

Surfboats for Dummies

For all you still water rowers who look at surfboats and wonder what's it all about - here's your guide.

By Chris De Jong

Surfboats

Just what is surfboat? A surfboat is a vessel that carries the five male or female's from the sand through the surf break and back. Powered by a four person crew, equipped with oars, steered along by the fifth person - the sweep.

A surfboat is constructed from fibreglass and measures up to 7.925 meters in length and up to 1.62 meters in width. Competition restrictions make these surfboats have a minimum weight of 209kg. That means these boats aren't a small item.

Surfboats were and still are, part of many Surf Life Saving events staged at any carnival (competition) around Australia during the summer months. To row and compete in a surfboat you must be 16 years of age and have your bronze medallion. A Bronze Medallion can be obtained through any surf life saving club around Australia and consists of the individual completing a set of tests.

The competitors of a surfboat crew represent their surf club. The crews that represent the club all wear a team uniform or competition cap which is in club colours. All competitors must wear club caps while in competition. Differing from still water rowing where composite crews are allowed, in surfboats all five crew members must belong to the same Surf Club.

With the commercial run events like Ocean Thunder where large prize money is on offer, the formats differs somewhat. The crews that compete in this event represent a sponsor with all teams in sponsored uniforms - much like cycling. Crews in Ocean Thunder can be made up of rowers from different clubs.

Exposure for surfboats has increased thanks greatly to the organisers and promoters of professional surfboaters - the Ocean Thunder Series and the Australian Surf Rowers League. This sees surfboats televised nationally and, as of this year, internationally.

Below: Pacific Palms Under 19 crew crossing the line and winning their Division at the ASRL Open



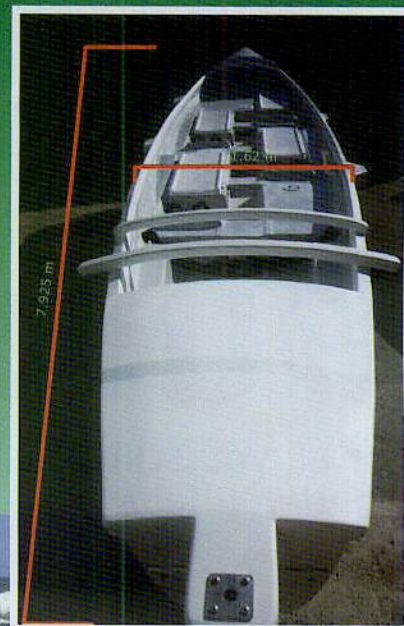
If the sweep is the steering wheel and on-board computer, the rowers are the engine room.

The Crew of a Surfboat

There are five positions in a surfboat broken into two sections (sweep and rowers). Each position has its own job and task for that person that sits there. Those positions are; Sweep, Stroke '4 seat', 2nd Stroke '3 seat', 2nd Bow '2 seat', Bow '1 seat'.

The Sweep (usually male but more females are now getting involved) is the most integral part of any crew. They have the responsibility of steering the boat, encouraging the crew and ensuring that he and the four rowers return to shore as safe as possible - ensuring a duty of care taken to himself and the rowers.

If the sweep is the steering wheel and on-board computer, the rowers are the engine room. They aim to deliver as much power and technique to their oar as possible during a race. The stroke is usually the member of the crew with best general technique and timing, the crew always follows the strokes lead. The 2nd stroke and 2nd bow possess the strength and power. The bow is one of the hardest positions to row and where the bravest souls venture. The bow is a difficult seat to row due to hand heights continually changing from the nature of the surf, as the waves tends to hit them first.



Above: Bondi crew jumping in the boat at the start of a race.

