

Paipo - Belly boarding in Australasia

New South Wales: Manly to Palm Beach



Bellybogger in action. Photo courtesy Dick Ash.



Hal Baily, Whale Beach
Baily, H (1987). 50 years Whale Beach SLSC.



Gary Clist strapping down his Hosking bellyboard and his 8' Trevor Hewton 'tracker'.
Photo Gary Clist.

Back in the day

The known history of Australian surfing has its roots in the Manly and Freshwater area. Some of Australia's great big wave riders from the 1960s came from this area, including Dave Jackman and Gordon Simpson, both of whom rode bellyboards as well as stand-up surfboards. These surfers also had strong links to the life saving movements, as did a number of other belly board riders of the time. This meant that they were also competent bodysurfers. Jackman recalls seeing Tommy Zahn from the 1956 US/Hawaii lifeguard team riding a bellyboard at Manly. This twin-finned balsa paipo with redwood stringers resembled those made by Wally Froiseth of Hawaii. Along with his twin brother Mick he made a copy of this twin finned balsa paipo. Jackman would move to New Zealand in 1962 where amongst other surfcraft he rode a guitar pick shaped paipo based on a design he saw in Hawaii.

Jackman tried to produce these boards commercially but found little interest in such boards in 1996. (Jackman 2011). This style of twinn finned board was made commercially in Sydney by Bill Clymer, who had moved from Melbourne in 1957 to be at the heart of the surfing industry. Larkin has described the Clymer bellyboards being influenced by a Bud Browne movie shown in Sydney, likely the same film seen by Leigh Tingle. If Zahn did bring a bellyboard to Australia Clymer may also have seen this board. Clymer's boards were twin fins, with a wooden rounded handle that followed the shape of the nose. Most were between 3 to 4', the occasional one being 5'. A number of these balsa boards were made over a two-year period before Larkin moved to Queensland around 1961-1962. Tony Dawes (2010) rode a Clymer style board as did Barrie Stark. Stark recalled that his board was, "Balsa 3'6", round nose, wide square tail, 23" wide. Dead flat with balsa grip at the nose. Bill Clymer loomero. Rode it 1958-1960" (Stark 2011). Stark also recalled "Rat" riding a board, "sometimes prone, kneel or standing up". Bruce Usher noted that the thirteen year old Barrie Stark bought "a 'Loomeroo' for 10/-/- pounds" (Usher 2011). Colin Harper also purchased such a board at Manly in 1958 (Regan 2010) though the board doesn't have a logo.



Bill Clymer bellyboard - deck view.
Mike Brown collection.



Bill Clymer logo.
Mike Brown collection.



Bill Clymer bellyboard - bottom.
Mike Brown collection.



Bill Clymer bellyboard
Surfworld - Torquay

Henry Marfleet (UK) reviewed his collection Australian surfing magazines from the 1960s and identified a number of letters requesting articles on bellyboards. This included Friendly Bear (1964) who also referred to Burl, Squizza, Dog, Dumper, Tissa, Rabbitt, Bains and Harry as a group based at the Manly surf lifesaving club. Ray Moran from the Manly surf museum has identified these surfers as respectively: Dick Browning, Bob Padman, Roger Griffiths, Tony Dawes (who briefly worked for Bill Clymer), Barry Taylor, Nev Taylor, 'Bains' is unknown and Rob Lovell. Other letter writers were the 'Sunburnt surfer' from Harboard (1965) while Ian Lawson (1963) from Bellevue Hill wanted information on where he could buy one of Leigh Tingle's boards.



Colin Harper's bellyboard advertised in the Manly Daily.
Colin had been inspired by the surfing of Gus Garland and Goose Allen
Photo by Colin Harper



Colin Harper's bellyboard.
Photo by Colin Harper



Wave with 3 bellyboards. Photo taken by Ted Ashby
[Tribute to Ted Ashby by Neale Ashby](#)

A later development was Midget Farrelly's "Belly Kneel-rider combination" advertised in Tracks magazine by Farrelly surfboards (Farrelly 1971a, Farrelly 1971b, Farrelly 1972a, Farrelly 1972b, Farrelly 1972c). Five foot long and twenty inches wide, the advertisement for this board refers to surfers exploring "the possibility of using a board that performs more than one function. It would seem that the ideal piece of surfing equipment could be ridden lying down, kneeling up, and possibly in the standing position". These boards were offered as either single or twin fins. Farrelly surfboards also produced "The Belly Rider" which was 48" by 19-20 inches. This board was reported to be able to "out race high speed gun boards". Features included a large single fin or twin fins, a "slight "V" bottom and hard edges, while "The nose is sensitive being thin and scooped. A foot before the tail the deck is humped to carry the chest of the surfer". Lengths and widths could be varied and it was described as having "minimal flotation". The advertisement also stated that board had been used in Hawaiian surf up to 15 foot. These boards may well have been influenced by those of Larry Goddard whom Farrelly shared a house with in Hawaii during the winter of 1970-1971 (Goddard 2009).



1971 Tracks ad for a Farrelly bellyrider

Moynier (2010) described his father making him a ply bellyboard at South Curl Curl in 1959. Approximately 3'6" long and 22" wide, rocker was added by soaking the board overnight. Bricks were used to add some nose rocker. Like other paipo this board doubled as a skim board. Bob Rose and Gordon Simpson from Freshwater reported surfing Dee Why. Simpson is featured in the 1961 Bruce Brown film, Surfing Hollow Days surfing Waimea on a McDonagh bellyboard. In the early 1960s Sydney became a centre of surfboard production, producing boards locally and for national distribution. Brookvale became the centre of the Sydney surfboard industry, which was originally dominated by Dillon, McDonagh, Wood and Bennett (Sutherland M, 2009).



Bob Rose's 3mm ply bellyboard: 42.5" x 16".



Bob Rose's bellyboard



The fin is 2" x 3.5" long

Dick Laycock, a McDonagh employee estimated that he made perhaps 50 bellyboards over a long career. He stated that most surfboard manufacturers only made them in the "single digits" in response to custom orders. These boards were made to the customer's design or the manufacturer would make what they thought would perform. Laycock described flat slabs about 30 mm thick and without fins. Greg McDonagh (2009) stated that he made bellyboards under his own label from 1958-1964. Most were made in the 1960s. He estimated about 20 were made during this time period. Initially the blanks were coolant then later urethane. These boards were twin finned ("like a large waterski fin", "almost a D fin"), and usually about 4' x 2' wide, 2- 2.5" thick. They were described as having a rolled down edge and being flat bottomed. Purchases were from local guys and the advent of boogie board was given as the reason bellyboards declined.



McDonagh bellyboard

Photo <http://www.soulsurf.com.au>



McDonagh bellyboard
Photo <http://www.soulsurf.com.au>



McDonagh bellyboard
Photo Craig Hosking

Denis McDonagh (2009), Greg's brother became a partner around 1959 in McDonagh Brothers surfboards. He advised that prior to the 1960s surfing was mostly body surfing or rubber surfplanes. He considered surfboards developed out of people wanting to ride something different to the surfplane and that surfing was based around lifesaving clubs and football. The McDonagh's experimented with different foams including refrigerator foam, coolite and polyurethane foam. Greg McDonagh and Barry Bennett were described as perfecting foam blanks in Australia. Sometimes a blank would be blown out of shape or be a third full. As it was costly to make a blank McDonagh suggested bellyboards were sometimes made from these reject moulds that were too short. Second-hand boards were also big business so some bellyboards were off-cuts but there were also custom orders. Typically bellyboards were built like "miniature surfboards". Surfboards at this time initially were sold from factories, before displays and retail outlets were added. The McDonaghs and Barry Bennett eventually opened Surf, Dive and Ski (McDonagh D 2009) to compete with the introduction of 'pop outs' being sold in the Nock and Kirby's department store. Surfboards had become big business.



Gordon Simpson
Bud Browne's *Surfing Hollow Days*



Free fall



Catching an edge



Planing

Bennetts also made bellyboards, though kneeboards became a bigger item with shapers like John Ware and Bruce Hart on staff. A 1964 story accompanied with advertisements in *Everybody* magazine featured a Bennett bellyboard. Twin-finned they ranged from 3' to 4'6" and weighed 6-7lbs. The cost - 18 pounds (Everbody 1964).



Bennett bellyboard.
Photo Mike Brown.



Bennett bellyboard.
Photo Mike Brown.



c 1963 Bennett bellyboard- 4'10" x 20 3/4
Photo: <https://www.vonweirdos.com>



Shane bellyboard. Photo Henry Marfleet



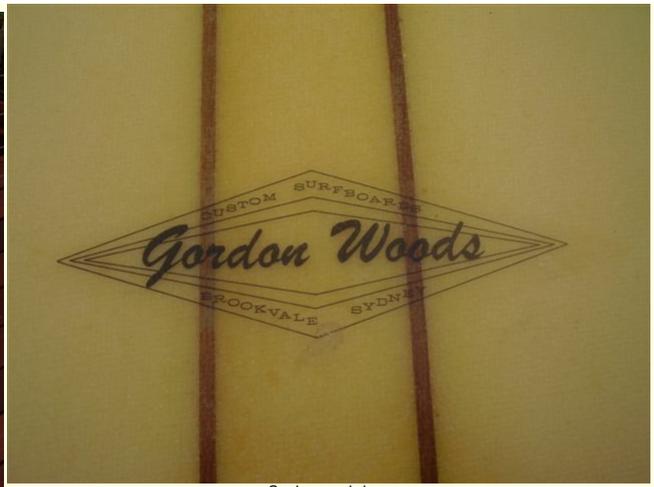
Gordon woods bellyboard.
Photo Mike Brown.



Gordon Woods bellyboard.
Photo Mike Brown.



Gordon Woods fin. Photo Mike Brown.



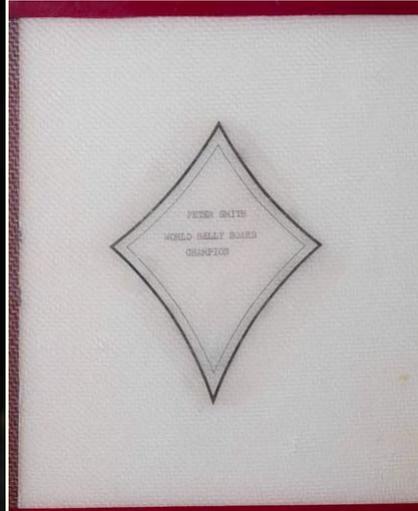
Gordon woods logo
Photo Mike Brown.



Keyo bellyboard
Photo Henry Marfleet.



Keyo bellyboard
Photo Henry Marfleet.



Pete Smith 'World bellyboard champion'
Photo Henry Marfleet.

On the northern Sydney beaches Dick Ash (2009) recalled wooden boards, referred to as "tea trays" being ridden. These were said to be a tear-shaped piece of ply that was varnished and had a chrome towel rack on the front as a handle, but without fins. J.H 'John' Haynes a Palm Beach lifesaver made ply boards, both stand-up and bellyboards for fellow club members. He is said to have made at least 10 bellyboards. Two of his boards are on display at the Cabbage Tree Club, which is associated with the SLSC. One of the boards is an honour board recording Club presidents (Williams (2012)). Also from Avalon, Robert Hosking (Clist 2009) made ply boards with chrome handles. This was a relatively small scale, local production. Gannon (2011) recalls Hosking based his board on one made by Peter Sobels from Avalon SLSC. Soebells' board was made after a trip to Hawaii. Hosking (2011) noted: "Over the years I was making these boards (I built approximately 60) the design changed considerably, but this was probably the final and best. I was getting 4 boards and fins out of a 4 x 6 sheet of 1/2" Cemac Seaply. More recently, Hosking (2012) commented "They certainly went through a continual development phase. The first was 3' long with a square tail and single deeper fin from 3/8" ply then to 3/6", at which stage scalloping the rear was introduced following the lead of Peter Sobels. There was even a tri-fin, and a back to front board starting narrow at the front and having the greatest width at the back! The fins may have been deeper and shorter during this period. The final variation was basically to get maximum length from the sheet of ply with the offcuts to produce the fins. That may be why they are not as deep! Also, our favourite surfing spots were shallow rock breaks (Hoskin 2012).



Tig Eilbeck with Haynes bellyboard
Photo Brawley, Sean (1996). Beach beyond : a History of Palm Beach Surf Club 1921-1996.

Gary Clist (2009) is a kneeboarder who started on surfplanes before riding bellyboards from 1965-1967. He bought a bellyboard from Robert Hosking from Avalon. The board was 4' by 22-24", 3/8" marine ply. His board had handles, half moon fins and was white with a red racing stripe. Gary stated there was a small group (less than a dozen) who rode bellyboards at South and Middle Avalon, with North Avalon described as 'mal' wave. For Gary, a bellyboard was a progression from the surfplane and he tried a foam board but the buoyancy made it more difficult to get out. Because he had no car and there was always some sort of wave he reported that there was no need to travel and there wasn't contact with other belly boarders. Gary moved to Noosa, but the board needed more solid waves and he changed to surfing kneeboards. Clist (2009) identified Brian Barraclough from Bungan as a bellyboarder from the 1960s. Paul Gallon identified friends who surfed Little Avalon on a bellyboard as including Dave Flatt, John Bridger, Donald "Ducksie" O'Brien and Malcom Robertson.

Nearby at Whale Beach, for many years Hal Bailey rode a 1 cm thick, twin finned ply bellyboard. The board had a hand grip and his son Kim, noted: "he loved a big barrel and often ended up surfing it in storm surf on his own (when conditions stopped others getting out). The board allowed him to drive deep under big waves, had two little keel like fins".



Robert Hosking with bellyboard.
Photo courtesy Paul Gannon.



Paul Gannon's board on top of Dave Cairn's GT Cortina packed for a trip to Noosa, ca. 1970. Photo courtesy Paul Gannon.



Hosking bellyboard
Photo courtesy Robert Hosking



33" Deane Brothers, a 1950s Williams and a copy of a Hosking bellyboard.
Gary Clist collection.



Modified copy (concave added) of a 1960s Hosking bellyboard.
Gary Clist collection.



Hoskins copy.
Photo by Gary Clist



Deane Brothers board - bottom view.
Photo by Gary Clist



Deane Brothers board- deck view.
Photo by Gary Clist

In 1964 Dave Sams wrote to John Kelly of Hawaii who had written *Surf and Sea* seeking information about paipo boards. Dave was surprised when he received a letter back (below). Dave got Bill Clymer to make him a board, based on the recommendation of Gordon Woods. In subsequent trips to Hawaii Dave caught up with Val Valentine who made the Paipo Nui boards (based on the design of Jim Growney and John Waidelich) and Paul Swanson. Pete Sobels was another paipo rider from that time. He also rode a finless paipo which he bought in Hawaii but preferred his homemade, twin finned board.

John M. Kelly Jr.
4117 Black Point Rd.
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815
May 25, 1964

David Sams
16 Mildred St.
Warawee, Sydney
N.S.W., Australia

Dear David:

It was a pleasure to receive your good letter and thanks for the enclosure of two bucks thought that was unnecessary. Better to save your dollars for your first trip to Hawaii!

As to applying the step to a paipo board, at this point I think it would be unnecessary. As you know, the step makes it possible to combine high speed with maneuverability with a surfboard. The paipo is already so maneuverable due to its light weight, small area, low center of gravity and so on, that I hardly think it would gain a thing. As a matter of fact, it was Jim Gromney and John Widenick, the two developers of the ultra high speed skin board (that should read "skim") who passed me with their fast skims when I was riding a very fast Downing gun that gave me the first ideas for the hydro. That is to say, it was being passed by them that triggered the idea of building a faster surfboard and one that was maneuverable as well. Incidentally, Jim and John have told me that the hydro is the only board in the surf that they cannot pass on their skim boards - but neither can they be passed, either.

As to the design of the Gromney-Widenick skim boards, I have enclosed a sketch of the boards they developed which are really catching on here. It is getting to be the usual thing to see a number of them tearing up a surfing site and making board riders and body surfers look as though they were statues. Your dimensions are about right but it is notable that Jim and John employ no skeg. The skeg forces a paipo or surfboard into directional motion which may, and often does, conflict with the inertial line of flight thus producing drag. It is primarily the freedom of inertial line of flight that, in combination with a no-contour-drag shape to the bottom of the board that enables their ultra high speed. In place of the skeg, the skim board rider "ralls" the flared after corner into the wave-wall when he wants to change direction. Once set in the desirable course, he allows the board to plane flat to the water thus freeing it and himself of all drag but the slight skin friction between the unbr-wetted-surface of the board and the water. The total bottom surface area of their boards is important - it has to be sufficient in size to bear their weight in flight, i.e., to have enough lift. A lot of our skim-board enthusiasts are now standing up on them and hot dogging... fantastic action.

For the last question on bodysurfing the heavies, I use a side position on a steep wall - right in the curl - with lower arm (right arm on a right slide) bent and extended across the front of my body using the hand as a sort of skeg bearing against the water that rises up the wave. This puts the rider's back smoothly up against the vertical wall of the wave and keeps the right shoulder out of the water thus reducing drag. When the wave is not steep enough - it has to be actually vertical - then you have to roll over on to the conventional belly position with arms at the

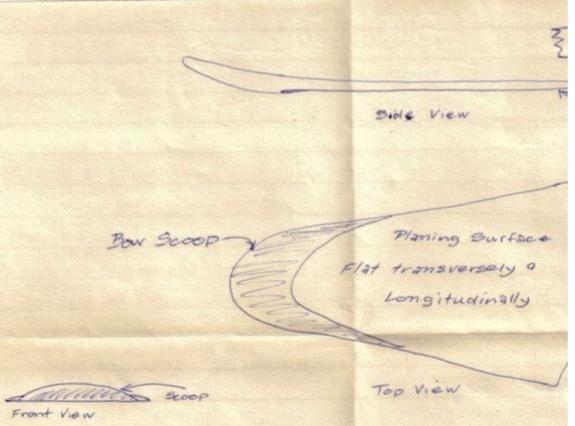
John Kelly's letter to Dave.
Photo courtesy Dave Sams.

side. The side position just described is for me the fast position known - I can keep up with a slow surfboard using it once you get into the belly position, you slow down considerable drag from the many contours of the body. The side position of the upper body out of the water completely.

These positions will all be described in the book when it falls.

Thanks again for writing, David. Hope to hear from you again.

Best regards,



• Be sure to have sharp breakaway on sides and rear end for no-drag release

John Kelly's letter to Dave.
Photo courtesy Dave Sams.



Dave's Clymer board
Photo courtesy Robert Hosking



Dave's Clymer board
Photo courtesy Robert Hosking



Sobels board: 48" x 20" x .5" Coachwood marine ply



Pete at Avalon.
Photo courtesy Pete Sobels



Pete Sobels at Newport Pool, 1966.
Photo Dave Sams

Gary Sharp and friends rode belyboards around Newport, built out of sheets of Brunzeel Marine Ply, 3/8" thick. Sharp (2012) recalls "We each bought a 4x2 foot sheet and shaped our own designs, cut and shape the fin/s from the offcuts and enamel painted them, usually over a weekend. Cost at that time was about \$20 all up." Gary and his friends rode the boards from 1966-1970. Sharp continued to ride his board around Newcastle (1970-1985), Manly and Freshwater in the 1990's and more recently in Vietnam.

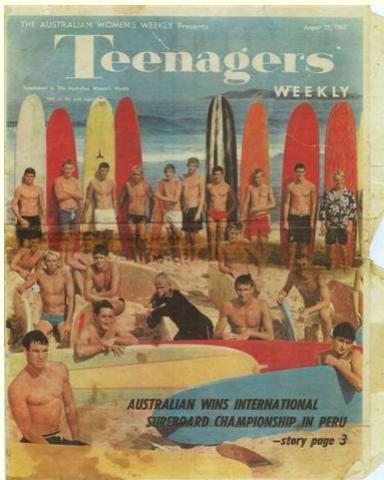


Gary Sharp ply paipo
Photo Gary Sharp.

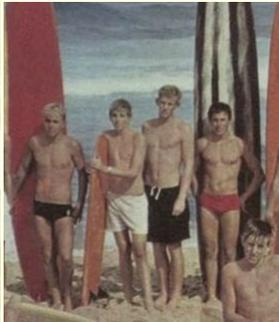


Gary Sharp ply paipo
Photo Gary Sharp.

Richard Wright (Wright 1965) of Collaroy questioned why there was not a bellyboard division in contests, given a tandem surfing display at the then recent New South Wales state championships Long Reef. The only identified Australian contests were the chestboard division of the Avalon Board titles in May 1963 (Unknown 1963) The Avalon contest was won by Rodney Sumpter who also placed third in the US Salt Creek bellyboarding contest (Unknown 1964b). Ron Turton has reported seeing this competition and stated Sumpter rode standing up (Turton 2011). Bellyboards were also given as prizes. The Surfing World (Unknown 1964c) offered a Keyo paipo as a prize for the best bodysurfing photo received.



Teenagers Weekly, August 1962
Photo courtesy John Knobel.



Barry Watson - with bellyboard
Photo courtesy John Knobel.



Contest, Narrabeen 1962
Photo courtesy John Knobel.

In the early 1970s there were two attempts to commercially make bellyboards on a larger scale. Originally based in Avalon, Dick Ash (Ash 2009) first produced a bellyboard around 1960 when he cut up an old broken balsa board. Almost a decade later, around 1970 Ash produced the bellybogger, a roto moulded hollow plastic board. After these boards were banned from use within the 'flags' and with the advent of the Morey Boogie board Ash ceased production. However, he has redesigned the bellybogger which he now produces from Byron Bay.



Surfing World, Vol 27(5)
December 1978



Dick Ash Bellybogger. Photo Henry Marfleet.

1994 Tracks ad for the bellybogger.



Dick Ash - down south



Dick Ash -1960s Avalon area

Nowadays

More recently in the Manly area, Brett Curtis has experimented with various materials and designs, including hydrofoils and mat-paipo hybrids.

Back in the day extras



Shane bellyboard



Shane bellyboard



Shane bellyboard
Photo Gary Clyst



Shane bellyboard by Richard Harvey



Shane bellyboard
Photo Jim Swinton



Shane bellyboard
Photo Sandy Sandrin.

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