

## THE RUN HOME.

This is the area where a good sweep can make up for the relatively easy job they have on the outward course. Gauging runners and how to control your craft when in gains speed on them, takes considerable time to achieve.

Every surf boat has a different position where it is most comfortable on a runner, this is mostly subject to the hull design and weight distribution of the crew. Deciding the approximate place that is the best balance and running position will take a lot of working out. You must find this spot if you want to get the most out of runners. Some craft with straighter keels than others are more comfortable with the swell somewhere between the stroke and 2nd stroke seats. Others will run easier with the runner near the 2nd bow seat. These latter craft are "chasers" and often deceive unaware sweeps that they are still on runners. [Fig. 10.]



Straight keeled boat

Fig. 10.

Chaser boat.

Experienced sweeps have different methods of gauging when a runner is offering its service. From the moment you come out of the buoys you must be constantly glancing over your shoulder looking for likely runners. Runners are a part of the oceans constant turbulence and although you may consider that none are available, without warning you will feel your boat lift. You must be ever alert for this racing bonus and quickly assess whereabouts the runner has formed under your boat and urge your crew to greater effort to put the boat in the comfort zone.

This is where crew teamwork is essential. The bowmen must concentrate on maintaining maximum length forward, with a sharp catch that pulls the bow down and keeps the craft running. Their finish must be exceptionally clean, the slightest back pressure has a breaking effect on the craft. The stroke-men must really power their finish trying to lift the stern of the boat out of the water.

There is a common fault among powerful rowing crew to row away from runners and when it catches them up it passes by without giving them a lift. A good example of how to get the most out of runners is the ability of current master long board rider Trevor Hendy. He will chase and catch the slightest runner and when his board is running properly, he does not over paddle, he just uses enough strokes to keep the board running using balance and timing to complement excessive power. He has uncanny skill to follow the swell where ever it goes.

A sweep who can master the feel of a runner and steer his craft in any direction it may go, is a great advantage to their crew. But remember that when you are on a runner, you are aware of other crews and the position of your finishing marker.

When you come away from the buoys you must decide the course you intend to take to the finishing line, taking in to consideration the direction of the prevailing wind and swell and your position in the race, If you are in front it may suit you to set a course to the wave area adjacent the finishing line. You may decide to increase your lead by instantly running your boat on the swells and change course closer to shore. The first

option is usually safer as the runners will be more prevalent closer to the main wave area and you will no have as many course correction steering problems, as those encountered in the larger inshore swell.

If you are well behind the leaders you may have no other option than to immediately run with the swells, trying to catch your opponents and pressure them into making mistakes in the wave area.

To keep your craft continually edging towards your intended wave area position is hard work. By getting the best out of a runner you may deviate considerably from your intended course and getting back to it a problem. At the same time you must be ready to receive the benefits of the next runner, with the boat at the correct angle. Many races are lost by the sweep changing course midway on a runner and broaching the craft or not having the boat properly positioned to catch the following runner. [Fig. 11.1

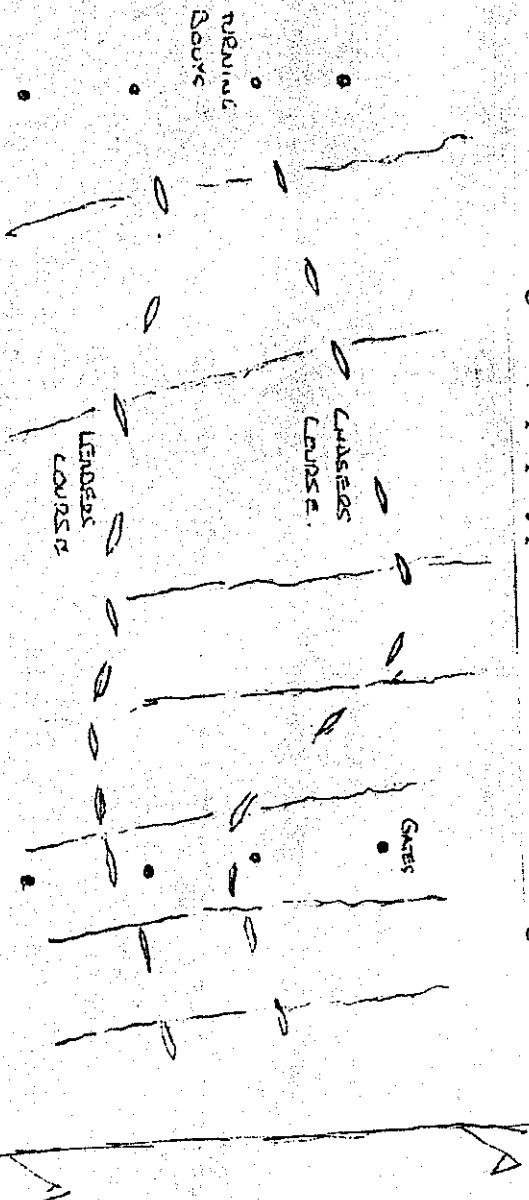


Fig. 11.

The secret of having perfect control of your boat on runners is good body balance and finesse in steering control. Any body movement must be made without any discomfort to the crew. Steering pressure must be applied carefully without any jerking motion.

Before the 2nd quarter bar became fashionable in surf boats a sweep had less restrictions on their body movement and a good sweep looked like a top board rider as they adjusted their movements to the run of their craft. This general principle can still be applied.

A fact of life for any crews performance is the likelihood of someone catching a "crab" while on a runner. On most occasions this happens when a rower loses concentration. When this happens, do not panic or jump about abusing the culprit, just try and keep the boat on the swell, using all your strength and skill, and encourage the rower to regain their seat and row again. This rower must start rowing again in perfect time with the rest of the crew, a stroke taken out of time will cause bigger problems.

If a rower is thrown out of their seat due to a crab it may be better to stop the rest of the crew from rowing and wait for the rower to properly regain their seat.

## WAVE AREA.

As you approach the wave area, it is a good policy to stand up on the wave stands, this gives you better vision to assess in coming swells. If nothing is offering then quickly alight from the stands otherwise you will unbalance your crew. Catching a wave while racing is totally different to wave catching practice. You have to position your boat in a spot that will see you finish relatively close to your starting marker. If you only have to qualify for the next round, you have some tolerance in deciding which wave to take. If it is a final your options are less and you have to face the fact that winning is what any competition is all about. But unlike the majority of sports. Mother Nature has a big influence on the final result and it is her actions you must always keep in mind.

As your wave approaches the wave area you have to decide which of the following swells, you feel, your crew is capable of catching when the swell becomes a wave. Never under estimate the ability of your crew or the run of your boat. On many occasions a small forming swell can suddenly become a catchable wave and if you are tentative you may miss out on a possible winning bonus.

The most dreaded area that racing sweeps try to avoid is "No man's land". This happens when you miss catching a wave and your boat runs into a position where a following wave has broken and you are confronted with the problem of try to catch a turbulent mass of foaming white water.

Avoiding "no man's land" should be utmost in your mind when approaching the wave area. Certainly make every effort to catch the first swell available, but make allowances to counteract this danger area. If you miss the first swell then it may be wise to stop your crew rowing and wait for the next swell. Should the following wave be about to break or has broken, your only option is to drive your crew to top speed and get as far away from the foam as possible. You keep them rowing till the last moment before the wave hits. They should be in their wave catching positions as the white water hits the tuck. Calling them back to soon will stop the boat running and the broken wave will be much harder to control.

In big seas, when approaching the wave area, it is a safer policy to forget about the race and concentrate solely on getting your craft over the finishing line relatively dry and on a straight course. You will often hear a experienced sweep, after crossing the finishing line, asking their crew "How did we go." This shows they have given all their effort and concentration to the control of the boat.

While you are checking out the swells in the wave area, you must always know the whereabouts of the opposition in the race, you must be pre-planning what you will do if they broach or begin to impede your progress. It is a common occurrence for leading crews to clash and a following crew slip by and take the money. Although the offender, causing the interference, may be penalized, it does not help the possible winner.

In moderate to rough seas your crew boatmanship can be a tremendous advantage. Their balance on comeback can be the difference of holding or losing a wave.

Controlling their combined body weight to correct any rocking in the boat is very important.

Some rowers feel that once they have rowed onto a wave, it is then up to the sweep and they just have to sit there and have a pleasant ride to the beach. This is a fallacy, if they want to win races. Top boatmen have the ability to read the crafts progress on a

wave. If they see the boat is beginning to broach, they may be able to assist by pulling on a trailing oar that is on the side of the boat going away from the white water. (Fig. 12.)

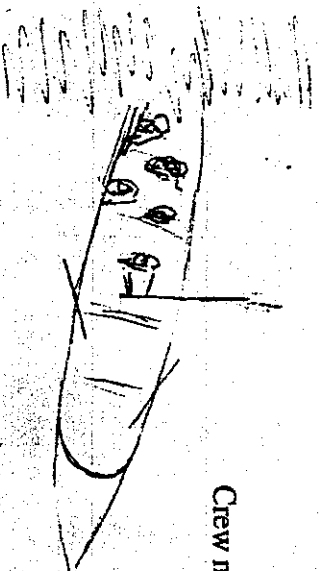


Fig. 12.

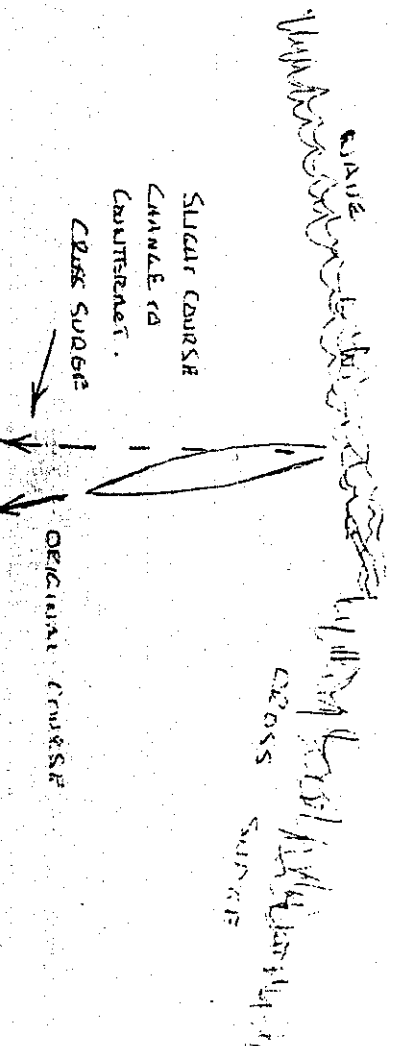
Any action in this area must be spontaneous as the sweep will be in enough trouble without giving a order. Only very experienced rowers have the ability to help the sweep in this "checking" procedure.

On a very big wave the boat receives a mighty boot in the tuck and the foam begins to come over the aft gunwales and the bowmen may have to move their body weight forward, trying to get the stern to lift and let the craft plane away from the foam. The sweep may ask the stroke or 2nd stroke to assist him with effort on the sweep oar. Should this happen, they only apply pressure on the sweeps commands, which could be "hard to me" or "hard to you". All these procedures are only implemented at the sweeps request, many very experienced sweeps, consider crew participation on a wave to risky and prefer to have complete and unhindered control of the craft.

## BROKEN WATER

When your boat is running true and properly balanced on a broken wave you must continually take quick glances to your left and right and gauge whether the wave is gaining more power or turbulence on either side of the boat. If you feel there is going to be a big surge in either of these areas, a slight change of course can counteract this surge just before it hits the boats stern. These changes in wave formation are always present and you must be alert to meet this challenge. But always remember that after any quick glance to assess the white water, your immediate attention and concentration must return to keeping a true course.

Mastering how to control a surf boat when effected by cross surge, takes a lot of surf practice and is a skill that has to be achieved to become a competent sweep. (Fig. 13.)



When you are running true on broken water in a race your placing will depend on the run of your boat and the power of the wave, Your only option is to have your crew seated and balanced correctly, trying to make sure the craft runs faster. Many races are lost by crew members going forward in a hasty manner and throwing the boat off course. Discipline in a close finish is essential.

When your boat begins to fall off a broken wave, naturally you must order your crew back into their seats to row again. Your judgment when to give this command depends whether you can keep the boat on a straight course while they move through the craft. How you carry out this procedure will be crucial to the race result.

## **AT THE FINISH**

If you are on a wave all your attention must be riveted on the stem of your boat. do not look at any of the racing boats, your job is to take your boat as straight as a arrow over the finishing line. Should the wave start to die, you may send a crew member forward, this person must move with their body as low a possible to the bottom of the boat. Their movement is quick and every step firmly placed in the centre of the boat. If your crew is still rowing, drive them till the bow hits the sand, never assume you are over the finishing line.

On occasions you may encounter very shallow water and it is necessary for you to jump out of the boat and push it. This can be a very risky decision, if the water is above knee depth and your action may hinder rather than help your progress. The finish of tight races are never over until the judges give their decision.

## **POST RACE.**

When your crew regain their composure, remove your boat from the starting line as quickly as possible, this is a common courtesy to the next race competitors and assist officials. It is important that your crew "warm down", either a light jog along the beach or exercises. Your job is to inspect your boat and gear for any damage or stress that may of occurred.

Your crew should relax in a shaded and protected area with a intake of suitable fluids. this "unwinding" procedure is quite important to a crews well being and team spirit. Discussion on all features of the race is a must, whether the results where good or bad. Should someone have made a mistake, talk about it sensibly, angry discussions do not improve a crews morale.

The intake of proper food between races should be on the advice of a qualified dietitian.

Your task is to return to watching the surf conditions and performance of other crews.

## FINALLY

Surf boat racing is a addictive sport, especially for successful sweeps. Some of these sweeps develop characteristics, that at times will disturb you and possible make you quite angry. Try to overcome these feelings by using your brains and improving your sweeping ability, this does not mean being timid. Always stick up for your crew and yourself.

Some experienced sweeps are masters in the area of post race protests and ability to change officials decisions. Be prepared for these post race politicians and if you disagree register your disapproval with the officials concerned. Your actions may make no difference, but you will feel better and the officials and the "master" politicians will know they are not dealing with a "yes" man.

Remember all boaters have a common bond. That is a constant battle with the ocean and as the years roll on and you get to know your adversaries, this bond becomes a badge of friendship that you will have until the end of your days.

Bill "Woofa" Barnett.

Sept 1997.