

SOUN



SYLVAIN CAZENAVE

Dick Brewer, the man behind the quintessential Island gun.

Dick Brewer, Princeville, Kauai

CHRISTIAN In December 2004, Bruce Irons won the Quiksilver in memory of Eddie Aikau event at Waimea Bay on a 9'7" Brewer he'd borrowed from Makua Rothman. When Irons approached Brewer for a board of his own, he ordered a 9'4".

DICK That 9'7" was already shorter than what the normal board is at Waimea—the average board out there is probably 10'2" on a big day. But that 9'7" was 3 $\frac{1}{4}$ ", it had float. It just shows what a fantastic paddler Bruce Irons is.

CHRISTIAN Going shorter allowed him to take off right under the ledge?

DICK That's exactly what he did.

CHRISTIAN Does going down to a 9'4" affect the outline? Do you go a touch wider?

DICK No, it's the same template I've used for 15 years. We've probably done 300 of them off the computer model. You can go from 9 feet up to almost 10'6" for a big boy. You go wider when you make a board for a big guy. But if you make a 10'6" for a 170-pounder, you draw in the tail and the nose. It's something I worked out with Darrick Doerner years ago. We dropped everything. When the thruster first came along, we had to figure out where to put the fins and how to do the bottoms. The concave and the flat spot underneath where you stand—which has always been the Brewer standard on the single-fin—was still viable. But we moved the wide point back and gave [the thruster] more tail rocker than what was normal for a single-fin, and it still worked excellently. It was still state of the art, the board I designed 25 years ago. The single concave [Brewer uses on most of his big-wave designs] started with Buzzy Trent. Bob Simmons had built him boards with concave and he said, "Dick, I went so fast at Malibu on a giant wave—I've never gone that fast, even at Makaha." You know, they're really fast with a straight spot right where you're standing, then the concave. But you can overdo it and they'll actually stop on the face. It's a very sensitive thing.

CHRISTIAN There's the Waimea-style wave, where you take off on a ledge, and then there's the open-ocean, outer-reef setups where you have to get up to speed to catch the thing. Do you make different boards for those situations?

DICK Way outside Hanalei Bay there's a place called King's Reef that's between 50 and 100 feet. Hanalei will be closed out when it's breaking that big. It'll jack—you've seen the Hokusai tsunami prints?—looking like a giant Sunset peak, feathering for 150 yards sometimes, then it'll finally throw top to bottom.

CHRISTIAN Can you see the possibility of a surfer on one of your bigger boards, maybe weighted on the bottom like we've talked about, lining up with a wave like that?

DINGS V

Dig Deep—Paddle-in Big-Wave Guns

INTERVIEWS BY CHRISTIAN BEAMISH

DICK Everybody really wants to do that deep inside. The lineup varies 50 to 100 yards, and to be sitting there, waiting for that 50-foot wave to come to paddle into it—you'd have to paddle 25 to 30 miles an hour down the face to even catch it—you're probably going to tow it. What we're going to see is people really getting skilled riding Maverick's and Waimea and those type breaks that are acceptable, surfable places. We're going to see a lot more people riding boards like what Garrett McNamara is riding right now, which is getting back to older, single-fin technology with close to $3\frac{3}{4}$ " under your chest, less rocker because rocker is your enemy when you're trying to paddle fast. The single-fin engages the tail; the thruster engages the rail. When you're going down the face with your weight on the tail, the single-fin is a lot more forgiving. However, once it starts going straight down it wants to keep going, where with the thruster it's easier to cock it over on a rail and start going the other way. With the single-fin, sometimes you've got to reach over and put your hand in the wave to get it to start coming around. We just sort of accepted it in the old days. We didn't realize you could put tail rocker in and that thing would come right around.

CHRISTIAN With boards for this "outer realm" of big-wave surfing, do you envision wider noses?

DICK They do paddle better, but all of a sudden you start getting windage as soon as you're in the face. So, no, I don't see going to a wider nose.

CHRISTIAN You mentioned routing out strips on the bottom of the biggest guns, parallel to the stringer, and laying in strips of lead.

DICK The weight is closer to the water; it lowers the moment of inertia. When it lands [on a big drop] you don't have the center of gravity higher up in the board, which makes the bending moment when you hit the water, forcing the nose of the board forward. You call it weight transfer on a drag car. It's weight transfer to the "front wheels" when you're landing on a board. I feel like you're better off putting the



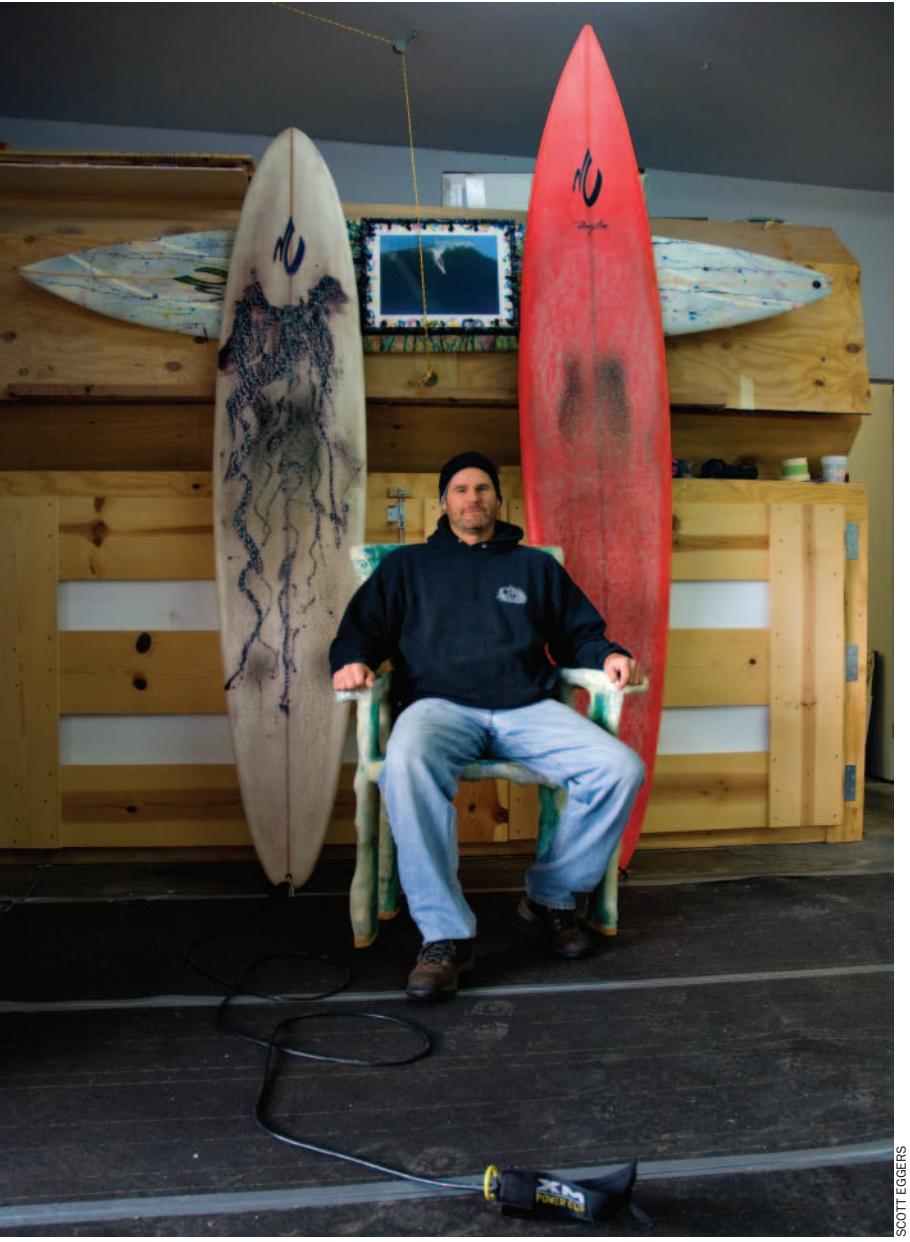
BRIAN BIELMANN

Bruce Irons, reeling off the bottom on a borrowed Brewer at the Eddie and pushing big-wave riding from survival mode to the high-performance realm.

weight right in the bottom of the board. I tell my glassers: "You can just put four or five more layers of glass on the bottom and it'll be a lot more efficient." If they're really sharp, they can feather the rails and just put layers on the bottom and not have to make the rails get thicker.

CHRISTIAN Have you learned things from the tow boards that you've made that you've brought back to paddle-in designs?

DICK We did learn a whole lot of things, but I've got a lot of secrets, you know what I mean?



SCOTT EGGERIS

Domain of Cone: From design concept and shaping, to glassing, sanding, and fin placement, Randy Cone builds each and every board from start to finish.

Randy Cone, Half Moon Bay, California

RANDY I'm a product of controlling, localized spots. There are good things that come out of that: There's a natural pecking order in the water; when somebody does something wrong in the water they're booted out. The etiquette and integrity in the lineup is held in those kinds of situations and that's what I'd like to see everywhere. But it's a different vibe in the water everywhere these days.

CHRISTIAN You've mentioned a "Makaha" type outline for some of the guns you're building.

RANDY It just came about trying to shorten the boards. In order to hold the outline curve properly, you end up having to go a little bit wider in the nose. It pushes the wide point forward depending on whom the board is for and where it's made to

ride. As far as a wave like Maverick's goes, we can get away with a wider nose—it's not Pipeline; you don't need a needle nose. There are different groups of people; it depends on the way each person surfs. I'm not going to make the same board for a 19-year-old kid that's charging that I make for a guy who sits outside and gets his strokes going.... But the reason my boards work as well as they do is because I'm building each one [start to finish]. I could give someone my [KKL] program and have them cut and [glassed elsewhere] and they won't work as well as the ones that I do. I'm literally setting the edges, setting the rail, and doing everything I can. They were arguing on Swaylocks about China taking over and I said, "China is never going to take over my hands. They're never going to be able to do what I can do with my hands." And some idiot says, "Yeah, well they already are...." But he didn't even understand what I was saying. Everyone thinks that just because someone can shape a board they know how to build one. There's a lot more to it than just shaping a board.

CHRISTIAN How does weight figure in to your designs?

RANDY Everyone is working on a weighting system like they do with the tow boards, and we've got a few top-secret things we're working on. [Added weight] seems to work better when you can incorporate it in the board itself. People have tried to place weights on the deck between the riders' feet, but the surfers don't seem that happy with it. Weight definitely comes into play. You'd want something nice and light to catch the wave, and then once you're up and moving you want the weight...it'd be nice if we could instantly add weight right when you want it. I've got a board that's chambered...that can be filled with water to add weight.

CHRISTIAN Even in focusing on the upper limit of paddle-in surfing, towing has provided valuable data, hasn't it?

RANDY It definitely has. I'm not opposed to it at all. You have to take everything you can get out of every little angle you can learn from. Just because you might not be into the towing thing and it doesn't take over every aspect of your life, it's a good aspect to learn design from and where to draw lines. Designs come and go. It's nice [on paddle guns] to go a little shorter, but there are days when you say, "I wish I had a little more board." When you get into the 20- to 25-second-interval swell it becomes really hard to get the smaller boards [in the 8'6" range] going. That's when you get into thinking, "Hey, man, I want to get a little momentum going so I can get up to speed on this thing." And there are those days when you don't necessarily feel like launching yourself off of the ledge and free-falling; you just want to go catch a couple of waves...kind of like the days when you want to go longboarding. And then it builds your confidence; you go back out again on your small one. It's nice to mix it up. I'd like to see more of the younger crowd more into experimenting with design.

CHRISTIAN Three fins seem to be your preference.

RANDY Yeah. But there's still something to be said for the two-plus-



Shaping in Half Moon Bay provides quick access to the Maverick's test track. R. Cone—design validation.

one setup that Twiggy [Grant Baker] won the Mav's contest on last year [2007]. If you look at the footage from when he took second this year [2008], the surfing is way better. He's definitely taking it to the next level, and the tri-fin definitely allows you to surf better than you can with the two-plus-one setup. Every year everyone's getting closer and closer to riding them like shortboards, and that's what I like to see—things progressing every year.

CHRISTIAN How does the rocker break on the shorter guns you're building?

RANDY We're taking a little bit from every generation. [Pause, then in an aside to self]: What the hell does it matter anymore? Everybody's just going to copy it anyway.... I'm not carrying my rocker line from the center of the board; my rockers are generally a little farther forward because the curve [of the outline] is carried farther forward. You're actually just concentrating on the part of the board you're really riding. It's not from the center, it's not '70s style, no matter what anybody says. [On another note]: But you're catching me at a time when I'm really bitter about the whole thing.

wondering why I wasted 30 years of my life on this. The [KKL] machines are really great, but it opens up access to everybody and it's really tight right now. I just had a kid and I'm going, "I need to make some money...." I'm a little disheartened right now.

CHRISTIAN I'm sorry to hear it because I really appreciate the way you build your guns from start to finish, integrating the glassing and the shape in a culmination of all you've learned over so many years.

RANDY Somebody can just take one and bring it to a guy with a machine and just copy it. But it's just the nature of the beast. If you're not doing 20 or 30 boards a week, you're starving. I should build yachts.... With surfboards there are a lot of little things that you don't really see, but it really helps if you can ride a board and know what it does. [For example] my take on the downrail is that [that design] had a lot to do with compensating for the overall amount of thickness and width that those boards had, so that you could actually turn them. Some of the old Brewers are really bitchin' because that's his style. He's got that rail on the bigger guns that I've



PETE HODGSON

When asked about big-wave boards for the outer reefs, Jamie Sterling simply replied, "Kirk Bierke."

seen. If people are running more vee and more thickness, they have to be able to turn them. We started going shorter: Grant [Washburn], Twiggy Baker, and myself. When I first saw Chris Bertish come over here and ride an 8-footer, he got me to ride my little 8'2". Once you learn this wave [Maverick's] you don't need as much [board length], but you've got to have the balls to do it. I'm actually riding a bit of a bigger board this year because I wanted to figure out what I was losing in riding a smaller one. You do lose a little paddling, you don't catch quite as many waves, and you've got to really be on. I think the kids should be doing it. The other part of it is that you have to get to know how to ride bigger waves.

CHRISTIAN How do you distribute the thickness on the "shorter" (8'2" to 9'0") guns?

RANDY A lot of it is the rocker line. The forward part of the rocker is the planing part—the part you're paddling on, so you don't have to carry the same amount of thickness you do on a 9'6". I try to keep the bottom [configurations] fairly simple because you're going so small you want to have a little bit of forgiveness, so I roll the front pretty good. You're generally going to be on a later drop, so I'll roll the front so you won't catch, then a flatter section through the middle, and then maybe a little vee coming off the tail....

Kirk Bierke, NSW Australia via 20 years on the North Shore

KIRK If you end up paddling farther and farther out in the ocean [in the biggest surf], you're going to want something that you can get to the other side of the island on. I've never heard of anyone having to do that, but at the same time that might be what you end up doing. You wouldn't want to have a lack of respect for what you're dealing with.

CHRISTIAN How did your outer-reef designs evolve?

KIRK When I saw these empty waves out in the middle of the ocean. It had gotten so crowded [at the main North Shore breaks]—when you stand on top of the hill you just see perfect waves peeling out in the distance, but once you paddle out you realize there are acres of water moving. It's not measured in yards or feet; it's more than that. So I tried to design boards to work [in those conditions]. One of the key things that led to successful equipment was actually a paddleboard race. I tried an old-school-style board and the thing was so fast, amazing really, and I thought, "If I take this paddling [capability] and put it into a board that surfs waves well...." I'd have all kinds of speed and be able to catch the wave. Not only catch the wave but also get out of the way when you realize you're

in the wrong place. I don't think a lot of people think about that much, about getting out of the way. If you come over the crest of the first wave of a set and suddenly realize you're in the wrong place, you've got about 17 or 20 seconds to get out of the way, to do something about it. If you've got a board that covers distance, you can get pretty far in 20 seconds. The paddleboard was key. I don't know a lot about paddleboard design, but the one I got on just flew across the water. A lot of people think of thickness as a way to achieve paddling speed. With a lot of curve you're going to reach top speed and start pulling no matter how thick your board is. By realizing that the rocker is everything, I was able to shave off vast amounts of foam and create something that turns like a 6'2" but you're going faster.

CHRISTIAN How would you characterize that rocker?

KIRK A large flat area. It depends on the kind of wave you're going to ride. Big waves are like small waves in that there are different ones: long ones, short ones, bowl ones, slopier ones. So wherever you're surfing big waves, you might need a different style of board. The outer reefs of the North Shore have one thing in common and that's the acres of water. If you have too much rocker, you're not going to beat the section. You're going to be trying to string together a bunch of short arcs across one long obstacle. And that's not going to work so well. It's like surfing a regular spot but everything's bigger.

CHRISTIAN It seems that so much of performance surfing continues to excel, why wouldn't what's been called "the unridden realm" get pushed back as well?

KIRK It probably would have, but the advent of the jet ski provided people access to an easier path, so fewer and fewer people have gone out there to physically do it with their bare hands. Also, I think that the younger generation who have grown up on thrusters is a limiting factor, because with the three-fin you have to have so much more curve on the bottom of the board to be able to turn it, and that sends you back into the problem of trying to string together the short arcs. Going back to a faster rocker, you need to be actually catching the wave. Those waves are coming in at 30 to 35 miles an hour—you've got to match that speed to get down the face or else you end up dangling in the lip, and you might make that and you might not. And getting caught inside is the equivalent of the game-over sign. Being able to get out of the way is paramount.

CHRISTIAN In this outer realm, how big of boards are we talking about, 11-footers, 12-footers?

KIRK Well, I'm a small person, about 5'6". I weigh 135 to 140, and my favorite board for those days was a 10'8", primarily because that was the blank size. That was the biggest blank that Clark Foam made where I could get the rocker that I needed. The bigger blanks that had the rocker that was needed for the Waimea kind of wave...no matter what you did with them, it took the speed out of the rocker.



Bierke incorporated some of the characteristics from a particularly speedy paddleboard to increase the capabilities of his big-wave designs.

CHRISTIAN When you go with a much flatter rocker for these outer reef-type waves, does that bring you back around to the single-fin?

KIRK It does, actually. Looking to the present and future, the four-fin can accommodate that flatter rocker. The age-old problem of dealing with the single-fin is something we still have to work out. I believe that it is the design front that is going to enable people to surf [big waves] more successfully. You have to have timing; you have to have confidence—experience helps. But equipment is everything. If you put yourself in the spot, and every place has its "spot," it'll be



Van Ginkle with quiver and chief assistant standing by.

Dave Van Ginkle, Cape Town, South Africa

CHRISTIAN How have the waves in your area influenced the paddle-in boards that you build?

DAVE There are two well-known [big-wave] spots: One is Dungeons, and one is Sunset, a deep-water wave that you can pick from far that breaks on a reef far out at sea. Dungeons breaks quite close to the land, on the shelf. But to get to it you need a boat because it breaks on a point. There are completely different boards [for those respective spots]. The boards are really big. I've got some at 11-foot, almost 4" thick—really big, you know? [At Sunset] you really need as much paddle power as you can get. And at Dungeons the wave stands up more, so you can ride a shorter board, not as much volume. It's hard to compare it to other waves, but you don't need the paddle power at Dungeons that you do at Sunset because it's so far out [one mile], and it's in the middle of the sea, and the waves are moving so fast, and you need as much paddle power as possible. We've just been making the guys extremely big surfboards. Andrew Marr brought one of them over to Maverick's and Randy Cone and Jeff Clark couldn't believe how big it was.

CHRISTIAN Do you see big-wave surfing advancing as high-performance surfing continues to advance?

DAVE If you look at guys like the Long brothers, they're technical about their big-wave surfing and about their equipment. I think when you get more guys like that getting involved, guys that are really good surfers across the board whether it be one-foot or 25-foot, then it's going to become more advanced. At the moment there are a couple of older-school guys that are just really brave, and really good watermen, and they just really want to catch the wave. Guys like Greg and Rusty, and Jamie [Sterling], and Andrew [Marr], they're just good surfers. It's survival in one aspect, but they've thought things through as well. They're training themselves for everything. It's a matter of getting yourself to a state whereby you're able to surf these waves. These waves aren't pretty. Especially in Cape Town, we're quite a bit like Northern California where the swells that do come often come with the storms. I think tow surfing has helped them as well for strengthening up their legs and learning about their equipment, and becoming more and more familiar with being around big waves. Suddenly, you're not just thinking about surviving; you're calmer so you can start thinking about actually surfing the wave, and where you want to be on the wave. I've seen a huge advancement.

CHRISTIAN What are the fin configurations on the really big boards you're shaping?

DAVE Thrusters. I have done one or two big single-fins. Single-fins sometimes drift a little the guys say. I sent two boards [10'0"] to Andrew Marr in Hawaii—he's got a 10'9" Brewer single-fin over there, a beautiful surfboard. On December 4 [2007], there was some swell at the Bay. He said he rode the 10'0" first and made all his waves, but when he tried

surfable. Before the tow boards, the most important factor was the ability to paddle. You can have all the performance in the world, but it's not going to help you at all. [The really big boards with the wide point well forward] is a matter of reverting back 15 or 20 years. It's the kind of thing that's hard for the younger guys to get their head around. If you've spent your whole life surfing on a conventional tri-fin, here you are paddling out into the biggest waves you've ever seen, doing the heaviest thing you've ever done on something that only has one fin on it. I wouldn't want to be in that position. The single-fin allows you to turn from forward on the board, where with the thruster you can't. There are disadvantages with the single-fin, and I think they're slower, too. A shorter board with a faster rocker is going to be better—no question. If you can go with a shorter board with four fins and turn better, why wouldn't you?



VAN GYSEN

The deep-water reefs of Cape Town call for larger timber than other big-wave locales. Carlos Burle, well timbered with a DVG shape at Dungeons.

to ride the single-fin he definitely felt that it drifts. That's why he took the 10'0" to Todos. It's probably 21½" wide, close to 4" thick, and it's got huge volume—a lot of the volume is up front as well. They're really ugly surfboards; they don't look pretty like some of the Hawaiian guns that are really beautiful, you know? They're chunky, and they've got horrible square rails. They're functional. They work really well in the big waves. The tails are quite pulled in, but really, I've got a lot of volume up front. How can I explain? They're like an upside-down teardrop almost. [The surfers] say they can actually lay farther forward on the board and that helps with the paddle. By doing that [outline] we're able to bring the boards' size down. The guys that were riding 10'5"s two years ago are now riding 10'0"s or 9'10"s. So we don't have that long, drawn-out nose, we have a shorter nose, but it's wider and it's got a lot more volume. The wide point moves forward almost half a foot. You can lie with your chest almost a foot up the board.

If you've got a long nose in front of you, you've got to get that thing over the ledge. Nine times out of ten you've got air movement coming up the face, so if you don't have all that nose, you're already a little bit quicker in. I'm thinking of even weighting the boards up front.

CHRISTIAN Have your rockers changed much?

DAVE More rocker. I find that when the boards are too flat the guys have this thing where they paddle better, but when that flat board catches the wave and the wave starts pulling, that flat board doesn't fit in the wave. And if you look at the old footage of those guys ten years ago with those big, flat boards—all of them—their tails come out because they don't fit into the curve of the wave. They take off and they have to make an adjustment on their feet placement to get the rail in the tail section to stay in the wave. But here in Cape Town the waves get really round, so I've put a lot more rocker into the boards. That fits into the wave face a lot better; your fins are always in the water. If the board's too

straight and the wave's got too much curve, something's got to give—[the board] is going to come out of the water. I've been so lucky that I've been able to work with guys like Andrew Marr and Greg and Rusty Long, and another guy I've worked really well with is Paul Patterson—he's an amazing surfer. They've taught me so much. These guys are just so brave, and they're willing to do anything. The rocker issue has probably been the real highlight of what we've been doing. By putting a little bit more rocker, the boards are just feeling a lot more stable in the wave.

CHRISTIAN What's the balance to be achieved between having a board that paddles really fast and also has optimal performance?

DAVE You have to make sure of where the guy is lying on the board, where his shoulders are, where his arms are going into the water—about two feet back from there—you want it pretty flat. That's the area his body is planing on. You'd probably find that his feet aren't even going off the end of the board, so why are you worrying whether that's touching the water or not? When I'm talking about more rocker, it's not in the front, it's more rocker in the back. It's funny because it's kind of like what they're doing on the high-performance shortboard today. Mick Fanning and all these guys, the entry rocker on their boards is really low, the tail rocker is really extended. When they're planing the boards are really fast, and when they're riding off the back of the board, the board is incredibly loose. They've still got control because it's not a banana—the rocker is just in one area, the right area. We're all learning now that there are different boards for different waves. Big-wave surfing has taken off in such a way that everyone is learning: the surfer, the shaper. It's a good time to be involved in big-wave surfing. When I was in Hawaii, I saw the guys who were riding the boards from 1985. I'd say that from '85 to '95, or even 2000, the boards looked exactly the same. The guys weren't changing the templates. But from about 2000 more really good surfers were getting involved, and so things have developed....



JEFF DIVINE

Four fins allow a wider tail and more maneuverability for Gary Linden.

Gary Linden, Oceanside, California

CHRISTIAN In talking about the “outer realm” of big-wave riding, do you see it breaking down into different types of big waves?

GARY Yeah, there are different types of big waves. For paddling it becomes more specified. Now we think of big waves as the tow surfing realm—you’ve got places like the Cortes Bank, places that we probably aren’t prepared to paddle into yet. Maybe we can get there, but we still haven’t approached the zenith of the places we have challenged. We spoke earlier about the under-the-lip takeoff, and then the open-ocean paddling into the wave. As the younger guys get better and more experienced, the under-the-lip takeoff is almost the only one that allows riding waves at 30-foot, 60-foot face,

or something like that. It’s really difficult for myself to get up to wave speed for an open-ocean one. The tide becomes a factor, if there’s some water to it. The other day Todos was big. I planned to get out there at 9:00 because it was high tide and I knew that with that much west [in the swell] and that much size and period to it [there were legitimate 50-foot waves this day], it would need a lot of tide. I sat [outside] and I was kind of the point man. I can read Todos pretty well because I’ve been out there a lot. If you saw that I moved, everybody moved, you know? I felt that I participated at least in helping to preserve the lineup. It was really cool to be out there and paddle, because that’s big-wave surfing. Tow surfing is another sport. It’s amazing, it’s as amazing as you could imagine. I’m not trying to say one is better than the other, but to me it’s a different thing, and I’d like to preserve the paddle part of it because that’s the tradition. It’s a real challenge to all your ability and all your experience surfing. [To ride a 50-foot-face wave] the wind’s got to be right, [the wave] is going to have a little cap, it’s going to give a little push at the top. A big wave with a long period is going to pull the water up, and stand up, stand up, stand up, then go “Whoom!” With less period, you can still have size, but it’ll be easier to catch.

CHRISTIAN What are the characteristics of a board for the kind of surf we’re talking about?

GARY In ’98, I was the contest director for the Big Wave Challenge at Todos Santos, the event that Taylor Knox got that big wave in. Two days after it came up again about the same size. I wasn’t in shape, I had a 10-foot board, and I tried to go out. I spent three hours in the water and didn’t catch a wave. I realized that my board, even at 10-foot, didn’t have the volume [I needed]. I was 48 at the time, and I figured that it was an El Niño year and I might not get another shot at this, but next time I’m going to have a board that’s big enough. So I built this huge board: a 10'6" x 21" wide and 3 $\frac{3}{4}$ " thick—just massive. I’ve ridden good waves at Todos, at Maverick’s. It’s really stable. I catch waves, I get in, survive. It’s got a lot of tail rocker. Wood boards [the balsa guns] don’t flex, so it has more tail rocker than it would if it was a foam board. [The rocker] is abrupt in the tail. Rockers go in three stages: the entry, the planing surface, then the release. What happens is that a lot of people will make the guns too straight in the tail to go fast. But you’re going down a curl. The curve of the board has to fit the curve of the wave face. If you’ve got it too straight, it’s going to go straight.

CHRISTIAN I envision a traditional outline—a big-wave spear, 10'6" coming into a long pintail.

GARY It’s more of a rounded pin. Curves give you maneuverability and straights give you speed. I made some boards for Mark Foo before he died and one of the things he told me was, “Don’t try to shape any speed into this. I’ve got plenty of speed; I want to be able to land. Soften it up.” That’s one of the things I’ve learned. I’ve got 21 inches so I can get a good curve to it; not only does it give me more volume, I



SCOTT SULLIVAN

Linden, coursing down a biggie at Todos on a gun made from a balsa blank, his favorite surfboard material.

can have an 11½" tail and a 9½" nose and it's got a lot of curve. The volume is under my "motor," under my chest. On the tri-fins, the wide point is right about at center; on the single-fins you move it forward.

CHRISTIAN Does the three-fin configuration work for you in the giant stuff?

GARY Three fins have been the traditional. I'm experimenting with four fins now, but fins have a lot to do with the success or failure of big-wave surfing. Curtis Hesselgrave makes my fins. He forces me to get the 50-dollar-a-fin, G-10 special fiberglass, special foils, and many times I've thanked him [See Soundings IV, TSJ Vol. 15 #6]. I've noticed that the four-fin allows more rail control and a wider tail. It eliminates some of the length, which is a hindrance; it preserves some of the volume, which is an asset. Where I have trouble is I get to the bottom, and then drawing a long enough line with that big of a board is really hard. I want something that I can get more on a rail with my weight. I need the big board to get in, but when I get in the board is too big for my size. I can't control it. I'm just hanging on for dear life. I want something I turn. I think the four fins will allow me to do that. The other thing is the full rail, a nice, full, voluminous rail gives you that stability because you're going so fast, and you're so susceptible to the slightest variation catapulting you into a long hold-down.

In my small-wave boards, I've been using a concave deck, about a ¼" concave in the deck, and it's just given me the most amazing control. When you've got a board that's 3¾" thick, it's tippy; you've got a log. I want to shape one at 3¾" and then gut about ½" out of it. I've been manufacturing the Brewer surfboards for about six months now. His boards are very flat [in the] deck. My first time at Waimea he loaned me his 9' single-fin, and it was just a Cadillac. I caught my first 20-foot wave with it, and it was just a beautiful board. Working with him now, I get them cut on the machine and I finish them. I'm seeing that that is still really valid, that's why those are the boards that everyone wants at Waimea, because they're the best; they've just got it all together. He hit upon it early, and it's almost coming back to [a realization that] this is better than what I've been doing, and it makes me want to take it to another level—I want to gut [the deck] out. What happens with the concave is I'm down here [gesturing as if "inside" the board, like a boat with ballast]. I started with a ¼" concave, but I must have a ½" now. It's like a pair of shoes with orthotics—I never fall, or not where I normally would. The board will tip, but my foot is right where I want it to be; the board will right itself. I made a four-fin gun before I got to this realization and it's nice, but I got to cut the guts out of the darn thing because I know that that's going to be me. ♦



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