waves in a session – really works.

On top of this you can go for the full S&M and get all rubbered up with gloves and hoods and all sorts as you go surfing / SUPing and do your waterperson homework. As you'll choose non-windy conditions for your ocean realignment, the associated windchill is much less, and any light or sun that comes through feels glorious.

Break out the palmless mitts, hoods and drysuits (for some) and go windsurfing. The cold weather can help you focus on making much better judgements.

All the tips in this series and more are in 'Winner to Wavesailor,' so please do your revision.

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