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How to: CROSS-STEP ON A LONGBOARD

By LIZA MONROY

Cross-stepping is one of surfing's most elegant maneuvers, but it's not purely aesthetic. Moving up and down the board allows you to control speed and stay close to the wave's energy source. But how to begin when it's easier, and fun, to trim, turn, and not waste waves while learning this tricky technique? We asked three local surf stars, each with differing stylistic flourishes, to share their paths and journeys to the nose.

Natalie Marquardt shows us how it's done.

PHOTO: NOLAN SULLIVAN

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Réne "Rainey" Ouellette, who is shredding into his 60s, noserides a sponsored Crime 10'0. His signature composure prioritizes a relaxed stance—no flying arms. Tessa Timmons learned growing up in San Diego and credits her style to developing out of that scene, with Joel Tudor among her mentors. "You're going to surf like the people you watch when you're learning," she says.

One surfer who learned from watching Timmons now cross-steps so gracefully one might not realize he's a lifetime shortboarder and a more recent convert. Wanting to log (sorry) more time in the

water, Buell Surf Shop manager and surf instructor Jason Hdez bought an L41 10'0 classic noserider shaped by Kirk McGinty with a Tudor fin. "I'm getting more into riding different boards," he says at a picnic table outside Buell. "Longboards were the original surfboard." Hdez also credits Darshan Gooch, Kyle Jouras, Candra Jordan, CJ Nelson, and a slew of others as teachers and inspirations.

For Timmons, the admiration is mutual. "Jason is an amazing shortboarder and now he's longboarding amazing too," she says. "His brain is fresh on what to do, which will help other people who are learning."

↓ Réne "Rainey" Ouellette is one of the smoothest cross-stepping sliders in town.

PHOTO: BRYAN GARRISON





↑ Tessa Timmons dances across the deck of her board. PHOTO: BRYAN GARRISON

a. KNOW BEFORE YOU GO: BOARD, BREAK AND CONDITIONS

“There are controversial and differing opinions on what you should be riding,” Timmons says. “Everyone has their theory.” For intermediates, she suggests a single fin, over 9’0, with thick rails.

Ouellette’s boards weigh between 20 and 25 pounds, with “a deep concave, a lot of tail rocker and less nose rocker,” he says, peering out over the choppy Pacific one drizzly afternoon at a Capitola overlook.

For Hdez, the proper noseriding board is “a solid plank,” akin to “having a sidewalk.” “You want to be able to walk up your board and not feel teeter-tottering or wobbliness,” he explains. Break-wise, he

says, “a long point break gives you room and space and makes you feel comfortable.”

Stick with knee-to-chest-high waves, Ouellette advises. “A big overhead wave is not conducive” to noseriding, nor is high tide. “It’s hard to walk on a wave at five-and-a-half-foot tide,” he says. “The face is not hitting the reef right.”

b. SAFETY

Though not considered “classic,” Timmons advises wearing a leash on your calf below the kneecap when learning. Just remember, she adds, “you shouldn’t ever ditch your board—it can spring back, which is just as dangerous.”

With the right log, spot, and swell, it’s time to get stepping.

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HOW
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1. Take the high-line.

“Two-thirds up the face,” Ouellette says. “A good board will automatically go there.”

Once you’re in trim, “be into the pocket as close as you can,” Timmons says. “That’s when the rail and fin are engaging.”

2. Stall.

Cross-stepping speeds you up. “Stomp on the tail to slow down,” Hdez says. “The closer to the nose, the faster you’ll be going.”

3. Walk. (The Shuffle is Real. Resist.)

Step back foot over front to walk forward. As weight transfers to the new front foot, your crossed back leg steps to front and you’re in normal stance again.

Per Ouellette, shuffling is “a hard habit to break.” Don’t rush, either. “Test it out, give it a couple steps, then you can go further,” Timmons says.

“You don’t have to spring up to the nose,” Hdez offers. “You can remain in the crossed position to get the right amount of rail.”

4. Stay on the Stringer.

Ouellette emphasizes the importance of walking forward and back (more challenging), where “everything is even.” If you can hang 5, then 10, that’s “the ultimate to-do for a traditional longboarder,” he says.

5. Practice. (Often!)

Remove your fin to practice at home. Or, try skating a longboard (though hitting pavement can result in injuries that keep you from surfing). Cross-training should help develop weight-transfer and balance—think slack-lines or balance boards. However, nothing truly imitates your board sliding across the wave as water moves beneath you.

The most important tip our experts give is the hardest to put into practice: actually trying, which means wasting waves. “Sucking is part of the process,” Timmons says. “Some days are good, others are crowded or you’re tired, and that’s super-normal.” 🌀



An evening stroll with Jason Hdez. PHOTOS: BRYAN GARRISON