

**IT'S SMALLER,
FASTER....AND
THREE HUNDRED
YEARS OLD!**

THE PAIPO BOARD

**story and photography by
VAL VALENTINE**



**John Waidelich —
developer of the modern Paipo.**

In the surfing section of Honolulu's Bishop Museum, the oldest surfboard in the world is on display. Over three hundred years old, it is of such a size and shape that there is no question it is a *Paipo* — or, if you will excuse the expression, a belly-board.

Surfing on the tiny paipos has received consistent mention in the journals of the South Pacific's early visitors and explorers. It must have been a strange and thrilling sight for these Europeans to see the natives riding large and dangerous waves on the tiny boards. Frederick O'Brien, in his book *White Shadows in the South Seas*, written nearly 65 years ago, mentions these natives riding waves on boards "no bigger than a shirt front". From his own experience, while in the Marquesas, he decided to join the natives in their sport, and attempted to ride the surf "on a coffin lid." He could never quite manage to get into the wave on the unwieldy "lid" although "sev-

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Top/John Waidelich drags his arm and steams through a hot Sunset Beach left. Middle/Jim Brownie extends his "outrigger" right arm as he planes, completely out of the water, across a Sunset Beach wall. Bottom/Waidelich drops in at an angle as a surfer on a conventional board stalls and waits for him to build up speed.



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Top/This photograph of John Waidelich illustrates how fast the Paipo gets out in front of a wave. Middle/Hanging and stalling through the top of a wave at "Techniques." Bottom left/Jumping from the Kuhio Breakwater is the correct method of entry at "Techniques." Bottom right/Val Ching demonstrates that it's possible to stand on the Paipo.

eral experienced riders rode it surprisingly well." He switched to a Paipo and from his immediate greater success came many vivid descriptions of his thrilling rides.

The word "Paipo" doesn't exist in the Hawaiian dictionary. Librarians and historians assume the word is Hawaiian slang, possibly derived from "Paepae" an Hawaiian word meaning slapping, or from "Poipu", meaning "engulfing

wave." Poipu Beach on the island of Kauai is well known as an excellent body surfing beach. Possibly small boards were ridden there and called, naturally enough, Poipu Boards. Through careless usage, the word Poipu might have been changed to Paipo. In any event, the word Paipo is now commonly used in Hawaii to describe a body-planing board.

On the island of Oahu, paipos are rid-

den at most of the beaches. The most popular spots are Makapuu, famous for its excellent body surfing waves, and the Kuhio Beach breakwater on the Waikiki side. The break ridden here is called "Techniques." In the old days, before youngsters were allowed out in the larger breaks at Waikiki, they were advised to first practice their *technique* at this particular break, hence the name, "Techniques."

The boards ridden at Makapuu and Techniques range from the weird to the wonderful; they vary from the very crude to quite dazzling masterpieces of woodwork. One might be made of beautiful balsa with redwood stringers, covered with fibreglass and rubbed out to a dazzling finish. Riding the same wave, and having just as much fun, might be a board crudely carved from an old signboard. Most of the boards, however, are made of plywood. Some are painted or given other means of protection from water damage. But some are just plain wood, with no covering whatsoever. Some have skegs; some don't. Some skegs are wood; some are fibreglass; and some are metal. Some riders prefer a large skeg mounted in the same relative position as on a conventional surfboard while others prefer two smaller skegs located near the rear edges. One boy in particular favors a fearsome skeg similar in shape to the knives on the wheels of the chariots in "Ben Hur" — a devastating weapon in the surf!

The accepted way to get into the lineup at Kuhio Beach is to walk out to the end of the breakwater, toss the board into the water, wait for the surge to make the water a little deeper, and jump from the eight foot wall. From there it is an easy kick out to the take-off area. Most riders lie on the boards, getting into the wave with a few flips of their fins, with an occasional arm-stroke thrown in for good measure. Often two boys will make a financial merger; together they purchase a pair of fins, each going his separate way with a single fin.

The speed and maneuverability of these boards is amazing. A few boys have mastered the art of standing on the board. They handle their small Paipos in a manner quite comparable to a surfboard hotdogger. The undisputed master of the art of riding a Paipo in the standing position is a young man by the name of Val Ching. Val shoots the wall, does spinners, rides backwards, executes breathtaking pullouts and per-

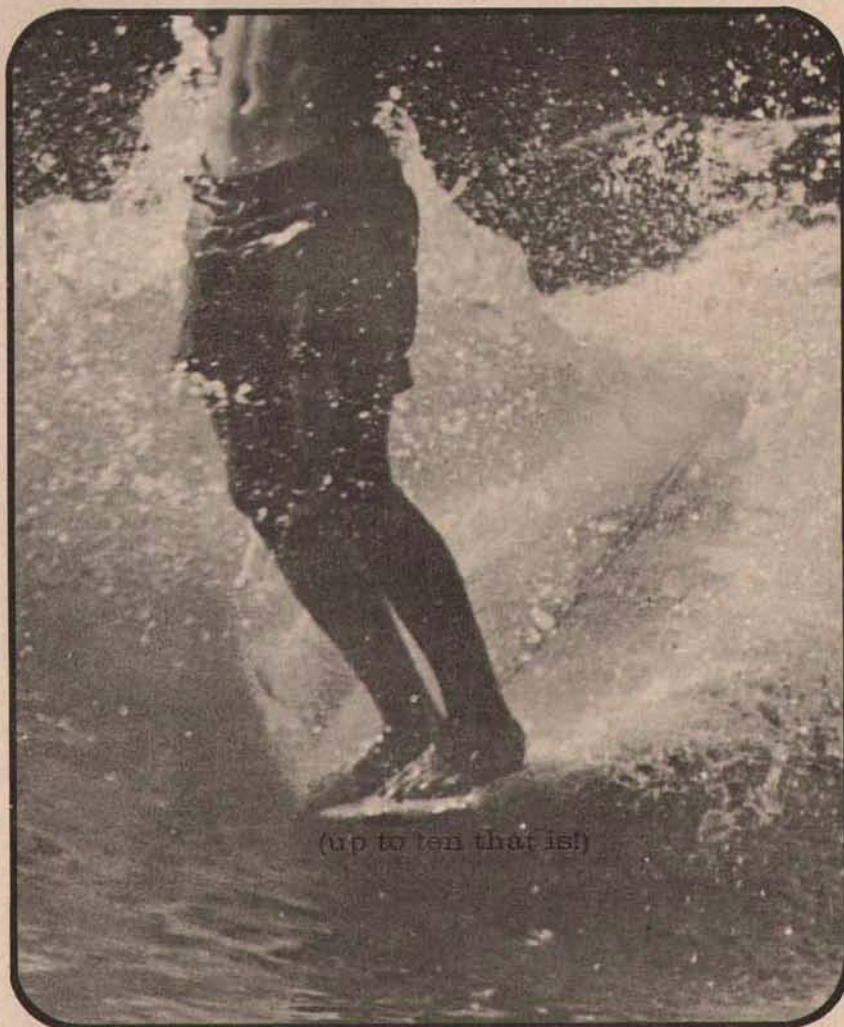
forms all the moves usually only seen on a conventional board. He uses a four foot plywood Paipo board which is three-quarters of an inch thick, glassed, with a single skeg.

Wally Froiseth, former Makaha champion has done much to refine and modernize the Paipo. A few years ago Wally designed and built a fibreglass-balsa Paipo board with redwood stringers. The board has nearly parallel rails and twin skegs located near the back rails. Around the nose of the deck is a raised handrail. Wally also prefers the standing method of riding and likes larger waves. He has had some out-

standing rides at Makaha in good sized surf, and he was the first to ride big waves standing on the Paipo.

Lately, there have been two innovations in the Paipos. One is a skegless, delta-shaped board developed by John Waidelich, which seems to be much faster than the regular Paipo. John has even ridden big Waimea on it. A commercial version exists, known as the "Paipo Nui". Waidelich and some of the other riders have been experimenting with a hydrofoil board which lifts the rider entirely free of the water. But how far can they go with a board that is already some three hundred years old? ➤

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