

Ain't Nothin' Wrong with Longboards

by Ted Avellone

Long ago, someone, who was probably lying half-dreaming in a hammock gently swaying in the tropical breeze to the timeless melody of muffled crash of surf and dry rustling of palm fronds, had a waking vision that it would be neat to somehow put a sail on a surfboard. Ain't Nothin' Wrong with Longboards by That person, or perhaps someone else whose free-running half-awake mind had the same vision, started fooling around with the idea, actually building things and experimenting. Historical accounts differ on exactly who that person was. Doesn't matter. What matters is, the boards in these dreams and first examples were longboards.

Just What is a Longboard?

In the jargon of today's sailboarding realm one hears the term "longboards" thrown around a lot, perhaps even more so in the last couple of years. The term originates from 1960's surfing world jargon. A "longboard" surfboard is one that's at least three feet longer than the rider's height, usually from eight to eleven feet long. They're the same boards made famous in the 1966 movie "The Endless Summer." Long and wide and stable, perfect for a fun ride in waves large and small. It's no coincidence then that the first sailboards generally met those criteria. You could stand up and stay dry on longboard sailboards in 2 knots or 20, they planed easily, were stable, and were used and enjoyed by novices and experts alike. You could take your dog for a ride on them, surf them on most any half-decent swell, and do all manner of freestyle tricks on them. More than a few people now in their 40's were likely conceived on them. Sailboard manufacturers made dozens of variations of longboards, and by the late 1970's, here in the U.S. and especially in Europe, longboards dominated the sailboarding scene and they remained popular into the early 80's. The fat & happy sailboarding world of racing, regattas, freestyle events, and massive clubs thrived on the rich mother's milk of longboards. Life was good.



Evolution into Near Extinction

Then, right around the time Disco began to give way to New Wave and "hair band" rock bands, an arms-race like frenzy of newfangled "short board" designs became the new darlings of nearly every established sailboard manufacturer. Following the industry lead, the sailboarding magazines showcased pictures of insane wave jumping and massive wave-riding feats along with ads for new short boards and wave sails.

Everyone wanted a "high performance" short board, along with "higher-performance" and higher cost-- masts & booms & sails. The short-board designing and selling seemed to reach its white-eyed mouth-frothing crescendo somewhere in the late 1990's. However, as the industry eventually found out, not everyone lived on the north shore of Maui or Oahu. While the shorter boards



and higher-end sails, masts and booms were indeed technological marvels and ideal tools to handle high winds and big waves, the sport of sailboarding splintered into several niches, none of which had the sheer numbers of sailors the old original longboarders once enjoyed. Once-thriving clubs slowly dwindled, and regattas were fewer and farther between. The sport and hobby of sailboarding seemed to have lost its former glory and found itself in the doldrums for a couple of decades.

A Resurgence

For the past few years the new shiny objects of the watersports world are Stand-Up Paddle Boards (SUP's), Kite-boards, Foil boards, and Wing sailing. The Kites, Foils and Wings are technological marvels. Exciting! Extreme! Expensive! I say good for all of the people fooling around with those contraptions. Someone has to push the boundaries and experiment. And I have to chuckle at all the soccer moms and Chads who act like SUP's are some revolutionary new thing. Guess what? You're on a longboard your grandparents grew up riding, but now you're using a ridiculously long kayak paddle to get around. You just haven't yet thought to put a sail on it. Maybe a new word and acronym will have to be invented to get those people thinking about sailboards correctly. "WAB" Wind-Powered Adventure Board? "FUJEV" Fun Je ne sais quoi Vessel-ette? In all seriousness, the Kites & Wings & Foils & SUP's are all very positive things because they get a whole new generation of people interested in water sports that involve boards. It's a very short leap to get those same people to try a good ol' longboard with a manageable, sensible sail and see how absolutely fun, easy, and satisfying it is!



What's Old is New

There is nothing new under the sun. Younger folk be doin' things I used to do, they think are new. Though those words were written thousands of years apart, King Solomon and Mick Jagger may as well have been referring to longboards. There seems to be a nostalgic resurgence of interest in them. They're stable. They're easy to sail. You can sail them in mellow seas or in spicy surf. All of the good and positive things about them that appealed to so many people in the

early days that basically launched the entire sport of sailboarding still applies. Recently, there are a few manufacturers that have resurrected old longboard designs and made them a little lighter, a little stronger, a little better contoured, and have even made sails in the "old" style, but a little better designed and with newer stronger materials. While shortboards and kites and foils and such are still popular and definitely have their places, regattas and races are including longboard classes more and more and a new generation is discovering the excellence of longboards. Like the Phoenix that has arisen from the ashes, longboards are back and are here to stay. Long live longboards!

New vs. Vintage Boards

Buying one of the new-made longboards is probably the best way to go, but if you're well-armed with knowledge and aren't in a rush, it's entirely possible to find a good quality vintage longboard by searching on the Internet. If you look long enough, you can find a board that was of quality design and engineering when it was first made (not all were), was used little, and was stored properly for the last few decades. There are a lot of old boards out there. Many are junk, having obsolete designs or needing proprietary parts that don't exist anymore, or have been abused and aren't worth buying at any price. Some may be good candidates but are grossly overpriced. But if you look long enough, and you know exactly what you're looking for, some real vintage gems can be had for downright cheap prices. For example, finding a nice Mistral longboard complete with all components and with a powerbox fin system and one of their later mast-foot track systems at a price about equal to the current cost of a trip to the grocery store is downright exhilarating. Whether vintage or new, the verdict is in: there ain't nothin' wrong with longboards. Longboards rule!