

Ben Wilson attacking another monster Photo by Benwilsonsurf.com



WORDS Mark Gee

STRAPLESS WAVERIDING

With more people kiting with surfboards and surfers crossing over into the sport, strapless kitesurfing is gaining popularity amongst the ranks. There are definitely benefits from riding strapless, but there are also challenges. The following tips will hopefully get you up & riding strapless at your local in no time.



Photo by Mark Gee



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Mark Gee cutting it up at Lyall Bay, Wellington. Photo by Willie Davenport

STRAPLESS
WAVERIDING



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Choosing the right board to ride strapless

There isn't really a right or wrong board to start riding strapless. Of course a surfboard or directional shaped board is the board to go for, but it can be anything from a regular polyester surfboard, to a production kite surfboard that you can also ride strapped. It's much easier to ride strapless on a board with a bit of volume in it, so make sure you get one that suits your height & weight. Personally I go for boards a couple of inches higher than me, and I also go for a bit more thickness and width in them, as I'm a heavier guy.

When starting out, you are more likely to knock your board around a bit, so I would either go for one of the stronger epoxy production kite surfboards, or if you don't want to spend too much, so don't hesitate to go second

hand. That way if you thrash it, at least it's only a cheap board & you can upgrade once you do get the hang of riding strapless.

Riding strapless in different conditions

There is really no limit to the conditions that you can ride strapless in. You are only limited by your skill. When starting out I would suggest either trying it in flat water or on a small surf day in light to average wind. As you progress you will find yourself getting out in the more challenging conditions.

Getting up & riding

There is a couple of ways you can get up and riding strapless. Probably the best way when starting out is

sitting down in the shallows with your board in front of you. Place your feet evenly balanced on the board. Fly your kite at 12 o'clock or just past, and then fly it back down in the direction you want to go. As you feel the pressure of the kite, let it pull you up onto your board and head down wind slightly until you get up and going. Sounds simple doesn't it? Well it is. Although it might take you a few goes to get used to the timing and getting up on the board, once you get it, you'll be up and riding in no time.

Heading out over the waves

This is best practiced in small surf conditions first, but the trick in getting out over the waves riding strapless is all about controlling your speed & keeping your center of balance low to the board.

As you approach the wave, you will need to slow your

board speed down. Slow enough so that you don't just fly over the top of the whitewash and fall off on the other side. You also need to keep enough power in the kite to get you over the wave and keep moving forward on the other side. Kite position is important, as you don't want it to lift you off your board, so try & keep it at 45 degrees. You will also need to lift the nose of your board over the white wash so that you pop over the top of it. Whilst doing this make sure you keep your center of balance low to the board, so you don't just fly off when going over. Going over unbroken waves is similar but make sure you head down wind a little, so you simply don't drop down and fall off once you get over the peak of the unbroken wave.

Catching a wave

Now this is obviously the fun part and where strapless kitesurfing definitely has its advantages. You are not limited to your foot placement and you can trim your board and move your feet around, depending on what you are doing on the wave at the time. Basically you have the freedom to move on your board. You can cruise along the face or move your feet back a bit and throw that board around.

Choose smaller waves to start with, but try and ride across the face. You can either catch the wave on the way out by basically heading down wind a bit and whipping yourself onto the face of the wave, or you can catch the wave from out the back using the kite to pull you onto it.

When whipping onto the wave, as you head out pick the wave you want to catch. You will need to get your timing right with this technique and not pull yourself onto the wave too late. Head slightly downwind and pick up speed. As you line the wave up, turn towards it to get yourself positioned on the face. Its best to keep your kite low and heading in the direction the wave is. Once on the wave you can either park your kite and ride, or keep the kite moving as you ride it down the line.

When catching a wave from out the back, pick your wave as it starts to form. Use your kite to pull you onto the moving swell. Keep your speed up and position yourself on the wave as the face starts to get steeper. Keep the kite low and heading in the direction of the wave. Once you feel the power of the wave taking over from the power of the kite, you can either park your kite and ride or keep the kite moving as you ride it down the line.

Strapless riding may look hard, but it's actually easier than it looks. Once you get out there a few times, you'll probably find yourself progressing pretty quickly. It's all about getting out there and having a go. I hope you find this info helpful in getting you up and riding - see you amongst the waves!

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