



# HYDROFOIL RENAISSANCE

..... By Armie Armstrong .....

What is this 'new sport' and where did it come from?  
Armie Armstrong talks to some pioneers in this exciting sport.

The first time I witnessed proper hydrofoil surfing was when Daniel Kereopa and I were filming the original waterman, Laird Hamilton, foil surfing a big raw swell outside Raglan's famous point breaks. It was for an Ultimate Waterman event pitch video. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PKJD4iYpCAs>

The huge smooth flowing turns, effortless speed and mad linking of sections for impossibly long rides was breath taking up close. Both DK and I were hooting and stoked.

At that moment I realised it was obvious that foiling was finally going to catch on, especially with hydrofoils supercharging America's Cup yacht racing.

The recent explosion of interest was further ignited by Kai Lenny paddling himself up on a foil to ride wind swell on Maui's famous North Shore. That moment represented a maturing understanding in the development of hydrofoil design. But in fact, there is nothing new about hydrofoils. The first hydrofoil boat was designed and built in 1906. Foils have been used since on both power and sail vessels of all shapes and sizes, improving efficiency, stability and speed.



Kai Lenny foiling pioneer, Image courtesy Naish

Kite and windsurf foil racing has also been taking off, with top riders breaking many world sailing records. Foils on boards to ride behind boats, and later, to tow surf into waves, have been used for over 25 years by pioneers like Laird, Rush Randall, Dave Kalama, and Kiwi surfer - Campbell Farrell: "When riding a foil standing up was pioneered it was a big deal, and even more so letting go of the tow rope, using the energy of a wave to keep going by yourself. But not many took to it. There's no question foiling on a wave gives the closest feeling to flying free like a bird does, looking for lift. It's magical and most who experience that feeling will want more. It's

great to see the way foiling has evolved with kiting as it became completely self-sufficient. I'm not surprised peoples enthusiasm for foiling got re-energized. I don't know where it's heading. Who would have thought Americas Cup boats would be foiling at 45 knots?"

The gliding sensation of silently slicing through water on a foil is extremely addictive. Even in choppy water the sensation is like riding a pristine powder run on an empty mountain. Anyone who loves the ocean and enjoys water-sports of any kind will find their first successful ride completely unforgettable.

My first foil session with a kite was on a family sailing trip to Coromandel. I provided much amusement to everyone with my shiny new carbon weapon, looking like a total fool crashing and burning a lot before it suddenly clicked and I was away. It has since become a bit of an obsession.

I made my first foil sup in mid-2015 and was playing around with various kite foils, but it soon became apparent that these kinds of foils are too difficult to ride without the puppet strings.

And so began my seemingly endless mission of making multiple prototype foils, with the

aim of racing in the 2016 Molokai 2 Oahu world champs on a sup foil. Unfortunately, this year the organisers were not ready to include DW sup foils and decided there would be no foils on the course.

Unperturbed, I headed to the Gorge Paddle Challenge hoping to ride the famous Columbia River wind and rattle some cages in the sup race establishment with a first ever foil versus traditional race sup attempt, on a prototype 10'10" race sup/foil setup.

Unluckily it was glassy for days before the race and the big river's swell hadn't built up. On race day

there was almost enough wind so I gave it a crack. The first mile was flat and I was so far behind I could hardly even see everyone on their traditional 14' race boards.

When I finally found enough wind swell to achieve take-off velocity, I couldn't believe how fast I caught and passed over half the fleet before turning the dreaded corner for the last mile of flat water to the finish. I was again overtaken by almost everyone - but I was fired up. I had truly seen the potential for this new generation of lower speed more stable foil shapes we had been working on.

While in Hawaii for the M20 race, I

rode with and talked to Kai Lenny and Zane Kekoa Schweitzer - the 2016 Ultimate Waterman winner, about their take on the new foiling equipment:

Zane - "What I love about the new evolution of hydro foiling on sups is the opportunity to find the soul's session that we all desire as surfers. In surfing culture, most waves to surf are crowded with people and a lot of the time it seems like a battle to have a good session. I always try to avoid crowds and people when I surf, because I care about grounding myself and connecting with nature when I'm in the water."

"With the new evolution of hydro foiling it opens up so many more

'surf spots', from open ocean channel crossings, to downwind surfing ground swell, to riding down rivers with a little bit of energy and surface bumps. It's amazingly efficient and they seem to ride waves that most people would not consider surfable, or even a 'wave' at that..."

Like sup, foiling has taken a while to catch on. I remember when I started NZ's first sup school, 2006 in Raglan, I couldn't pay people to even try it. Foiling's gestation has been longer but now is the time.

If you're keen to give it a go, there are two simple ways to learn.

If you are a kiter then that's the easiest route. If not, then you need to tow behind a ski or boat - wakeboard style - and get a good hour of foil riding time under your belt before going anywhere near waves.

For equipment the new, larger more stable low speed foils with shorter masts, are way safer and easier to ride and are more versatile for wake, kite, windsurf and surf.

It's summer, so get out there and have fun!