



BUILT TO LAST

INTRO → OCEAN RODEO'S MAKO BOARD IS 13 YEARS OLD. IT WASN'T ALWAYS POPULAR, AS WE FIND OUT IN THIS TRIBUTE TO A MODEL THAT HAS ALWAYS LIKED - AND CONTINUES - TO BE A LITTLE DIFFERENT. SOME PEOPLE JUST LOVE THAT AND A SEEMINGLY IMPOSSIBLE COLLECTION OF EXTREME CURVES HAVE PROVED VERY POPULAR FOR A GROUP OF DEDICATED NON-FOLLOWERS OF TWIN-TIP FASHION **WORDS** → JIM GAUNT **PHOTOS** → OCEAN RODEO, UNLESS STATED OTHERWISE



There are a lot of Mako riders in my little corner of the world in Cornwall," says Dom Moore, Ocean Rodeo's man in the UK. "They are a bit like VW campervan owners in that when they see each other there's always a wave or friendly greeting exchanged, and as our sport develops and becomes more anonymous, I think that's really special."

Unlike the VW, the Mako hasn't always been an icon of desirability. Like the VW, it has always stood out in a crowd. Dave Nunn of Windance in the Gorge, Ocean Rodeo's biggest Mako dealer, reckons, "When we got our hands on one in 2007 we laughed at it! The roundness of the Mako can still throw customers off for sure."

Dave has now long been a convert and uses several analogies to put his customers' minds at ease, one being that, "the concave is just the same as on a competitive water-ski, and everyone knows that water skis haven't been flat bottomed for a long time."

Let's get into the shape - it's not like you or your mates ride is it?

In 2002 Ocean Rodeo had just launched their first flexible board built in snowboard construction and were one of the first companies out of the gates in doing so. Their pride and joy was the Outlaw board. OR's MD Richard Myerscough remembers, "Our sales manager at the time was Mark Vincent. He would walk around the office saying we need a board with massive concave, not just a few millimetres, but ten to fifteen centimetres, something more like a high speed slalom water-ski (as Mark was a competitive water skier). His hand would be shaped in a C and he'd be grumbling that flat boards sucked. At first I wasn't interested in the Mako as I was 100% fixated on the Outlaw and the development of the flex snowboard build that was increasing durability and performance so much."

Ocean Rodeo's designer, Ross Harrington, listened to Mark though and got the first version of the Mako press produced by a Canadian snowboard factory. Called the 'Mark 1' after Mark Vincent, the first models featured end grain balsa core, ABS rails, PU bottom and top coat - in fact not far off what you see today.

Ross explains, "I agreed with Mark that we should try to create a board that had high lateral resistance and yet minimal drag. The kites we were using at the time had minimal depower (although we thought they had a lot of depower of

course compared to what had gone before), so the board had to be really dug into the water to force the kite forward in the window to reduce the angle of attack, effectively reducing the power in the kite."

Of course, kites can now do this by simply sheeting out, but at the time the grunty, powered kite handling wasn't helped very much by the fact that most of the boards were either flat or very slightly concave on the bottom and were heavily reliant on their fin performance. Ross could see the difference that a change in approach could make.

"I designed a couple of boards in CAD that were more or less rectangular and had sharply down-turned rails to act as a form of keel. To test the concept we bolted angled extrusions onto the bottom rails of an existing flat bottom board, which sort of worked, but if the water flow wasn't parallel to the extrusions then a lot of drag was created. It was apparent just how much the flow along the bottom of the board changes as the board travels over the water."

Look at the wake off the back of a regular board and you'll see the vortices coming off the lee-side fin as the water is dispersed / forced towards the rail due to the board being heeled over. As they had set out to achieve, the Mako shape was born as a way of making a shape that would create a lot of lateral resistance and yet minimal drag regardless of the direction of water flow over the bottom. It doesn't sound easy, and it wasn't as Ross explains.

"The first design was 150 x 34 and a real challenge as I was new to CAD and this board was a collection of extreme curves (plan shape, rocker and concave). There are no flat or straight parts. The oval plan shape combined with the deep cylindrical concave and the large amounts of continuous rocker gave the downturned rail that we wanted for lateral resistance. By having it taper off towards the tips in combination with the tapering off of the width, I hoped that the board would be less affected by the direction of flow. I wasn't sure how many - if any - fins would be needed, so I only put one on either end."

Ross sent the file off to the Canadian snowboard manufacturer who soon contacted him to let him know that making a board with such compound curves was going to be extremely difficult. Imagine curving a piece of paper in one direction and then try curving it another 90 degrees; 'you can't do it without something deforming' was their analogy. So Ross used end grain balsa for the core as it



CAPTION → All the Makos have the same design formula as the original. Ross found that every time he deviated from that something would be lost in performance. It was a classic straight off the bat **PHOTO** - Kai Benson



[2006]



[2007]



[2009]



[2010]



[2011]



was easier to put a compound curve into and lots of force on the mould to hold the curve, and they waited anxiously for the first samples.

Mark tested the first one and loved it, evident in his insane carving turns and the fact he was flying upwind. Ross tried it and hated it. Mark had a water-skiing background whereas Ross was used to riding a regular twin-tip where you load up your back foot and was struggling to get it to ride in a straight line. "I was spinning out and it felt like I needed way more fin, so I quickly went back to my regular board," confesses Ross.

Mark, meanwhile, kept riding the sample and was liking it more and more. He could boost huge airs and lay down slalom water-skiing style carves, so they decided to go into production, even though, as Ross confesses, "I still couldn't ride it!" At some point around that time Ross damaged his regular

twin-tip, so took the Mako again and decided to commit to learning to ride it.

"The lightbulb finally turned on when I realised that it didn't need to be ridden off your back foot. It was a eureka moment for me! Equal foot loading and using that downturned rail between your heels; the board took off. You could even load your front foot and the board still performed. It flew over chop, holding an edge as soon as you touched back down. I was converted and even tried going back to my regular twin-tip, but hated it, so I stayed with the Mako."

Ross wasn't the only one to struggle with that first design. Ocean Rodeo marketing manager John Zimmerman says, "The 150 was absolutely polarizing. People who could ride it loved it, those who couldn't (or wouldn't) figure it out, hated it."

Richard Thompson from Devon, UK, first landed upon the Mako in 2006, the original wood cored 150

x 34. He highlights that "it was blisteringly fast but skittish as a flounder in a frying pan. Not the easiest, but still the stuff of legends."

Ross experimented with numerous fin configurations on the original 150 x 34, even setting it up as a six fin with three fins at each end for a short period, but says that anything other than the original centre fin on the end had too many negatives.

Next up came the 134 x 35, a squared off version of the 150 x 34, but it was a face sprayer unless used by a light weight rider as getting rid of the oval ends made the board more sensitive to foot placement. The 150 x 40 and 140 x 40 also went into production with the wider platform making it easier for riders transitioning from regular twin-tips and offered a more stable platform for bigger riders. Realising the demise of a cult classic, when Ocean Rodeo announced that the original was going to be



CAPTION → Philippe Alengrin, 2003
PHOTO → Kai Benson



[2011]

[2012]

[2013]

[2014]



CAPTION → Philippe again
PHOTO → Kai Benson

put out to pasture and retired, a number of very loyal riders cried out and bought multiple spare boards from the final production run.

It was the 130 model though, aimed at the more performance kiter, that really got those in the know excited.

"This was my favourite board." admits Ross. "Unfortunately its small size kept a lot of people from trying it. Anyone who loved the original 150 has really loved this, though."

JZ agrees. "The 130 Mako was the best of class. A skateboard like feel, it absolutely tore holes in waves and was a blast to jump because it felt like you had nothing on your feet." A 135 was also added to the line-up adding more stability through the turn if you come slightly off balance and requires a little less wind to be fun, but John says, "It's a shame so few people were willing to try the 'mini Mako', but the 130cm label threw a lot of people off, even though the board felt like a 135 underfoot with its deep concave.

The Mako has been through the mill but retains its original design concepts, which although most probably see as 'unfashionable' now, represent a statement that says, 'We don't need to keep changing things for the sake of changing them. We want to live in the moment and enjoy what we have in front of us. We might not travel to perfect conditions every six months but we took up kitesurfing purely for the escape and for fun. It may not be perfect, but it's where we live.'

Boards will be lighter, stronger and faster; they'll be bigger, fatter, smaller, wider, thinner and before we know it, what's state-of-the-art in terms of riding performance today, will become the standard. Kitesurfing will gain more and more attention as the feats that the best in our ranks achieve truly begin to match the levels of risk and reward in other sports.

But does everyone want to chase that dog around the park every weekend? Or do they just want to go kitesurfing?

The Mako isn't necessarily easy, it's different and, once mastered, very suited to everyday conditions. There is still a need to learn the skills, which is a significant factor in the enjoyment levels of all the sports that we do. We might learn the basics of kitesurfing quicker than other sports, but we still need meaning. We need to test the limits of our character, but maybe we don't always need such a stiff test. The next time you come in from a session, simply ask yourself: can you corner properly? There's a lot to be said for cornering properly in any activity.

Unlike the early VW campervans, the Mako design was quite complicated to get right. VW on the other hand were able to turn out 90 different body combinations over the first five years, from buses, to milk floats, bread vans, delivery vans and the beloved camper. Like the campervan, however, the Mako is a favourite among all sorts of people, regardless of age or profession.

Like the 'Splitty and the 'Bay', truly iconic VWs, the Mako represented an era of freedom and fun, and still does.

As kitesurfing matures and riders begin to count the decades they've been riding, like surfers, they will look round at the collection of products strewn about their garages. Kitesurfing opens up journeys in product experimentation as much as it does for travel. Have aspirations as a kitesurfer. Aim to build the perfect quiver. And somewhere in that quiver have a board that you know no matter how bad the conditions, it will still remind you why you first enjoyed kitesurfing. Become a good builder and warm your soul.

And go retro. Pay homage to where we've been as a sport. It's so right now.

CAPTION → Rody Pijts, Scheveningen, Holland
PHOTO → Dom Moore



CAPTION → Philippe
always gets in the photos
PHOTO → Kai Benson



CAPTION → Big Ideas for a small car



CAPTION → Jeremie Tronet on the 150 in 2008, Brazil

MAK(O)ING MEMORIES

INTRO → Meet some Mako quiver builders from around the world:



**DAVE NUNN,
MAKO PUSHER,
WINDANCE,
THE GORGE, USA**

I position the board in the market to the rough water freerider, the aspiring wave rider, the older kiter and to those who want to boost big air in rough conditions. I often describe it as being similar to a modern mountain bike in that it has tons of suspension to eat up the chop and therefore allows you to ride even faster through the hairy sections, especially here in the Gorge where the ramps are pretty close together. In the ocean the Mako makes exploring waves feel very safe.



**DAVE ROBERTS,
ASSORTED QUIVER RIDER
FROM PLYMOUTH, UK**

I suppose I was/am an experienced snowboarder and surfer and, while I wanted to get out and play in the waves, I didn't want to go all out with a directional at that point. Over the years I've also moved onto directionals, but I often go out in strong onshore winds that whip up big waves; conditions which aren't a problem for the Mako. It has all the bases covered. If mine got damaged or stolen I'd buy another without hesitation.



**HANS DE GELDER, 53,
HARDCORE MAKO QUIVER
MIXER, HOLLAND**

I have the King Size for light wind, the 140 and the 135 which is my favourite board for when I spend long periods in Cape Town. I have even had the 135 made in carbon by Ray at Long Ocean, a local Cape Town shaper. My

girlfriend has my old 130 and loves it. In Cape Town I see a lot of guys having trouble holding a rail and doing a big jump, whereas even in big chop I can just rip it and go high. I love to then come in and rip the waves. There aren't many boards you can really do that properly on.



**JON LITTLE,
MAKO MAGIC IN SCHOOLS
AT TRYKITESURFING.COM,
TROON, SCOTLAND**

I'll rave about the Mako King all day for teaching as it's truly universal. It's so nice to use a board that I can ride in light winds myself without it being a lifeless plank. The easy early planing compensates for the poor skill set of our not yet awesome students. The increased wind range means you can drop a kite size in lighter winds, it handles the white water well and is also good for all sizes of rider. The Mako ticks all the boxes!



**RICHARD THOMPSON,
WILDSIDE MAKO RIDER,
DEVON, UK**

I first landed upon the Mako 150 in 2006 and suddenly there was velvet speed and a board that felt alive. The harder you rode it, the more you were rewarded. Waves are my thing, so in the light wind it's a Mako King mutant and as soon as the power comes on then the faster you can go into your speed carves the better! So many sessions over many years. Cool dudes wake style. Chilled riders Mako style.



**JIM STRINGFELLOW,
BROKEN BUT BACK
RIDING THE MAKO,
THE GORGE, USA**

My girlfriend got lofted when learning to kite and broke her tibia fibula just below the knee. Years after her recovery she started kiting again but could

only last about 30 minutes in the chop before needing a break. The Mako 130 allowed her to increase her water time. A couple of years ago I broke my leg just above the ankle when riding strapless in chop. When I got back on the water I got a Mako 140, which I continue to use today. Strapped and in big winds and swell the Mako King handles and carves like a dream. I've ridden it in all conditions and especially enjoy it without straps in lighter winds.



**MIKE HILL, MAKING THE
MOST OF IT,
WHITE SALMON,
WASHINGTON, USA**

I have been using the Makos of all sizes for a few years now. I love the light weight design and the rounded tip and tail. At first I was concerned that I wouldn't be able to jump well on these boards, but after a few sessions I figured it out and the concave shape really locks in the edge and also makes for a super smooth ride, whether on flat water or in chop.



**DOM MOORE, TOUGH
SEAFARER AND OCEAN
RODEO'S MAN IN THE UK**

What I find reassuring about this board is that in a world of form over function the Mako is designed for performance first and the smooth flowing template is a most fortunate after effect. You don't really ride a Mako, you 'glide' it. It's like cruising on a cushion of air and that's really important because in our 420 miles of coastline we've got few flat water spots, but a lot... really a lot... of rough, open ocean water. And you'll never see one on eBay. That's a fact.

Find more info on the Mako at:
www.oceanrodeo.com **OR**

CAPTION → 2002 prototype



CAPTION → Jim Stringfellow



CAPTION → Philippe Alengrin, classic