



The Newspaper



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EDITORIAL

40 years of Windsurfing

Jim Drake set foot on the first "Windsurfer" the 22nd. of May 1967.



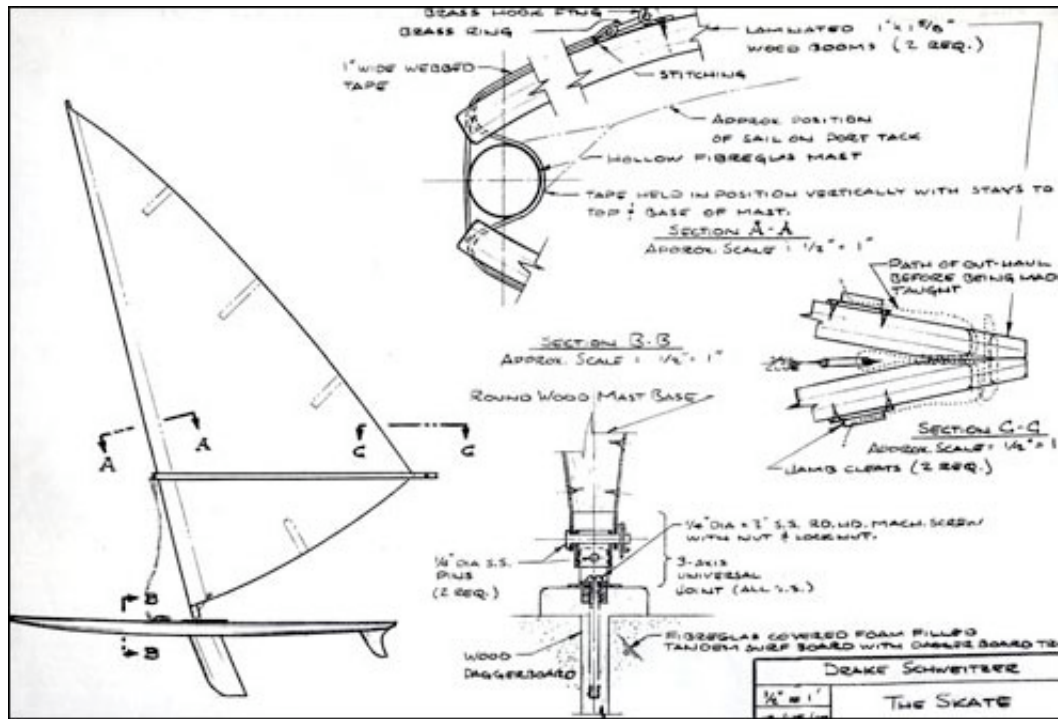
The Windsurfer was developed in 1967 by aeronautical engineer/sailor Jim Drake and computer analyst/surfer Hoyle Schweitzer, both Southern Californians. The first board was built in Jim's house in January that year, but details such as centerboard, fin and the actual universal joint were not even close to finalization. In fact, Drake was still trying to figure out how the rig could be mounted and the board could be freely controlled. The first universal was attached to the centerboard, - moving only fore and aft. It was months later during one of Drake's commuting drives to his work place at the Norton Air force base in Southern California that he clicked on the idea of a fully moveable rig.

Jim Drake took his family and the new contraption he called "The Skate" to the beach on May 22nd. 1967. No one on that beach could have known that the grey haired gentleman they had watched rigging was about to make history. Along with the birth of this the-unique free sail system, an entire new sporting concept was conceived. The first series of boards where made from **Hoyle Schweitzer's** garage in 1969.



By 1971 European sales were growing to such vast proportions that a licensee had to be appointed to handle the hungry market. A licensing contract with the Dutch company Ten Cate was executed and "Ten Cate Windsurfing" was born. In 1974 a second licensee was appointed to manufacture Windsurfers, this time in Tokyo and "Windsurfing Japan" was on its way. In August of 1976 a 3rd. licensee was established in Sydney, Australia.

The sport literally exploded into fashion, and by early 1978 it was 45.000 Windsurfers sold throughout the world. One brand, - one board model only. The industry quickly grew to include numerous manufacturers and licensed brands and at it's peak in the mid 80's close to a million boards where sold per year.



The Skate (click to enlarge picture.)

However, the decline of the 90's was almost as radical as the "explosion" of the 70's. Media hypes and short board "fashion" changed the course of windsurfing. The water sport "for all" had been replaced by the extreme sport "for a few."

It has become increasingly obvious that windsurfing has isolated itself from the masses and become an extreme sport 40 years after its birth.

Jim Drake; (Interview with American Windsurfer magazine volume 4 issue for 1996)

I have an optimistic view about the sport. It certainly, at least, has hit a plateau, and I think the reason it has reached this plateau is because there are some natural barriers to participating in the sport. Some are brought on by the media and some are brought on by nature. The one that's brought on by the media is the picture of the sport as being this athletic circus trick of jumping waves and whirling around this great wide ocean. Well, that's simply not what the sport is. Just not at all.

It has much more broad application and pleasures to it. Because people who are athletically inclined but not as superbly coordinated as Robby [Naish] can enjoy the sport in many regards without having to ever get airborne. I think that's a media created problem for the sport. But it's hard not to be more energized first with spectacular photos though than it is for calm lakes and all.

I think that the natural barrier that has come about, which perhaps technically can be breached, is the wind barrier, on the low side. If the sport were able to create a board and sail which allows pleasurable fun for the not very good, in 8 - 10 knots of wind, two things would happen. First, the number of sailing spots would go up by a factor of ten. And second, the number of people who can do this, or the number of people who can now see themselves as actually participating in the sport would go up by ten thousand. So for notch reduction, and the lower limit of the wind speed for the board, you'll create several factors, wind spots and people. That's just natural.

Though credit must be given to Drake for the invention of the sport, it was Hoyle and Diana Schweitzer who gave life to the new sport of windsurfing. Their vision, energy and passion remains one of the most underrated achievements of our times.



Diane and Hoyle display their Windsurfer at the Long Beach, California, Boat Show in 1970



Interview with Jim Drake



Interview with Hoyle Schweitzer

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