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GETTING RADICAL

Engineer and surfer, Eduardo Cenzano is making surfing bespoke

ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON ON SPAIN'S NORTH COAST, A gentle offshore breeze is sculpting the Bay of Biscay into a corduroy seascape of gently rolling green walls.

A surfer stands surveying the crowded line-up, looking for the section where the waves are breaking best. The surfboard tucked under his arm is the only thing that doesn't fit with this clichéd image: it is a strangely shaped object with its curves all in the wrong places. With a bulbous nose instead of the typical sharp point, it has a narrow middle where there should be a wide bulge. Towards the tail there is another thick area. It is a parabolic surfboard; a surfboard with a "waist" and "hips".

But the curves are exactly in the right place. The surfer is confident that his board is the fastest in the water. It is more stable whilst shifting into the turns more rapidly than traditional boards. Few of his fellow surfers in the line-up know it yet, but surfboards like this are poised to take the surfing world by storm.

This board is the latest stage in sixty years of surfing evolution and the surfer holding it is Eduardo Cenzano, the engineer who has channelled his years of aerodynamics experience into perfecting the surfboard of the future. His company Trinity Boardsports is spearheading a revolution in surfboard design.

Cenzano is actually more businessman and engineer than surfer. He owns several companies, and his background is in designing the huge aero-dynamic sails for the hundreds of wind turbines that now surround his native town of Pamplona, where the foothills of the Pyrenees meet the Basque coast of Spain.

In 2005 Cenzano met Grant Stover in Biarritz and the English/South African surfer talked about the parabolic surfboard he had been shaping. The engineer took the design back to his laboratory in Pamplona and ran it through a series of thorough tests using expensive fluid dynamics software developed specifically for his wind turbines.

"This is the first time in the history of surfing that such thorough research has ever been put into board design," says Cenzano. "Surfing is a gigantic industry these days but the vast majority of revenue comes from clothing rather than board sales. The big surf brands put considerably more research into developing next year's selection of US\$120 boardshorts than they ever put into the new generation of surfboards." ↘

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EVEN TODAY, THE GREAT INNOVATIONS IN SURFBOARD shaping come from what is very much a cottage industry. The majority of surfboards are carved by hand in small dusty garages or workshops that are coated with a perennial blizzard of fibre-glass dust. It's unsurprising that Cenzano's cutting-edge boards have been greeted with so much enthusiasm. Indeed, five out of the six test-riders for these early boards were so impressed that they refused to give them back.

"We tested and tweaked the design for several years on our computers before finally taking it to shapers," Cenzano continues. "It took a lot of research but the basic reasons why these boards work so well are actually obvious. On a traditional board the curve from the nose slows the board down by acting as a brake along half the length. But with a parabolic board the water literally gets sucked into the waist with the result that the speed is phenomenally increased. Also there is less of the buffeting that is caused by water hitting the edges. You get less aggressive interference so the ride is that much more stable. There are some pretty complex laws of hydro-dynamics at play in all this."

Even in the earliest tests it was very obvious that both professionals and beginners would benefit from the ability to catch waves easier thanks to the added flotation upfront. Whereas traditional boards have a tendency to "pearl" on a late drop down a steep face (driving its point into the wave and throwing the rider like a reluctant horse), the parabolic's wide nose makes that crucial bottom-turn astoundingly manageable. Surfers can effectively ride considerably shorter boards than they have been used to: a lighter, faster board is the key to the boost that a pro is looking for when trying to pull the spectacular aerial manoeuvres upon which competitions are won and lost.

But in the image-obsessed world of surfing the fact that these boards are better is not always sufficient. It is very important to look the part and many surfers are, contrary to popular belief, highly conservative. In typical beach parlance a really "sick" surfboard (ie, a good board) needs to fit in with the group's image of what a board should look like. Although surfers adopt "radical" as the highest praise that they can bestow, they often seem to fear truly radical change.

This is nothing new. Back in the 1960s a short board was considered to be anything less than the standard ten-foot longboards. The hardcore surfers turned their noses up at the emerging short-boards until the likes of Jerry Lopez and Mark Richards made them pay attention by doing things on waves that had not even been dreamed of a few years before. Then came the revolution of the "thruster" and for years a surfboard was not even considered worthy of the name unless it had the prescription three fin set-up.

TODAY SURFING IS ONE OF THE FASTEST GROWING SPORTS in the world and surfers are more open to change than ever before. There has been a revival of retro boards: "fish"



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designs from the 1970s with their strange tail shapes and configurations of two fins ("twinnies"), four fins ("quads") and even five fins, and there has been a huge revival of the 1960s Malibu longboards that a decade ago were considered fit only for old dudes who were too worn out to paddle for waves.

Trinity's parabolic revolution is about to take hold. It might take time to change the mentality of the more strait-laced in the surfing world, but the winds of change are already blowing. While Cenzano already has the support of a major Spanish bank and the regional government of Navarra, he is now looking for international partners to help Trinity bring their boards into the mainstream of surfing. Like all good shapers, Trinity are permanently trying subtle new changes on the parabolic template and testing is continuing in the lab and among a growing team of test-riders in the water. They are also working on a clothing line and a series of innovative engineering projects related to the world of surfing. They even plan to sponsor surf expeditions to pioneer unsurfed waves in remote parts of Africa and Asia and a desert surf festival for the Middle East using a technique, also developed in Spain, which allows any hotel complex (or oasis) to be fitted with a custom-designed wave-pool.

"We're confident that this is the start of a new era for surfing," Cenzano enthuses. "We've put a lot of effort into our patented designs before we launched them publicly. But now is the time. In the next decade all boards will start to look like this." These are the surfboards of the future. Ride the new wave. ♡