

# SURFSKI SCHOOL



come paddling



## ***THE OCEAN ABC OF SURFSKI PADDLING***

*By Dawid Mocke*

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## Welcome to the Intro Session ~ *Dawid Mocke*

Welcome to the **Ocean ABC of Paddling**. When my wife (Nikki) and I started the first ever Surfski School in 2002 it didn't take us long to realize that if we wanted to teach people to paddle surfskis we needed to highlight for them all the most important, "need to know" information into a simple and easy to understand (and remember) curriculum. Then, when you come and paddle with us for the first time, we explain it all to you during our *Intro Session*. Many thousands of paddlers have been through our *Intro Session* and have left ready to take on the challenge.

This booklet is a summary of the *Intro Session* and all the necessary skills you will need for surfski paddling. Everyone that joins our Surfskischool for the first time receives this booklet. We thought it would be great to offer our **OCEAN ABC OF PADDLING** to everyone!

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Our goal for you is that you will become a proficient surfski paddler. In the process we are sure that you will enjoy your surfski paddling experience. We are sure that you will find value in the pages that follow.

Enjoy, and feel free to contact us if you have any questions. *(If you would like us to run a Clinic in your area please see details at the end of the booklet.)*

### **The Intro Session Re-Cap:**

Here is a bullet point list of what you need to know about:

1. The Surfski and its steering
2. The Paddle: how to hold it and use it
3. Safety 1: Never have the ski side-on to the waves
4. Safety 2: How to get on and get back if you've fallen off
5. A - AWARENESS: Of the ski (not side on), Of the wind and the waves, Of other paddlers
6. B - BALANCE: The way to stay on using Eyes, Body and Paddle
7. C - CONTROL: Carrying the ski, Paddling in an out through the waves and Safety offshore

These headings represent everything you need to know about surfski paddling. Any aspect you may face can be covered under one of these headings. After working through them, all you'll have to do is remember them and apply them.

## The Surfski.

The surfski is a sit on top paddling craft. Surfskis are generally narrower and longer than kayaks making them faster and a little less stable.

Their design allows them to be used in any ocean conditions especially riding ocean swell with a following wind. This makes surfskis the most versatile of paddling craft as you can go further, faster and have much more fun!

### **Steering: The pedals and the rudder**

The surfski is steered by means of a rudder system using foot pedals. You push the left pedal to go left and the right pedal to go right. What's very important here is that *you need to be going forward* for the steering to work. This takes some getting used to as you'll find you push while you're taking a stroke so the ski snakes its way through the water. Try to focus on pushing on your heels while paddling and only pushing the pedals when you want to turn.

Most surfskis have an "*under stern*" rudder as opposed to a "*kick-up*" rudder. With a kick up rudder you generally don't have to worry about it in shallow water, however with an under stern rudder you can't paddle in water shallower than the depth of the rudder. You also can't sit on your ski on dry land without having a hole for the rudder to fit into. The reason surfskis have under stern rudders is that this makes them much more responsive and maneuverable. This is known as directional stability and is very necessary in open ocean conditions and when catching waves. Practically what this means is that you should:

1. *Be aware* that you have a rudder sticking out the bottom of your ski. When carrying your ski it could hook onto things, or people
2. In the shallow water you want to *be deep enough* that it doesn't get caught in the sand. This could bend your rudder. Thus, go in at least knee deep before getting on and don't ride all the way up the beach

### **Selecting and setting up your surfski**

When selecting a craft there are a couple of things you need to consider. Your main priority is to feel confident in the surfski. The most important factor in selecting a ski is stability.

*Never sacrifice stability for speed.* If you have a very unstable surfski you will not enjoy your paddling. It is better to have a more stable surfski than it is to have a faster surfski.

Stability is determined by the depth of the seat bucket and the type of hull. A narrower rounder hull is less stable than a flatter wider hull. A deep seat bucket is more stable than a shallow seat bucket. Sometimes a deeper bucket with a narrow hull is still relatively stable.

*Leg length:* Make sure that your leg length is neither too long or too short. Your perfect leg length will give

you a bent knee that doesn't touch the ski but which also doesn't allow you to completely fit a full fist under your bent knee.

*Comfort:* There are a variety of skis each with a slightly different seat. Your comfort in the seat will greatly affect your paddling ability as well as your stability. Make sure that you are comfortable in your surfski.

*Bung hole:*

Finally, there is a small detail worth mentioning: the bung hole. The ski is hollow, thus, should you get water into it, or should the air inside heat up or cool down, the surfski needs ventilation and a way to drain water out. This is what the bung hole is for. Don't forget to plug it!

## The Paddle

With surfski paddling we use a double sided paddle meaning there is a *paddle blade* on either side of a paddle shaft. The paddle blade is in the shape of a wing thus we call the paddle a *wing paddle*. You use the paddle to make the surfski go forward by taking a *forward stroke*.

It is essential that you use the paddle correctly by: having it the right way up, having your hands in the correct position and pulling it through the water the right way. *Using the paddle correctly is one of the essentials in having good balance*. If you can take a proper stroke, you will learn very quickly.

### How to hold the paddle:

The paddle is the right way up when the curve of the wing is on the top and the sharp edge on the bottom. Many people get this very wrong so don't worry if you thought it goes the other way. Most people forget though so always, before you start paddling, make sure your paddle is not upside down.

### Where to hold the paddle:

If you put the paddle on your head and hold the shaft at equal distances from the blades then your elbows should be at a 90° angle, or just inside of 90°. This allows for the optimum balance of reach and power. If the angle is larger than 90° then you lose forward reach and if the angle is much smaller than 90° then it is difficult to pull the blade through the water.

## How to take a stroke

The stroke happens by placing the blade in the water as far forward as possible and then rotating your upper body and keeping your arm in a semi locked position. At the same time you use your legs to push down on your heels. The stroke is made up of 4 stages: the catch, the stroke, the exit and the recovery. These will be explained in more detail in subsequent paddling sessions, for now try to remember some key (and basic) pointers:

1. The stroke is *in front of you* and you never pull the blade past your body. Once your hand gets in line with your knee you should take the blade out of the water.
2. Straight arms: try and keep your arms straight and semi-locked at the elbow during the stroke; only bend them when taking the blade out the water.
3. Use your back and rotate: use your back muscles to pull the paddle and not your arms, try to keep your shoulders parallel to the shaft of the paddle throughout the stroke.
4. Pull the blade away from the ski and not next to the ski. Follow the wake from the bow at about 45°. Don't pull the blade towards you or right next to the boat

### Tip: Nose line, eye line

When you're taking a stroke the hand that is in the air and going forward should run parallel to your eye line. Then, the paddle blade that is moving forward should NOT cross over the bow of your surfski to the other side. Your forward moving hand however does cross over.

## **The Never-Evers**

There are some very common mistakes that people make while paddling and especially when they are learning. They happen naturally so you should make a mental note to avoid doing them until it becomes habit.

1. Never let go of your paddle. This happens when you lose balance. Rather try to use the paddle blade to balance by slapping it down onto the water.
2. Never have your paddle up in the air with both blades not touching the water. This is also because one tries to balance without taking a stroke. This is like trying to cycle a bicycle without paddling
3. Never pull the blade past your body. You lose all power behind you and make yourself more unstable
4. Don't look at your paddle as you take a stroke, keep looking straight ahead
5. Don't squeeze the paddle hard, hold it lightly; you don't want to fight the paddle
6. Don't use your hand to adjust yourself in the seat thereby letting go of the paddle

## Safety Number One: NEVER SIDE ON

There is only one time when the surfski can cause damage or serious injury and that is when it is in a *side-on position* to the waves and the wind. This is especially true for the waves and in the breaking surf.

The surfski has a big surface area and even the smallest, tiniest of waves can exert a lot of power onto the surfski. If the ski is in a side-on position and you are on the wrong side of the surfski, then you are in risk of getting hurt and the ski is in risk of getting damaged.

Always have your surfski pointing DIRECTLY INTO the waves and the wind. If it is side-on to the wind or the waves then it is in a dangerous and highly uncontrollable position. One of your biggest priorities is to keep your ski perpendicular to the wave or wind movement.

Sometimes it's inevitable. Of course, the reality is that *you will* end up in a sideways position with your surfski sometimes. When that happens you need to firstly be AWARE of it, secondly try to FIX IT and if not fixed, then you need to AVOID it. If you get into a side-on position and can't get the ski perpendicular then you need to make sure that the surfski is not going to get washed *into* you. Get *in-between* the wave and the surfski i.e. that the ski will get washed away from you and not towards you. (When doing this offshore in deep water, it's very important that you are attached with a leash else you will lose your ski.)

Being side-on happens *often* when catching waves. While you are still working on your skills you will often slew/broach/go-skew when catching a wave. There is a method to control the ski when this happens covered later on, but for now what you need to know is that if you fall off you should try to fall *towards* the wave, not away from it. If you lean or fall away from the wave you are at risk of being bashed by your surfski

## Safety Number Two: GETTING BACK ON

There is a technique to getting onto the surfski. It's essential that you are able to get back onto your surfski as this greatly increases your confidence while paddling.

**The Starting Position** for getting onto your surfski, whether in the shallows where you can stand, or in deeper water, is the same. You need to be facing your surfski next to the seat bucket with your paddle across the top of the surfski over the foot straps. One hand holds the paddle shaft and foot strap closest to you while the other hand holds the other side of the surfski next to the seat.

The reason the paddle is *across* the ski is because if it is alongside/parallel to the ski, you will be sitting on top of it when you swing your leg over the ski. Also, another natural tendency is to let go of the paddle while remounting, but once you're on the ski you will find that you have drifted just out of reach of your

paddle.

The reason that your hand placement needs to be alternate (i.e. one hand on the left side, the other on the right) is that you are able to hold the ski stable once you *push* your body weight on top of it. If both hands are on the far side of the ski you will only pull the surfski over onto you instead of pulling yourself up onto it.

When in a standing position in shallow water you need to be sure to swing your leg behind you over the ski so that you are now straddling the ski with one leg on either side. If you swing your leg over in front of you, you have a good chance of kneeling yourself in the face if a small wave rolls in under the ski lifting it up. Also, if you try to put your foot straight into the footwell, the ski will be immediately unbalanced as you will be putting weight onto that foot and tipping the ski over to one side.

In deeper water where you can't stand you have the added difficulty of having to *push* yourself up onto the surfski. You should approach getting onto the surfski in a sequential manner.

**This is the sequence for getting onto the surfski in deep water:**

1. Always face the ski with your body AND into the wind and swell
2. Paddle ACROSS the foot straps, holding the paddle and foot strap closest to you in one hand. Do this whether in deep or shallow water
3. Put the other hand on the far side of the ski holding the edge of the SEAT BUCKET
4. In deep water, with all your might, *push* your whole body up onto the ski so that your stomach is now in-between the seat and the pedals. It's almost the same movement as getting out of a pool. You are now lying across the ski. *Another method* is to twist your bum into the seat while you push yourself up. You will now be sitting on the seat in a sideways position. Your *outside hand* should be pushing the ski down.
5. Swing your legs out of the water and over the ski *behind you* if you are lying on top of it or in front of you if you are sitting sideways.
6. If you got on by swinging your legs over behind you then you are now lying on top of the ski with one leg on either side. Compose yourself; don't rush into the next step. Your hands should now be under your shoulders both pushing down, keeping the surfski stable.
7. Gently raise your upper body so your bum goes into the seat bucket. Maintain balance by keeping the paddle across the ski AND over the foot straps.
8. Once your bum is in, keep your legs over the side and pick up the paddle
9. Slowly start paddling again before trying to put your feet back into the foot well.

It is advisable to practice getting onto the surfski in the shallows so that you are familiar with the process and the sequence.

A *common mistake* when getting onto the surfski from a standing position in shallow water is to bring your leg over the ski in front of you, or to try to put your foot directly into the foot well. Both these will result in falling over at some point.



## Awareness: Craft | Conditions | Companions

When you are starting out you are generally completely focused on staying in the ski. To this end it is natural to forget about what is going on around you. While it is important to focus on your balance, if you are unaware you will get caught by surprise and fall off anyway.

You always need to know what's going on around you; you can't just paddle blindly without taking note of things that can affect you and you need to spot the obstacle, problem or accident before it happens and try avoiding it e.g. waves. It is extremely important to have a cautious approach to any body of water where you may be paddling.

### The Craft: Not side-on

This is your number one safety concern which we've already discussed. Remember that you need to be aware that the ski has a big surface area. Being side-on to the wind or waves spells "Trouble".

### The length, front and back

One of the most important things to get used to is the length of your ski. It's basically 6 metres long, so you generally always need a circle of space with a 6 metre radius around you. Ideally the paddler closest to you should be 6 meters away. This ensures that should one of you lose control of the surfski you have room to avoid each other.

### The Conditions: Surf, Wind & Weather

There are *two conditions* that affect your paddling: the wind and the waves. Being aware of them is critical to being a proficient paddler. With the wind it is about knowing what your limits are and also knowing if you are getting yourself into a situation where you aren't able to paddle back into the wind. With the waves it's about not forgetting about them while paddling in or out or any area where waves may break.

### Wind: ALWAYS know what the wind is doing

The wind your biggest consideration when it comes to surfski paddling. It will always dictates what type of paddling you'll be doing. There are two aspects to factor in when you decide if, where and when you'll be paddling: Direction and strength.

*Wind Direction* - When talking about wind direction we can classify wind into two basic directions; wind is either *onshore* or *offshore*. An *Onshore* wind will be blowing from the sea towards the land. This wind is safer because it blows you back to land; but it makes the sea untidy and picks up the swell. It's difficult to paddle but radically improves your skill.

An *Offshore* wind blows from the land out to sea. It makes the water look smooth but it's dangerous because it blows away from land. This means that it's an easy paddle out, but a hard paddle back. BEWARE OF THIS WIND.

*Wind Strength* - The wind strength has many different measurements. There is kilometers per hour, miles per hour, knots and meters per second. The Beaufort scale is a classification that adequately describes wind strength. It is possible to paddle surfski in most levels of the Beaufort Scale, but of course, you need to have skill and experience. Try to make sure you have a good understanding of how strong the wind is before you go out.

### **Waves:**

You have to know what the surf is doing and where the waves are. When you are paddling out you'll never forget about the waves as they are right in front of you, however it's when you are paddling back to shore that the trouble starts. ALWAYS BE AWARE OF THE SURF WHEN paddling back in. *Don't just paddle in blindly*, you need to be aware of where the surf zone is and when you are in it. It's very common to forget about the waves, which is why we want to urge you to ALWAYS be thinking about them when paddling back to the beach. When you are aware of the waves you will have a strategy for dealing with them.

### **Your Companions: Yourself and those around you**

It's important to have an honest and objective view of your skill level. Take your fitness, your skill level and your experience into consideration. In the water it is essential that you have a clear path in front of you whether paddling in or out. Also try to enforce the "six meter radius rule" as much as possible. If there is another paddler in front of you, be aware of what they are doing as they may fall off and cause an obstacle.

## Balance: Eyes | Body | Paddle

*Staying on & Paddling on* - When it goes comes to surfski paddling, the philosophy of Balance is simple...Don't Fall In! Clearly no-one wants to fall off their ski while catching a wave or paddling out in the deep blue sea, but the reality is that EVERYBODY sometimes takes a dip...and it's never convenient. We teach Balance with the following rhyme (it comes down to 3 things): *Eyes, Body, and Paddle*

### Eyes:

You'll find it easier to balance by keeping your gaze focused on the front of your ski. This keeps your head and upper body still which is essential for maintaining balance. Keep looking straight ahead.

*Common mistakes:* Don't look at your paddle as you take a stroke, this is a very common reason why people lose balance, especially when they're learning.

### Body:

There are three important aspects to maintaining balance with your body: stomach, legs and heels. The first has to do with your core stabilizers and their muscle memory. Balancing on a ski is like balancing on a bike. Once your body can do it, it'll never forget. Your muscles will learn how to do it, so don't sweat it; and remember that it takes some longer to pick it up. The way to facilitate this process is to focus on flexing your stomach muscles while paddling. Try leaning forward a little and keep your hips from moving. You can assist this process by pushing down on your heels. This activates your gluteus muscles which form part of your stability core. Whether you're a beginner or a pro, this helps a lot.

### **WHEN IN DOUBT....LEGS OUT!**

PROBABLY THE SINGLE MOST USEFUL THING anyone will ever tell you about balancing a surfski is: "WHEN IN DOUBT...LEGS OUT!!" This term, coined by the legendary Hank McGregor, applies to EVERYONE, from the beginner to experienced paddler. When you absolutely need to be stable, put both your legs out over the side and sit. You do this anytime and anywhere, from (and especially) when you're learning to even the most experienced guys. Perhaps the time you will use this method of balance most will be if you have broached when coming in on a wave. You absolutely need to make this an instinctive action.

*Common mistakes...*

That moment when you need to throw your legs out happens in an instant, you mustn't be reluctant to do it. By leaving your legs in you might get your feet stuck under the foot straps. This is a problem as you're now upside down and stuck. Watch out for this, it could get serious.

### Paddle:

The final trick to maintaining balance on your surfski is also clearly the most obvious. *Balance comes from*

*paddling*. No matter what the situation, you'll find it a lot easier to balance by putting the paddles in the water and paddling. This works exactly like riding a bicycle: you have to pedal to stay upright.

Another way of using your paddles to balance is with a brace stroke. Bracing refers to using the flat side of the paddle on top on the water. By tapping the water with your blade you will give yourself that millisecond of critical balance.

#### *Common mistakes...*

Lifting your paddle above your head and whooping for joy does not aid the balance factor. The paddle is made for the water so keep it there by paddling or by using the paddle to brace. Also, don't let go of the paddle to use your hand.

## Control: On Land | In the Surf | Offshore

Be in Control...Always. You have to be in control. Staying in control of your ski is what it's all about.

When we talk about Control, there are three areas where you are going to have to be in control of your ski:

On land, In the surf zone and Offshore. Awareness and Balance are obviously central to maintaining control of your ski and are the basic building blocks to the practical skills which will be taught to you in the following section.

### **On land: The basics of Carrying and maneuvering your ski**

When controlling your ski on land you want to position yourself in the middle of the surfski. It is more balanced and easier to carry. Put the ski onto its rail and then use your leg to pull it up towards your hip. From here you can carry it on your hip or you can put it onto your shoulder with the help of you legs once again.

*Where does my paddle go?* Whenever controlling the ski, whether on land or in the water, your paddle should always be positioned across the foot straps at a right angle. That way you control the ski and paddle as a unit.

#### *Foot straps*

The foot straps aren't just there for looks or for your feet, you can use them to get a firm grip on your ski. Don't worry about them tearing out, they should stay in.

Always face the ski into the wind and with the nose pointing slightly down. This way if a gust of wind comes up you will be able to plant the nose of the ski into the ground and get back instant control.

#### *Placing it with regards to wind, waves and other factors:*

The Do's:

- Always place facing into the wind
- Away from the water's edge
- Upside down is always better
- Try and wedge your paddle underneath to secure it

The Don'ts

- Place it *side-on* to the wind, it'll blow away and take someone's shins out
- Leave it too close to the water; a wave will wash up and take it out to sea or dump it.
- Put it in the way of pedestrians or vehicles, they'll use it...as a ramp

### **Control in the Surf: Paddling out through the Surf.**

Before you can do any type of paddling you need to get to the backline, behind the waves. For many, this is one of the most daunting aspects of surfski paddling. However, if you know how to approach the surf line, it can be one of the easiest things to master and will really change your paddling as you won't feel

intimidated by the surf any more. So here are a couple of things you need to know about paddling out through the Surf Zone.

There are two important things you need to know about the surf zone. Firstly, you don't want to hang around there. You are either paddling ALL THE WAY OUT, or ALL THE WAY IN. Your goal is always to get either behind the waves or back to the beach as quickly as possible. You never hang out in the surf zone just paddling around checking things out. You want to get BEHIND THE WAVES...then you can hang out.

Secondly, it's not nearly as bad as it looks. Sometimes people look at the "surf"; they see waves rolling in from way out and they think: "Man, I have to make it through all those waves." But actually, it's not nearly as bad as what you think. The only time you have to worry about the waves is where they break and have a lot of power. This happens in a relatively small area called *the impact zone*. It's only in the impact zone where the waves have enough power to really dump you. This is where the explosion happens; after that the waves become foamies which are easy to handle if you just paddle straight into them. Now, what is important to know about the impact zone is that it's very rarely any longer than 30metres. In fact, if it gets to 30metres long the waves are REALLY big. Anyway, paddling 30 metres in your surfski is like taking 20-40 strokes max. So, getting through the waves literally comes down to taking 30strokes at the right time! Only 20 to 40 strokes and you're through the impact zone...no sweat.

Sometimes there is more than one break i.e. a mid-break and a backline. The mid-break is normally smaller than the backline, but the same principles apply.

So here is how you do it step by step: You'll get to the shallows first, then you'll have to negotiate some foamies and then you get to the impact zone.

1. Step one: The Shallows: Here timing is the key – You want to hit the impact zone in between waves, or better yet, in between sets. But don't wait for ages, go with your gut. Remember its only 30 strokes.
2. Step two: Get going, Be ASSERTIVE. Don't wuss around! Put the ski down, get on and get going. Don't think about it so much. *CRITICAL TIP: Direction, direction, direction.* ALWAYS face the ski into the waves, NOT side-on. Once you're side on you're history. Face directly into the waves.
3. Step three: *Attack the waves*. When it comes to the foamies before the impact zone, all you have to do is paddle directly into them. *CRITICAL TIP. Take a stroke over the foamie*, don't brace into it. Bracing into a foamie means you won't have anything to hold onto as the wave hits. If you take a stroke over the wave you give yourself some much needed traction.
4. Step four: Impact Zone. When you get here you'll either hold up a bit to wait for a wave to break and then just hit the foamie, or it'll be the perfect time to put in your sprint. Decide quickly, and not too late. If you decide to wait but you're too close to the impact zone then there will be a lot of power left in the foamie. If you think the wave is going to tumble you then put both your legs out as soon as the front of your ski hits the wave and use your paddle to "catch" the top of the wave

*What if you fall out in between the waves?*

Immediately turn it to face into the waves or back to shore, NOT side-on. Get back on quickly. Grab the foot straps and hang on if you can't get back on. Make sure that you are in between the wave and the ski i.e. always have the ski on your shore side

## **Control in the surf: Catching a wave.**

When you're learning how to paddle, or even trying to get better at it, there is one skill which is the absolute benchmark as to how good you are at surfski paddling: Catching a Wave. Everyone needs to know how to catch a wave. Before we move onto catching a wave, there are a couple of things we need to be clear on.

Firstly the IMPACT ZONE. This is where waves break and have a lot of power. This is the critical area of wave action; after the impact zone the wave loses its power and it's just a foamie rolling to the beach.

Depending on the size of the surf the impact zone can be anywhere from 5 to 30 meters long (40 strokes max). Very rarely is it longer than 30 meters and only in very large surf when you should be rethinking catching a wave.

Controlling your ski on a wave through the impact zone is the most difficult part of catching waves.

Secondly YOU MUST DECIDE before coming in whether you are catching a wave or not. If you just paddle in blindly, the chances are the ocean will decide for you and generally this means you'll get wiped out.

It's extremely important that YOU PICK the wave you want and not the other way around. Once you've decided which wave you want, you need to get the boat speed up, i.e. paddle hard-hard-hard. You need to be going almost the same speed as the wave when it picks you up. As you get onto the swell you'll start going faster and you'll feel the tail of your boat start to lift. As you get better you'll be able to do some "hot-dogging" left and right, up and down, but before getting to that stage you must be able to ride a wave successfully. So at this stage you want to be facing straight to shore, now's not the time for tricks.

To help your steering PUSH BOTH FEET HARD ON THE PEDALS to keep them straight. This keeps your rudder straight and, putting pressure on your heels also helps with balance.

PADDLE ALLTHE WAY DOWN the wave BEFORE it breaks. You want to get to the bottom of the wave as quickly as you can. Don't stop paddling because you need steering and should be going faster than the wave to keep your steering. If you stop paddling at the top then you'll nose dive, and that's not a very pleasant experience.

IF YOU BROACH (go skew when the wave breaks), quickly put both your legs over the side (remember: when in doubt, legs out), lean towards the horizon and grab the top of the foamy with your paddle (brace). You “grab” the top of the wave by putting your blade in the water as if taking a stroke except you don't pull the blade towards you. Because the wave is pushing you, your blade in the water will give you something to hold onto. If things still go pear shaped lean forward and grab the foot straps so you don't loose your ski.

Consider MISSING THE WAVES if the surf starts getting unplayable. The surf is generally unplayable when the waves are breaking really hard on a shallow bank in any size bigger than a 2 meter wave face. Some guys can do it, but this takes years of practice. Another time waves are unplayable is when there is a lot of water moving over the impact zone. Normally, when the swell starts hitting 6 feet, you should be thinking about not catching a wave.

## **Control Offshore...**

Control offshore is all about being safe when you're out to sea. There are 6 surfski accessories that you should find with every surfski paddler. In order of importance:

- A leash
- A pfd
- A cell phone pouch (and cell phone in it)
- A flare
- Juice
- GPS

All of the above are part of the kit that make your surfski status a bit more complete. Also, without the above you're putting yourself at risk.

### **Where do I put all this stuff?**

Now when you're packing the kit bag and you load all the stuff in you kind of tend to think of it as overkill. Yet rest assured that once you're paddling off into the blue yonder, not one of these items goes unused. Also, they all seem to fit on or in the ski quite snugly if you know the best way of attaching them.

### **Leash**

Having a leash means that if you fall off your ski you have a way of ensuring that you don't lose your ski. It is the most important piece of safety equipment. Definitely use a leash when paddling offshore. If you're planning on catching just catching waves it's better to paddle without one or make sure you have one that can handle it. There are two types of leashes and in this instance we are referring to a calf leash and it is non-negotiable. You may want to *add* a Paddle Leash which attaches the paddle to the surfski. This is useful especially if you need to re-mount the surfski as you can do so without having to hold onto the paddle.

## **Lifejacket (PFD –Personal Flotation Device)**

When paddling offshore in a PFD is non-negotiable, you must use one. If you are planning on paddling in and out near to shore (<500m) then it is less necessary, however ANY kind of offshore paddling requires that you wear a PFD. Your pfd will not only help you stay afloat if you are separated from your surfski and end up in the water, it is also the best place to keep other necessary equipment like a flare or a cell phone in a dry bag.

## **Dry bag/cell phone pouch**

Very convenient and a nice safety option since you can immediately call for help. Your cell phone will be dry and you'll be able to use it while at sea. All pouches can be hung around your neck or onto your PFD.

## **Flare**

Especially when doing long offshore paddles. There are two types: smoke flares and signal flares (that shoot up into the sky). Only use your flares once you are sure that someone will spot you. All flares have directions AND expiry dates written on them – read carefully!

If you're wearing a PFD there is always a pocket where you can fit the flare. If not, then your next best bet is duct tape somewhere within easy reach. It's not such a good idea to put the flare in a hatch as you may lose your ski in an instant and not have time to open the hatch to get the flare. I know of a girl who got taken out by a reef and her ski sank in seconds. She only just managed to grab the flare which was duct taped on.

## **Thermal clothing**

Always wear appropriate clothing, depending on conditions. A long sleeve, lightly coloured rash vest or thermal top is your best option

## **GPS**

The GPS is a nice toy as you can tell your speed and distance. Along with that great info while paddling, you can also use it to track your route, as well as mark your exact location (way point). This can definitely come in handy in unfamiliar waters. The idea is to be able to see the GPS, plus it needs to see the sky to track the satellites. You usually put it around the foot straps, or tape it down in front of the pedals.

## **Other Offshore Skills.**

**Turning the ski** – At first, turning the ski makes you feel a bit unbalanced, but you get the feel of it quite quickly. To make the ski turn easily:

- Take bigger strokes on the outside i.e. if you're turning right take bigger strokes on the left
- Try and do a big turn instead of a short sharp turn
- If you're still a bit unbalanced, put your legs out and paddle all on the one side
- REMEMBER – Your ski turns in a large semi-circle or bow, not like around a tight corner.

- DON'T wack your paddle down or lean on it to turn, this throws you off balance

**Balance comes from paddling** – Balancing is a dynamic action; by paddling you assist your balance. If you stop, it'll be more difficult to balance

**Being aware** – It is extremely important to keep your senses up and at 'em when you're offshore. Disaster comes silently.

**Always be on the lookout for:**

- Reefs – Look for the white water and aim just behind it
- Points – Any headland or point can catch you unaware since you suddenly land up in shallower water unexpectedly
- Ships, yachts and boats – technically any other ocean going craft or vessel needs to ensure that they don't crash into us, but unfortunately it's a bit like riding a motorbike, no matter who's fault it is, you'll always end off second best. Try to steer clear

**Runs, wind and choppy water:**

Paddling against the runs (chop) there is no real art to paddling against the chop; you just got to paddle hard. The most important thing is direction, always have your ski facing directly into the wind and chop as much as possible.

**Paddling with the runs** – when you're paddling with the movement of the water it's important to try and ride the swells and runs. That way it'll be much easier to maintain balance.

**Turning around – there are two scenarios:**

Turning with the wind – This means you'll want to be facing the same direction as the wind is blowing. This is actually quite easy because the wind will always blow the ski around. Put your legs out to stay balanced and paddle on the side opposite to the way the ski is turning. One or two strokes should do it. Once you get better you won't have to put your legs out.

Turning against the wind – This means you'll end up facing the other direction as the wind is blowing. This is a hard one. You need to have the one foot pedal down as far as it can go and paddle REALLY hard on one side. Try not to put both your legs out, rather put out the leg on the opposite side as the way you're turning.

**Being side-on** – basically you never want to be in a side-on position to the prevailing water movement. Sometimes this is inevitable depending on the coastline and the area where you are paddling. If you do have to paddle in side-on conditions try and do a zigzag type vibe.

# THE MOCKE PADDLING STORY.

Dawid and Nikki Mocke are world champion paddlers from Fish Hoek, South Africa. Their sporting careers started on the beach and in the surf as “Nipper” lifesavers, and progressed until representing South Africa in Surf Lifesaving. During this time they also started flat-water marathon, river marathon and flat-water sprint paddling; as well as open ocean surfski racing. In all of these disciplines they have enjoyed, and still enjoy, success at the highest international level.

## The Surfskischool

The Mocke’s are not only athletes, they are also mentors and in 2003, they started the Surfskischool to share the adventure of ocean paddling with anyone that wanted to learn. The Surfskischool has been going for 10 years now and has taught literally thousands of people to paddle surfski.

## The Brand

In 2006 Dawid decided to design a PFD that would meet safety requirements but not at the expense of performance. At a loss for what to name it, this is where the “MOCKE” brand was born. The MOCKE PFD was soon followed by other products all of which are designed with performance in mind.

## The Shop

Late in 2007 The Paddling Centre was opened to provide the right products, correct advice and excellent service to their clients. The Paddling Centre now provides the same service through an online environment, and at designated points such as the Surfskischool on Saturday mornings.

## Performance Inspired

The underlying principle at MOCKE PADDLING is the pursuit of purpose in the most excellent and inspired way: in our products; for our customers; and within ourselves.

## FOLLOW:

If you want to hear from Mocke’s personally or be first to receive up to date news and information you can follow them here:

- TWITTER: @MOCKEPADDLING | @DawidMocke | @CTSurfskischool
- FACEBOOK: “Friend” Dawid Mocke | “Like” MOCKE PADDLING | SURFSKISCHOOL CAPE TOWN
- SUBSCRIBE: On our Homepage [www.mockepaddling.com](http://www.mockepaddling.com) you can SUBSCRIBE to our email newsletters

## CLINICS:

If you would like Dawid Mocke to host a clinic or a series of clinics for your group or club then feel free to make contact via email: [school@mockepaddling.com](mailto:school@mockepaddling.com)