



One Sick Ride

BIG WAVE SURFING HAS EXPLODED ON THE SCENE. BUT IS IT REALLY GREAT FOR THE SPORT? HERE'S WHAT THE GODS OF SURFING HAVE TO SAY ABOUT IT.

by Bonnie Harris

Laird Hamilton earned his reputation as the best surfer in the world, and then, on December 15th, 2005, he topped it. He rode a sheer crystal cliff of water, skimming a screaming vortex so powerful and wide that one could shoot a bullet train through the barrel. He caught the beast, he stayed on it, and, oh, how he rode it.

"Jaws" is the name of the reef break in Hawaii, where behemoth waves regularly spin out at thirty-five to forty-five feet, and on the death-defying day that they peaked at a gut-clenching eighty feet, Laird was there. A day for the books. It wasn't just the biggest

wave Hamilton ever rode; it was the biggest wave anyone had ever surfed - until Hamilton's towing partner, Darrick Doerner, caught another eighty footer that same day in Peahi.

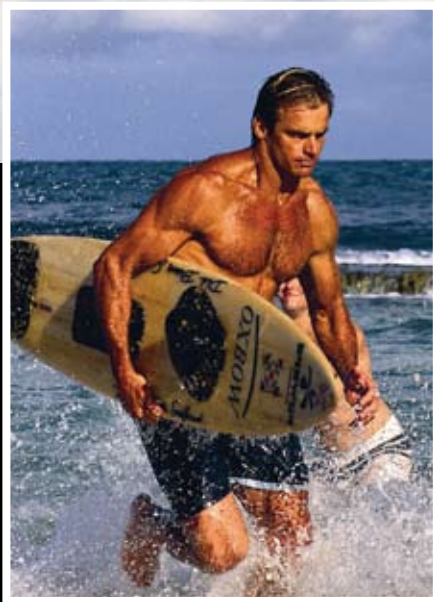
Hamilton, Doerner (known as 'Double D'), and their partner, Dave Kalama, have been working towards bigger waves for the past fifteen years. In the early 1990's, the three, all accomplished water sportsmen, started using jet skis to tow themselves out to waves. Not having to paddle meant they could get to bigger waves faster, and they wouldn't get as tired. Most importantly, they could get to waves that, before, would have been out of reach. And that's when they started riding giant waves.



Darrick Doerner, Peahi, Maui



Darrick Doerner, Peahi, Maui



Do Gooders

Laird Hamilton is an honorary Board Member of SurfAid along with celebs like Minnie Driver and Jackson Browne and surfers Kelly Slater and Greg Noll. SurfAid's mission is to improve the lives of people living in isolated regions connected to surfing. The non-profit organization is currently working in the Mentawai Islands in Indonesia to relieve suffering and fight disease and other health issues. SurfAid was created in 2000 by Dr. Dave Jenkins after he visited on a surfing trip and was struck by the poverty in the region. Pilot trials in the Mentawai Islands have resulted in a 75% reduction in malaria-related health ailments. For more information go to www.surfaidinternational.org.

Doerner remembers those days. "We first tried it on the North Shore in Hawaii in 1990. I towed Laird onto a giant wave and he didn't kick out for a mile." Doerner, Hamilton and Kalama were hooked, and convinced board shaper, Dick Brewer, to help them make a tow-board. While snowboarding one day, they realized smaller boards with straps for their feet would give them more room to work on a big wave. Dick created the first tow-board, called the "True Brew," to take the surfers from point to point as fast as possible.

It took ten years to get it right, but, in December of 2005, they finally caught the big giants they'd been chasing for fifteen years. Bad crashes in those waves, riding between 30 and 40 miles per hour, could leave them underneath the water for minutes at a time. Kalama, Hamilton and Doerner relied on their all-around water skills to learn how to tow each other in, and rescue each other, when needed, from the powerful force of the ocean.

The newest film from the group's Bam Man Productions, "All Aboard the Crazy Train," catches the three riding the enormous moving mountains - and crashing into them as well.

Tow-in surfing and tow-boards have changed the sport forever. Like breaking the four minute mile, riding 40-60 foot waves no longer seems impossible. And everybody's trying it. (Which, unlike running, could get people killed.)

Laird Hamilton sounds worried. "I'm concerned that a lot of inexperienced people are surfing. We're pushing boundaries and

"SURFING IS AN ART FORM... IT'S ABOUT STYLE, GRACE, DANCE AND MOTION." — DOUBLE D

possibilities." Particularly in Peahi, where companies like Billabong offer thousands of dollars in prizes for every foot of giant wave ridden. Doerner says cameras are everywhere, and they've created a monster. Double D thinks ninety percent of the people riding giant waves in Peahi don't belong out there. And it's not just the inexperienced surfers that are causing problems. The congestion is outrageous, with hundreds of cameras, fifteen or more helicopters at a time, hordes of boats and jet skis, and dozens of surfers. Everybody is trying to catch a wave, and a piece of glory to go with it.

Doerner's own surfing school only takes intermediates, which he classifies as "Able to ride a four to six foot wave." He takes people out and tries to teach them not only how to surf, but how to think about surfing. "Surfing is an art form. You have to speak the truth on the level of surfing you can do. It's about style, grace, dance and motion." Doerner classifies himself as both a water guide and a water guard, and considers surfing the purest fun of all. It must be working. Doerner's adventure surfing trips was booked the entire season.

Hanging Ten for Millions

Never a competitive surfer, Hamilton is definitely still making a good living off of his sport. Cosmetics giant, Coty Inc., recently announced Hamilton as the new spokesperson for Davidoff Cool Water, a men's fragrance. He's seen in American Express commercials, he hosts television programs and he takes regular surfing trips, courtesy of sponsors like OXBOW. Surfing has become a multi-billion dollar industry and Hamilton is at the top of the money earners. His buddies, Darrick Doerner and Dave Kalama, are also sponsored by companies like Byrning Speares, Dakine and Surfco. Even though Doerner and Kalama earn a living from their surfing schools, they owe a large part of their lifestyle to their corporate sponsors.

CJ Olivares is a Senior Vice President at Fuel TV and also an avid surfer. As a program developer for extreme sports television for the past decade, Olivares has seen a lot change in the sport. "The influence of surfing is not a fad in the same way the influence of urban or hip-hop culture is not a fad. The culture is growing stronger by the day." Olivares believes there are two ways companies get involved with the sport. Some choose what he calls "authentic involvement," others simply exploit it. To Olivares, it's pretty obvious which path a company is taking. Olivares thinks surfing will continue to explode in popularity as the competitions become more intense, the waves get bigger, and the surfing stars become even more famous.

Let's Run Over Jack

Jack McCoy is a legendary cameraman and moviemaker; he's probably shot more film and seen more surfing than anyone else. Ever. At 57, he's spent the last 35 years filming surfers, some of it from right inside the wave, where he admits he's been taken

out at least three thousand times. McCoy's surf movies, like "Blue Horizon," and his latest (his 24th), "Free as a Dog," are credited, like Gidget and Frankie Avalon in the '60's, for building more mainstream popularity of the sport. It's not a surprise that McCoy is fairly colorful himself. A surfer since the age of eight, McCoy went to Australia in 1970 to compete and never went home again.

Even though McCoy says surfers are the classic anti-establishment, he knows there are a lot more media and a lot more money in the sport today. But, McCoy claims they're all still "just a bunch of f-ing surfers" In fact he says that "Some are really thick in the head. ... But others are really intelligent. You get all kinds out there."

The WCT

Professional surfers compete on the World Championship Tour (WCT), almost all year long and around the world. Like other extreme sports, competitive surfing is starting to pay big money. Prizes are huge, and even mid-level surfers can make between \$200,000 and \$400,000 a year. Australian Joel "Parko" Parkinson has been a contender for world champion for the past few years. He's also the star, along with his dog, Trey, of McCoy's latest film.

At 24, Parkinson is right up there with Andy Irons and seven-time world champion Kelly Slater. These guys aren't towed



Photo by Franco Tramontano

Don't be a Highway Surfer

IF YOU'RE GONNA BRAVE THE WAVES, YOU'D BETTER LEARN FROM THE BEST. HERE ARE A FEW OF LAIRD HAMILTON'S FAVORITE SURF SCHOOLS:

- **Kalama Kamps** – Dave Kalama is a master wave rider and champion wind surfer who launched his new school on Maui in 2005. Check Kalama out in the films "All Aboard the Crazy Train" and "Die Another Day" for some sick surfing action.

- **Titus Kinimaka Surf School** – A year round school on Kauai, Titus is the legendary pro big wave surfer. At fifty, Titus is still competing in big wave surfing competitions around the world.

- **Buzzy Kerbox Surf School** – Buzzy is one of the most innovative big wave surfers in the world. Buzzy can also be seen in the 2005 surf film "Riding Giants." Go now, you can still get a lesson with Buzzy himself. www.Buzzykerboxsurf.com

- **Sea Adventures with Darrick Doerner** – For an advanced surfer who wants to check out the Oahu North Shore scene. Double D regularly tows Laird Hamilton into some of the biggest waves ever ridden. He's also been a stunt double in several movies like "Point Break."

www.dd-sea.com

Above: Tiger tandem-surfs with his dad, Darrick Doerner alongside a surfer client on the last day of camp. They hi-five each other as they reach the shore.





Jack McCoy
filming in Tahiti



Jack McCoy

in; they spend up to six hours paddling through the ocean, lining up, and trying to catch the perfect wave for the judges. Filmmaker McCoy thinks it's probably one of the toughest sports to judge. Judges score the events much the same way that skating judges do, but the waves change for every competitor. Action closest to the curl is always the highest scoring.

Competitive surfers love the sport just as much as the "free" surfers, like Laird Hamilton and Darrick Doerner, but even though they consider themselves part of a big family, Parkinson describes the pro surfing environment as "dog-eat-dog" once they're all out in the ocean. He thinks the free surfers are just as talented as the pros but, he says, "We're more focused, driven,

and hungry." Parkinson is hungry for a world title. The surfing community regards him as a major contender in the 2006 season. Able to perform extremely critical maneuvers very close to the curl, Parkinson makes it look easy. As a star of surfing's "Aussie posse," Parkinson has been on the WCT since 2001, and has finished in the top five every year since then.

More money for surfing has its price

Lucrative prizes, the high profile of the WCT and even the general lure of the sport are starting to create a problem. Darrick Doerner isn't comfortable with the crowds attacking big waves in places like the North Shore. Although he and his partners, Hamilton and Kalama, are extremely experienced, "Others are not. The money is making everyone hostile and aggressive." Doerner thinks it won't be long before more people will become seriously hurt - or die - going after what he calls the "Golden Carrot." Extreme

sports media exec Olivares has some of the same concerns. "There are only a handful of guys in the world training every day to surf 50-60 foot waves. They train for situations like holding your breath for more than three minutes and swimming for the surface. There is risk, and the key is understanding your limitations. Even two-foot surf can be dangerous to a novice surfer."

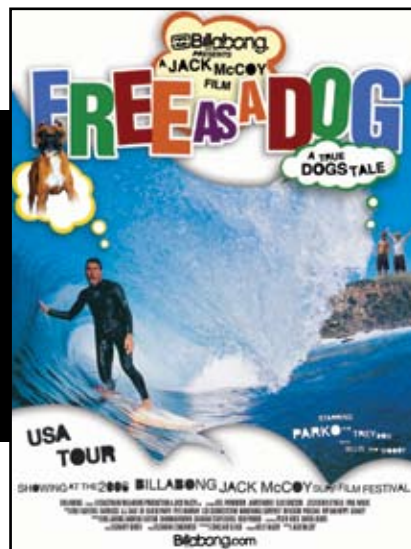
Want to hang loose? Here's the main advice from these gods of surfing. Know your limitations. Stay out of the way of the guys who really know how to ride the giants. Train before you try it. For most of us, it's enough to watch the movies, anyway. Leave the glory to Laird. Rather than risk being called "Gapers," we'll sit on the beach, pop a cold one and cheer.

Bonnie Harris is a publicist and writer based in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Paws and Hang Ten

Jack McCoy brings surfing movies back to their roots a new Billabong film starring Aussie surfer Joel "Parko" Parkinson and his dog Trey. "Free As A Dog - A True Dog's Tale" tells the surfers story of love and woe in the surfer world told from Trey's perspective. The actors won't win any Oscars, (okay maybe the dog will), but the surf footage is fantastic.

"Free As A Dog" is part of the Billabong Jack McCoy Surf Film Festival 2006. The Surf Film Festival runs until August 2006. Go to www.billabong.com for tour dates. Not coming to your town? The DVD of "Free As A Dog" will be released in September of 2006.



Jack McCoy photos by Tom Servais