



All-purpose jacket R??? and Suunto watch R????, both Cape Union Mart

Master Strokes

Changing your perspective usually changes your life for the better. Just ask any stand-up paddleboarder.

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Chris Bertish has been surfing big waves – conventionally and using tow-in – since 1998. This wave, on xxx 1999, was the first ever ridden on an SUP at Dungeons, South Africa's world-famous big-wave spot off The Sentinel, Hout Bay



THE SURFACE OF A BODY OF WATER – even without a whisper of wind or a trace of swell – is always in motion. To stand on it, then, requires a perpetually activated core – micro-adjustments of abdominals, spine, hips and legs, even toes. Balance.

For a steady-footed stand-up paddler, this waterway and its microclimate, whether inland and fresh, or salty like the blood in our veins, can be a teacher, coach, training buddy or play park. Motivations for each are myriad and complex, and therein hides the essence of SUP.

Paddling, in its assorted forms, has always been a multidimensional pursuit. The seemingly evolved form of doing it while standing on an oversized board, with a man-length paddle extending from your arms, is no different. Its roots are in ancient Polynesia and can be traced back to before even 'real' surfing, but it resurfaced in the early 1960s when the Waikiki beach boys would stand on their longboards and paddle out using outrigger paddles, to take pictures of the tourists learning to surf.

Those beach boys were true watermen, adept and completely at ease in the ocean. To them, standing while paddling was a natural evolution rather than something new.



Tools of the trade: on a 'proof of concept' paddle ahead of his attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean, Bertish paddled from Cape Point to Lamberts Bay. He covered the distance of 350km in seven days and was totally self-sufficient, having to carry solar panels, water, food, and communications and navigation equipment on board

PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY

Bertish is planning to stand-up paddle across the Atlantic from Dakar, Senegal, to Camocim, Brazil. To complete the 3 225km in his projected time, he'll have to paddle the equivalent of a marathon a day for 65 days. Follow his journey as he battles the unpredictability of the Northern and Southern Atlantic, and crosses the equator and doldrums, on thesupcrossing.com



STAND AND DELIVER

'I've been involved with water sports since I was about three years old,' says Chris Bertish, SUP extraordinaire and a modern-day incarnate of the pure waterman. 'Of course I was going to get involved with an activity that has so much potential, is great for cross-training and gets you out in the ocean in all conditions.'

Bertish is as multifaceted as the sport that's brought him national colours, passport stamps and fame. (He made it to the top 10 at the World SUP Championships earlier this year.) There's the well-rehearsed public speaker and often-interviewed sportsman who, when quizzed about why he does what he does, gushes quotes like, 'I'm four years younger than my brothers and never wanted to get left behind. That's what drove me to be so super-focused, competitive and goal-oriented.' People familiar with the 'other' Bertish allow him the clichés. They know the real one. They know that when he tells journalists he's 'more comfortable in the sea than on land', he's actually being sincere.

This Bertish wears a faraway gaze when he talks about his ocean exploits. Such as when 23 humpback whales surrounded him on his board off Dassen Island in early January. For two hours they stayed with him and guided him out of impenetrable fog. If the story of how he got there (read it on thesupcrossing.com) is not inspirational enough, how he downplays it will be.

'I don't want to get all spiritual about it and all,' says the 38-year-old Capetonian, 'but I've been fortunate enough to have some amazing experiences in the ocean over the years. And nothing, nothing compares to that.'

Sure, if circumstances were similar it's an encounter a kayaker may have had. The ultimate distinction, though, lies in the angle of view. New depths of field and lines of perspective emerge from up on a SUP, like when a photographer puts on a 15mm lens.

Forget competition, training and transport. Forget adventure. Ask any SUPer why they love their sport, and somewhere among their words you're guaranteed to get, 'above the water rather than on it'.

The analogy of 'rising above' applies more than aptly to Bertish, who's never been a professional athlete and has had to chase his sporting dreams while doing a full-time job. The sacrifices he's made and the challenges he's overcome form the basis of his motivational lectures. That, and how changing your perspective to a positive, upstanding one, will change your life. □

HOW TO

They're doing it everywhere from Emmarentia Dam and Midmar to Tietiesbaai on the West Coast. A second-hand board costs about R5 000 and a lesson is recommended. To find out more, contact Ocean Riders on 082 454 0398, go to oceanriders.co.za or email greg@truebluetravel.co.za

The paddle is an extension of the SUPer's body and comes in a variety of shapes, sizes and materials. [Right] At nearly 5.5m, Bertish's long-distance paddle board is much longer and narrower than his wave-riding model. It also has a lowered bow and soft, forgiving rails for long glides and speed on the open ocean

