THE BODYSURF METHOD

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THE BODYSURF METHOD PHILOSOPHY

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00.1 / MINIMALIST WAVE RIDING

For too long, my connection to the ocean was filtered through a piece of foam. I started my journey exactly like everyone else. I was the guy you see at most surf breaks, standing on the sand, clutching a bodyboard while scanning the horizon. Like so many others, I started by simply copying what I saw and therefore thought I only had two options, stand on a surfboard or go prone on a bodyboard. I was following the pack, mimicking the same movements and maneuvers and was measuring my success by the same standards as everyone else in the lineup.

For a while, it was fun and sufficient. I was content to be a part of the emerged part of the iceberg that is wave riding. Like most, I was captivated by what was visible above the surface: the aesthetics, the gear, the radical performance, and the cultural image of the surfer. It’s a beautiful view, but it’s a limited one. When you are on a board, you are skimming across the top of the ocean's energy, disconnected from the true mass of what is happening beneath you. You are essentially playing on the tip of the iceberg, unaware of the vast, silent power that supports it.

It wasn't until I stripped away the foam that I realized I had been missing the most profound part of the experience.

Below the surface lies the real body of the wave: the hydrodynamics and the raw, unmediated pulse of the ocean. To bodysurf is to dive deep into the submerged 90% of that iceberg. It is to stop being a passenger on the surface and to start moving through the engine room of the ocean itself.

For the professional with limited time, this shift in perspective is everything. We aren't just looking for a ride, we are looking for a total immersion that resets the nervous system. We are looking to go deeper than the superficial ego theater of the surface and tap into the quiet, heavy power that lies beneath.

The day that changed everything began on a crisp morning. I was feeling the weight of the crowded lineup which often defines a surf session. Everywhere I looked, there was a frantic battle for peak performance. Men my age and younger, fighting to stay on top of their boards, wrestling with the surface, and struggling against the very element they came to enjoy. It was loud, it was crowded, and it felt like work.

Amidst that chaos, I saw something that stopped my internal monologue cold.

A man, roughly my age, with nothing but a pair of fins and a handplane, slid into a heavy, breaking wave.

There was no clunky equipment to manage and no frantic pop up to stick. He didn't just ride the wave but he merged with it. He rode the high line with a silent grace that made the rest of us look like we were fighting the ocean.

He looked weightless. He looked free.

There was an incredible, understated confidence in the way he moved — a minimalist mastery that stood out because it didn't need to shout.

At that moment, the gear I was clutching felt like an anchor. I realized I didn't want the ego of the board or the performance driven noise of the lineup. I wanted to strip everything away and find my own reset in the waves.

00.2 / AN INVITATION TO THE FLOW

Whether you are a seasoned surfer feeling that physical grind, or someone who has never once set foot in the ocean, this is your invitation.

If you are new to the ocean, you might look at the surf and see a chaotic, intimidating arena reserved for those with a car full of gear and a lifetime of experience. I am here to tell you that the opposite is true.

By stripping away the equipment, we strip away the barrier to entry. We aren't here to shred for an audience. We are here for a private, technical discipline, a one-to-one conversation between ourselves and the pulse of the ocean.

This is the ultimate non ego narrative.

For the veteran, it’s a way to reclaim the joy. For the newcomer, it’s a way to enter the water with confidence, knowing you aren't playing a game of social performance, but practicing a deep, internal craft.

00.3 / RESPECTING YOUR TIME

I know exactly who you are because I see the same reflection in the mirror.

You are a professional. You have high stakes responsibilities, a family that counts on you, and a calendar that rarely has empty blocks. You don’t have the luxury of obsessing for four hours a day like a teenager. You also can’t afford to waste months on a trial and error journey that leads to high impact injuries or wasted sessions.

Because I had the rare chance to go deep and do the work, investing 100% of my time and energy into mastering the mechanics of the ocean, I realized my real mission wasn't just to master it for myself. It was to build a bridge for others.

Bodysurfing is probably the oldest water sport there is, but it is lagging behind in terms of visibility and therefore resources to learn the practice.

I’ve navigated the gear traps, the agonizing foot cramps from the wrong fins, and the hard way beatings so that you don't have to.

I have built The Bodysurf Method as a technical roadmap that respects your body and maximizes every minute you get in the water.

00.4 / THE FRAMEWORK

To respect your time, I have structured The Bodysurf Method to be an efficient, peer-to-peer guide. Every chapter moving forward follows a logical, high level hierarchy:

- Phase 01: Ocean Literacy.
- Phase 02: Preparing The Entry.
- Phase 03: The Entry.
- Phase 04: The Interception & The Ride.
- Phase 05: Technical Maneuvers.
- Phase 06: The Gear Lab.
- Phase 07: Conclusion

At the start of each phase, you will find a one page overview of its content.

Ultimately, the Bodysurf Method is more than a technical manual, it is a philosophy of subtraction. It is the realization that in a world of constant noise and “more”, there is a profound, untapped power in choosing “less”.

By removing the foam, the fiber glass, and the ego, you aren't just changing how you ride a wave, you are changing how you engage with the world. You are trading the frantic mechanics of “staying on top” for the effortless efficiency of moving with the energy.

The technical path is clear and it is time to move beyond the surface and engage with the hydrodynamic reality of the wave. The roadmap is ready, and the ocean’s energy is waiting to be intercepted, not fought. Let’s stop skimming the top and start mastering the physics of the flow.

We have shared the vision. Now, it’s time to sharpen our focus. In the next chapter, we move from the philosophy of the reset to start understanding how our playground works. Before we touch the ocean, we must first learn to read it by translating the raw energy into a clear, navigable map.

We will begin by building our Ocean Literacy in Phase 1.

01 /
OCEAN LITERACY

01.1 / Wave Physics

01.2 / Friction Zones

01.3 / Wave Anatomy

01.4 / Wave Frequency & Period

01.5 / Fluid Dynamics

01.6 / Wind Dynamics

To the uninitiated, the ocean can sometimes look like a chaotic wall of white water and unpredictable noise. To the Waterman, however, the surf zone is a sophisticated map of energy, topography, and fluid dynamics. Before we ever discuss entering the water and the mechanics of the ride, we must first learn to speak the language of the medium we will operate in.

Ocean Literacy is the ultimate shortcut. By understanding the “why” behind the wave, you stop fighting the ocean and start collaborating with it. For the newcomer, this knowledge is the antidote to fear and for the veteran, it is the secret to extreme efficiency.

Mastering this chapter means you will no longer waste oxygen chasing waves that don't exist or paddling against currents that want to help you.

01.1 / WAVE PHYSICS

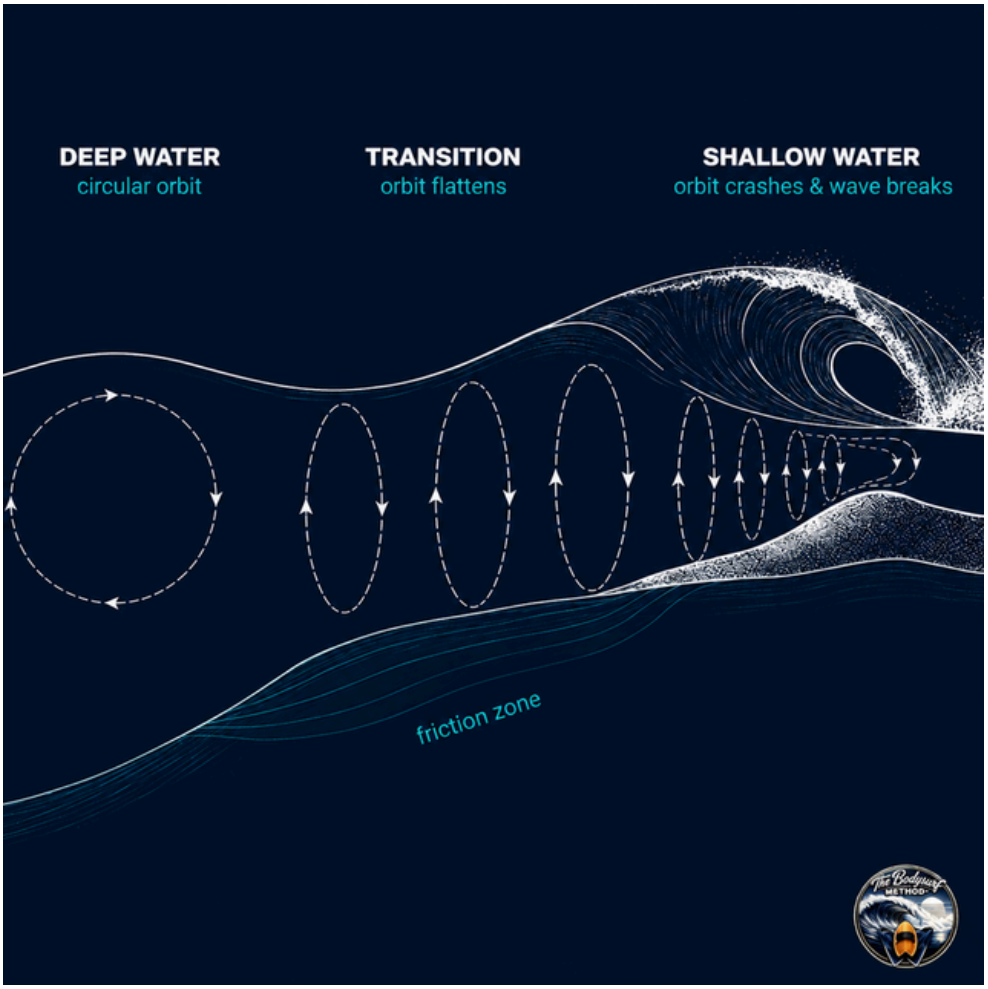
To the casual observer, a wave is a wall of water traveling from the horizon to the shore. However, to the Waterman, this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the medium. Waves are not masses of water in transit, they are orbital energy transfers.

When a swell moves through the deep ocean, the water itself stays largely in place. If you were to track a single molecule of H2O as a wave passes, you would see it move as a circle within deep waters and transform into a vertical ellipse, an elongated circle, the closer it gets to shore. The water rises and falls, moving forward slightly before circling back to its original position. This is the result of the energy pulse that is traveling at high speed across the surface, using water as its conductor.

Understanding this orbital nature is the first step in achieving efficiency. We don't chase waves because we aren't trying to catch a moving object. We are positioning our bodies to be intercepted by a pulse of kinetic energy.

The transition from a silent swell to a rideable wave occurs the moment this energy encounters the seafloor. As the pulse enters shallower water, the vertical orbit has no room to complete its circle. The bottom of the orbit hits the sand or reef, and friction begins to drag against the energy. While the bottom of the wave slows down, the top maintains its momentum, causing the wave to “trip” over itself, peak, and eventually it will pitch forward.

The figure below illustrates how orbital energy transfers within the water column ultimately end up creating the waves we ride



- Water particles move in a vertical ellipse as the energy wave passes through. They do move forward slightly with each wave, but the massive amount of energy is traveling through the water, not carrying the water itself across the ocean.

- The transition to shallow water: as the pulse approaches the shore and the water gets shallower, that vertical orbit has no room to complete. The bottom of the orbit hits the seafloor, friction slows the bottom of the wave down, and the top of the wave continues forward, causing the wave to peak and eventually break.

01.2 / FRICTION ZONES

Understanding the friction zone is what allows us to predict where the peak of a wave will be. A wave only breaks when its orbital energy pulse trips over a rising obstruction. By categorizing the different types of seafloors and man made structures, we can accurately map the exact spot where the energy is forced to rise and pitch.

NATURAL FRICTION ZONES

The foundation of any wave is the permanent or shifting structure of the seafloor, which generally falls into three natural categories:

- Sandbars (beach breaks): These are dynamic, shifting friction zones. Because sand moves with the tides and storm surges, the depth and shape of the bar change daily. This requires a tactical scan to find where the energy is currently tripping and where the channels have opened.

- Reefs and rock ledges (reef breaks): These are fixed, submerged structures. Unlike sand, a reef provides a permanent friction zone, meaning the peak will occur in the exact same coordinates every time. While predictable, these zones offer no margin for error.

- Headlands and points (point breaks): Here, the friction zone is the side of a landmass or point. As the energy pulse wraps around the land, it trips laterally, creating an exceptionally long shoulder and a consistent, high speed wall for us to bodysurf on.

MAN MADE FRICTION ZONES

In many urban or developed coastal environments, man made structures can also serve as friction zones:

- Piers and pilings: The vertical poles of a pier create localized drag. As the swell passes through, the friction of the pilings forces the wave to jack up into a steep, predictable peak

- Jetties and rock groins: These elongated concrete structures act as immovable friction zones. They not only trip the wave but often reflect energy back into the incoming swell. This reflection creates a wedge, a high torque, localized power pocket where two energy pulses combine into one.

- Breakwaters and sea walls: These massive structures refract the energy. A breakwater can turn a chaotic, disorganized swell into a clean, peeling shoulder by forcing the pulse to wrap around its tip.

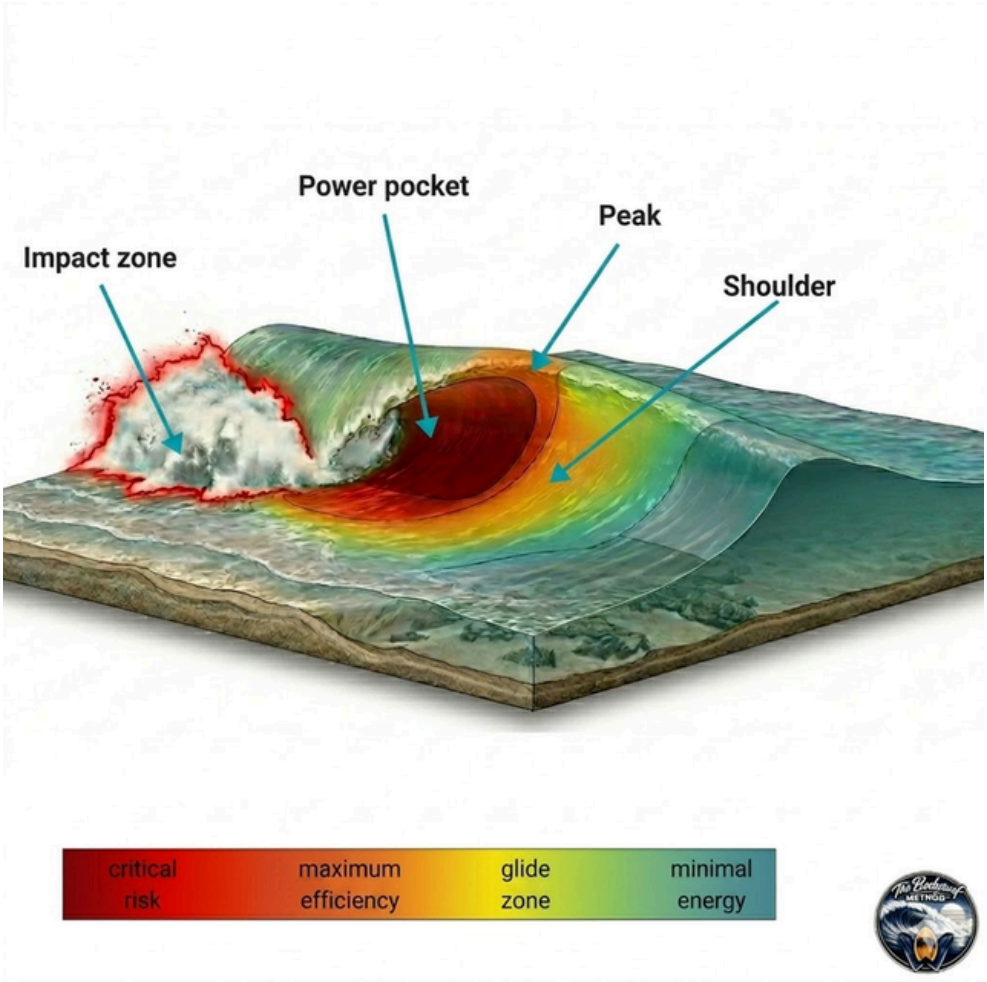
Whether the obstruction is a natural sandbank or a concrete pier, the physics remains the same. In a channel, a gap in the friction zone, the energy pulse has plenty of depth to pass underneath and the water particles complete their elliptical orbits without resistance, leaving the surface unbroken. It is a deeper water sanctuary where orbital energy passes through undisturbed. On a sandbar, reef, or jetty, the pulse hits the friction zone, the seafloor forces the bottom of the wave to slow down, the face steepens, and the peak is formed.

As practitioners of The Bodysurf Method, we recognize that we aren't just looking for a wave, we are identifying the exact coordinates where topography and energy collide to force a rise.

01.3 / WAVE ANATOMY

Once the energy pulse hits the friction zone, the wave develops a distinct physical structure. As practitioners of The Bodysurf Method, we view this anatomy not as a chaotic wall of water, but as a dynamic map of pressure and velocity.

By better understanding the anatomy of a wave, we can identify the engine room where the most power is hidden, the runway where our horizontal glide takes place, and the red flags that signal a high consequence collision. We are no longer guessing where to swim but we are identifying the exact physical features that will dictate the trajectory of our ride.



THE POWER POCKET

This is the vertex. It's the steepest part of the green water right next to the breaking whitewater. This is where the energy pulse is most concentrated. In The Bodysurf Method, this is our engine room, we stay here to maintain speed.

THE PEAK

The peak is the zero point of a breaking wave. It is the highest and steepest part of the swell just before it breaks. It marks the exact location where the energy pulse first encounters the shallowest section of the friction zone. Because the water depth decreases most dramatically at this point, the vertical orbits of the water particles are forced upward with the greatest intensity. This creates the maximum vertical height and the steepest drop available. The peak is our starting block. We position ourselves here to intercept the energy pulse at its point of maximum potential energy.

THE SHOULDER

The shoulder is the open face of the wave where energy peels laterally along the friction zone. If the peak is our starting block, the shoulder is your riding track, representing a precise physical balance where the seafloor is just deep enough to allow the energy pulse to maintain its height and steepness without the top outrunning the bottom. In this transition zone, the energy remains stable because the friction from the seafloor is perfectly balanced; it slows the pulse enough to create a rideable wall, but not enough to force a total collapse.

THE LIP

The lip is the very top edge of the wave, the crest, that has been pushed upward by the energy pulse and is now pitching forward toward the shore. It is the most volatile part of the wave's anatomy. The lip is formed when the top of the wave outruns the bottom. As the energy pulse hits the shallow friction zone, the bottom is forced to slow down due to friction. However, the water at the top has no friction holding it back, so it continues forward at high speed, creating the characteristic lip.

The lip contains a massive amount of concentrated energy. When the friction zone is shallow and sudden, the lip throws out into the air, creating the hollow space known as the barrel.

THE IMPACT ZONE

The impact zone is the exact location where the lip, traveling at high speed, collides with the lower part of the wave face or the shallow friction zone. This is where the kinetic energy of the energy pulse is converted into a violent, downward, and forward moving hammer blow. That energy has nowhere to go but down and out, causing a massive explosion of water, foam, and force. It is best to avoid the impact zone.

THE WHITEWATER

The turbulent, aerated water left over after the wave breaks. While less perfect than green water, it still carries significant forward momentum that can be used to slingshot back to shore. The whitewater is also the ideal place for complete newcomers to practice bodysurfing straight towards the shore.

Understanding the anatomy of a wave is about recognizing how the energy pulse interacts with the friction zone to create the conditions for a ride. This anatomy is not static, it is a dynamic system driven by the physics of water displacement.

As a set wave approaches, it initiates hydrodynamic suction, often called the inhale, which draws water away from the shore and out through the channels to build the wave's height.

Also we must remember that if the friction zone is shaped improperly, the result is close out physics, where the entire wave collapses at once, offering no peak or shoulder to ride.

Ultimately, once the energy breaks, it transforms into turbulence and displacement: the whitewater. Because this foam is aerated and less dense than the green water of the shoulder, it provides less buoyancy and control.

WATERMAN NOTE

NAVIGATING THE SHOULDER

Navigating the shoulder requires a keen understanding of its boundaries and the physics of the fade. If you stay too close to the peak, you risk being caught in the impact zone when the lip eventually pitches. On the other hand, if you move too far out onto the shoulder, the water becomes too deep, the friction zone disappears, and you lose your glide as the wave face flattens into the channel. However, when the friction zone remains uniform for a long distance, it keeps the pulse steep and continuous, forming what we call a wall. This long, steep face is the ultimate objective, as it allows for maximum horizontal velocity and a significantly longer, more controlled ride.

WAVE TYPES

Waves come in many different shapes and types and you might have already heard some of the jargon. Here is a definite guide to the lingo:

- A-frame: A perfect wave where the seafloor is shaped like a wedge. The energy pulse peaks in the center and peels in two opposite directions (left and right) simultaneously. This offers two separate runways from a single starting block.

- Barrel (the tube): When the friction zone is extremely shallow and rises abruptly, the lip is thrown so far forward that it creates a hollow chamber of air where the pocket becomes a hollow chamber of air.

- Shorebreak: A high intensity wave that trips on a very steep beach slope. Because there is no gradual transition, the impact zone is the dry sand itself. Some advanced bodysurfers love shorebreaks as they may offer extremely steep and quick faces to ride.

- Close out: This occurs when the friction zone is a flat, straight line parallel to the incoming pulse. Instead of peeling, the entire wall collapses at once. There is no shoulder to ride, making these a dead end for the practitioner.

- Wedge: Created when an incoming wave reflects off a man-made structure (like a jetty) or a rock and meets another incoming wave. The two energy pulses combine into one, increasing the height of the wave and creating a localized, explosive power pocket.

01.4 / WAVE FREQUENCY & PERIOD

To complete the physical profile of the ocean's energy, we must look beyond the individual wave and understand the macro physics of wave frequency and period, as this determines the total volume of the energy pulse before it ever reaches the friction zone. In The Bodysurf Method, we define the period as the specific interval of time, measured in seconds, between the passing of two successive wave crests.

A long period swell of typically 14 seconds or higher. It originates from distant storms and travels as a deep water kinetic force. Because these energy pulses have more space between them, they extend much deeper into the water column. When the massive wall of energy finally hits the friction zone, it creates a significantly more powerful hydrodynamic suction, pulling a large volume of water off the beach to build a tall, thick wave and more stable power pocket.

In contrast, a short period swell of 6 to 9 seconds is the result of local wind events rather than distant, organized storms. Because these energy pulses are crowded closely together, their kinetic force is surface heavy and does not extend deep into the water column. When a short period pulse hits the friction zone, it lacks the mass required to trigger significant hydrodynamic suction. As a result, these waves tend to lack the vertical thrust and thickness of a long period wave, often crumbling rather than projecting a clean, high velocity lip.

The period is the heartbeat of the ocean, and mastering its rhythm is essential for us as practitioners of The Bodysurf Method. Long period pulses typically arrive in organized clusters of three to five waves followed by a distinct lull, a period of calm that will later serve as our green light for entry. We will use this physics to time our swim through the channel, ensuring we aren't caught in the impact zone when the heaviest pulses of the set arrive. Conversely, short period swells create a chaotic ocean surface with almost no lulls, making the journey to the back far more taxing on our energy reserves.

For the ride itself, a short period swell offers a much smaller window for interception at the peak and a less reliable shoulder for maintaining a high speed line. Ultimately, while a long period pulse provides the deep water mass for a powerful, stable power pocket, the short period pulse requires faster reflexes and more aggressive positioning to overcome its lack of hydraulic thrust.

01.5 / FLUID DYNAMICS

To achieve an exhaustive view of flow physics, we must move beyond the wave's structure and timing in order to get a grasp of fluid dynamics and how it impacts our ability to ride.

This is the transition from being a displacement object that moves through the water to a bodysurfer that flies across it.

By manipulating our body's interaction with the medium, we can harness three distinct physical forces to maintain a high speed line:

- Buoyancy and density: In the friction zone, we must seek out green water for maximum efficiency. Because whitewater is aerated and full of bubbles, it is significantly less dense than solid green water, causing our fins and body to lose grip and sink. High density green water provides the necessary upward buoyant force, as defined by Archimedes' displacement principle, to support our weight and allow our body to act as a high-speed hull rather than sinking into the foam.

- Hydroplaning and surface tension: As we accelerate down the peak, the water pressure underneath our chest and palm creates lift. By maintaining a rigid, streamlined shape, we break the surface tension and begin to hydroplane. This shift from a displacement hull to a planing hull is what allows a waterman to skate on top of the water’s surface, significantly reducing drag and converting the energy pulse into horizontal velocity.

- The Bernoulli effect and suction: We stay attached to a steep wall through a pressure differential. As water moves rapidly up the face of a wave, it creates a lower pressure zone. By engaging our rail, the side of our torso and hip, we create a suction effect that holds us into the steep face. Our leading arm acts like a flap on an airplane wing, directing the flow to steer us higher into the pocket or lower toward the shoulder.

01.6 / WIND DYNAMICS

And finally, the wind.

While the friction zone shapes the wave from below, the wind shapes it from above. The relationship between the wind direction and the wave's path determines the texture of our ride.

- Offshore wind: This is wind blowing from the land out toward the sea. It acts as a structural support for the wave. As the energy pulse trips on the seafloor, the offshore wind pushes against the top of the wave, delaying the lip from pitching forward. This creates a steeper, more stable wall and a cleaner power pocket. For the bodysurfer, this wind grooms the surface, removing bumps and allowing for maximum hydroplaning efficiency.

- Onshore wind: This is wind blowing from the sea toward the land. It pushes against the back of the wave, forcing the lip to collapse prematurely. This creates crumbling waves with high levels of turbulence and displacement. Onshore winds turn the shoulder into a bumpy, disorganized surface where it is difficult to maintain a clean line.

- Cross shore wind: Wind blowing parallel to the beach. This creates chop or small texturized ridges moving across the wave face. It makes the Bernoulli effect harder to maintain because our rail is constantly hitting air pockets instead of high density green water.

The most critical takeaway probably is how wind affects surface tension. An offshore wind creates a smooth as glass surface that allows our body to transition into a planing hull with much less effort. Conversely, onshore chop introduces air into the water's surface, lowering the density and forcing us to swim harder just to stay on the face.

In conclusion, the mechanics of the ocean are not a collection of isolated events, but a singular, interconnected system of energy and resistance.

For the practitioner of The Bodysurf Method, mastering the physics of the flow means moving beyond the role of a passive observer and becoming a precision pilot of fluid dynamics. By understanding that a wave is an orbital energy pulse rather than traveling water, we stop chasing the ocean and start positioning ourselves for interception at the peak. We now recognize that the friction zone is the architect of the wave's anatomy, dictating where the peak will be located and where the impact zone will strike.

Whether we are scanning a shifting beach break or a predictable reef, our tactical advantage lies in reading the invisible forces at play:

- We use the wave period to time the heartbeat of the sets, ensuring our entry occurs during the lull.

- We utilize hydrodynamic suction to pull ourselves into the vertex of the wave.

- We leverage fluid dynamics and Archimedes' principle of buoyancy as well as the lift of hydroplaning, and the Bernoulli effect to transform our body from a sinking displacement object into a high speed planing hull.

Finally, by accounting for the wind dynamics that groom or crush the face, we can select the cleanest track for our ride.

In the end, Ocean Literacy is the critical foundation that turns the raw, chaotic power of the sea into a manageable, repeatable, and exhilarating sequence of events. By shifting our focus from the water's surface to the underlying physics of orbital energy and friction zones, we build better understanding of our medium, and therefore confidence. This literacy allows us to read the ocean's blueprint by identifying the inhale before a peak rises, using channels as strategic pathways, and predicting the impact zone before the lip ever pitches.

We are now navigating a structured system with absolute intent. With these mechanics mastered, we are ready to start prepping for our entry in Phase 2.

02 / PREPARING THE ENTRY

02.1 / The Scan

02.2 / Reading The Submerged 90%

02.3 / Decoding Swell Forecasts

02.4 / The 10 Minute Warm Up

02.5 / Breathwork

02.6 / The Waterman Kit

02.7 / The Waterman Code

02.8 / Physical Readiness Check

Before we enter the water and discuss the mechanics of a ride, we must first do the dry work and establish the waterman's foundation: the ability to sit, observe, and prepare without the interference of ego.

We are about to move beyond the sprint and pray mentality of the average beach goer and adopt a systematic approach to the ocean. We will focus on identifying the silent, powerful systems that actually dictate the ride.

By the end of Phase 2, you will have mastered the art of the ocean audit, and developed the situational awareness needed to turn a chaotic "washing machine" into a predictable, rideable map.

You aren't just going for a swim, you are preparing to bodysurf.

02.1 / THE SCAN

"Observation over ego".

We have all seen the person who pulls into the parking lot, puts on their wetsuit in a hurry and sprints straight into the waves without a second thought. They haven't warmed up, and they haven't spent a single minute watching the sets. They treat the ocean like a treadmill in a downtown gym, something to be switched on and conquered.

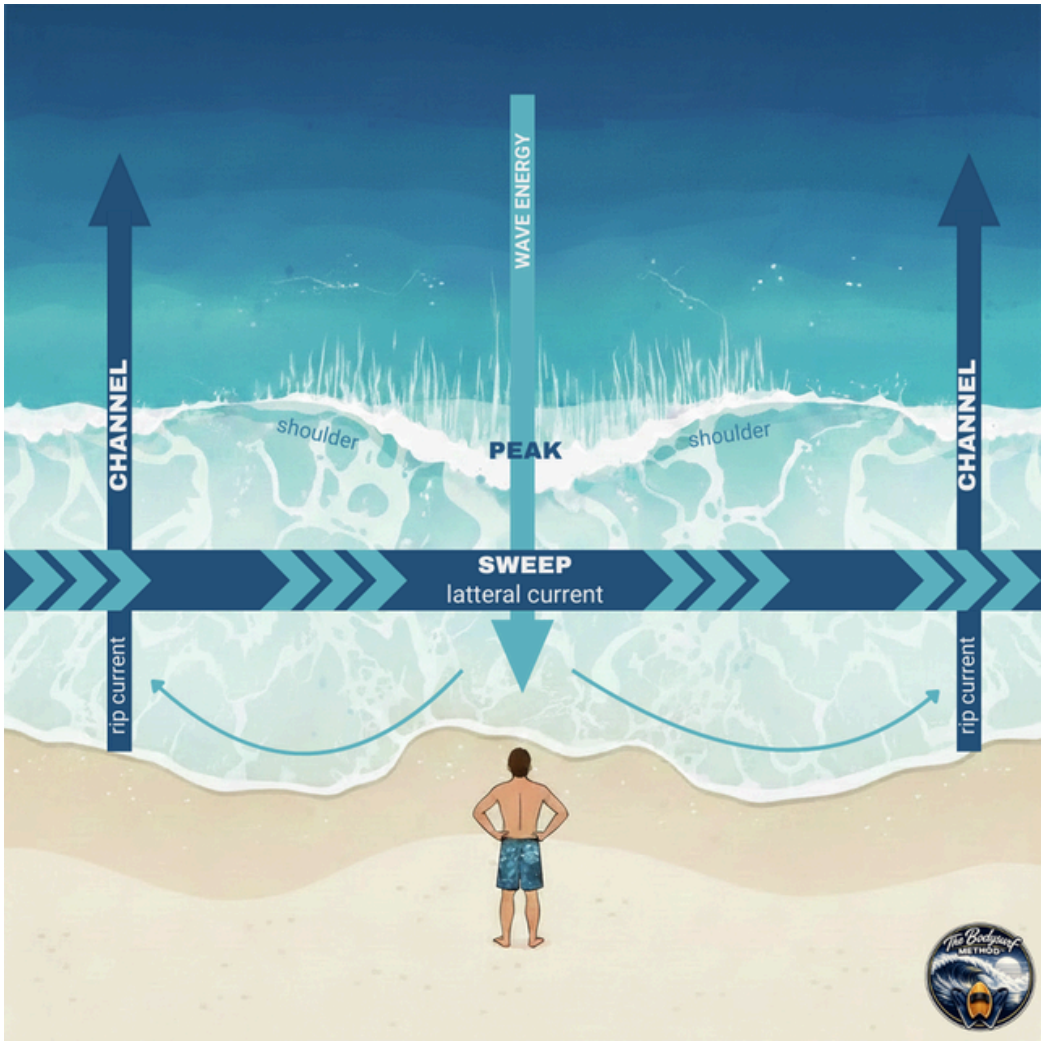
As practitioners of The Bodysurf Method, we recognize that this frantic energy is the opposite of ocean literacy. We don't just show up and go. We start every single of our bodysurf sessions at an elevated vantage point. We use the height of a dune, a cliff, or a boardwalk to gain a perspective that vanishes the moment we are at sea level. We can even use the most elevated part of the beach before the sand slopes towards the water. Some people also tend to use drones nowadays but be careful as drones are not accepted at some spots and the complete top down view can be confusing.

Elevation is the game changer, it makes analyzing a surf break much easier, it gives us a better overall perspective of what is going on and allows us to better select our points of reference. Once we have found our viewpoint, we stay there until the ocean's rhythm becomes a language we can read. We aren't there to chill, we are there to audit.

02.2 / READING THE SUBMERGED 90%

The iceberg mindset is the foundation of our approach. What the person sprinting into the water sees is the emerged 10%: the whitewater, the spray, and the noise. They are reacting to the end of a process.

We train ourselves to scan for the submerged 90%: the massive, silent energy moving beneath the surface. From our elevated position, we look for the following critical data points.



THE SWEEP

This is the conveyor belt of the ocean. It is a lateral current, a body of water moving parallel to the shore, pushing everything sideways. The sweep is created by winds and waves approaching the beach at an angle.

From our elevated viewpoint, we can spot the sweep by watching the foam and debris after a wave breaks. If they drift rapidly down the beach rather than floating in place, you've found the sweep. We identify this so we can use it to carry us into position, rather than waste energy swimming against it.

THE CHANNELS

We look for dark, deeper water where the waves don't break. These are our safe lanes. By identifying these from above, we find the path of least resistance to get to the outside (the calm area beyond where the waves are breaking).

THE RIP CURRENTS

This is the water flowing through the "pipe" of the channel. As waves push water onto the shore, that volume must escape back to sea, it finds the lowest point (the channel) and rushes out.

From our vantage point, we look for mushy, churning, choppy water flowing towards the outside. The rip is not to be feared and can be used as an "elevator" allowing the current to pull us to the outside with minimal physical exertion.

WATERMAN NOTE

Remember that to exit a rip current, one must swim perpendicular to it, and not against it.

THE PEAK

This is our launchpad. It is the highest point of a wave where the energy first begins to break into whitewater. By auditing the peak from an elevated position, we determine if the waves are breaking in a consistent spot or shifting.

Identifying the peak is critical, if we are not positioned exactly here, we miss the power pocket and the ride is over before it starts. It is critical to align a reference point to the peak, something such as a lifeguard tower, a building or specific rock formation that we can then look for once inside the water. This will help us find and align ourselves with the peak once we get swimming.

THE SHOULDER

This is the runway. It is the smooth, green, unbroken face of the wave extending away from the peak. As bodysurfers, we aren't interested in the whitewater, we are hunting for the shoulder. This is where we achieve a horizontal line across the wave. From afar, we scan to see if the shoulder is long and tapering, or if it is shortening too quickly.

THE SET INTERVAL

This is the heartbeat of the ocean. Waves move in groups (sets) followed by periods of calm (lulls). While auditing from the shore, we use a watch to time the gap between these pulses. The set interval dictates our entry, we don't sprint into a wall of sets but we wait for the lull to use our rip elevator safely and efficiently.

THE CLOSE OUT

This is our red flag. A close out occurs when the entire wave face collapses at once like a falling curtain, leaving no shoulder to ride.

From our vantage point, if we see waves breaking in long, parallel lines of whitewater with no green water gaps, the conditions are closing out. These are high risk, low reward waves that may be best avoided to prevent injury.

However, it is worth noting that top level bodysurfers do enjoy close outs for the extreme steepness and speed they provide. It is of the opinion of The Bodysurf Method that close outs should remain the realm of the pros.

THE BOILS

These are the landmines of the surf zone. A boil looks like a swirling, bubbling patch of flat water in the middle of a breaking set. It indicates a submerged rock, a pier piling, or a dangerously shallow sandbar just inches below the surface. We identify boils during the scan to map out our no go zones before we ever enter the water.

THE WIND TEXTURE

This is our quality control. We look at the spray coming off the top of the waves. If the wind blows the spray back out to sea (offshore), it combs the wave face smooth and may create a barrel. If it blows toward the shore (onshore), it creates chop and turbulence. We audit the wind to know how much stability and grip we will have on the wave face.

The ocean audit is not a suggestion, it is a requirement. It is the phase where we replace desperate guesswork with calculated intent.

For the advanced practitioner: This is about efficiency. We operate with a finite reservoir of breath and muscular energy. A Waterman knows that fighting a heavy sweep is a rookie mistake that can be bypassed with a thirty second walk up the beach. We aren't just looking for waves, we are hunting for the highest return on our physical investment.

For the newcomer: This is about clarity. To the uninitiated, the ocean feels like a washing machine: chaotic, violent, and random. That fear only exists when you don't understand the plumbing. By mapping out the entry points and the impact zones (the specific area where waves exert their maximum hydraulic force) from the safety of the shore, we strip away the fear of the unknown.

The objective of The Bodysurf Method is to help develop a level of ocean literacy where a break is as legible as a topographic map. We aim to reach a state where, by the time the salt touches our skin, the session has already been won. We know exactly where the power is hidden, where the safe lanes are open, and how the water is moving.

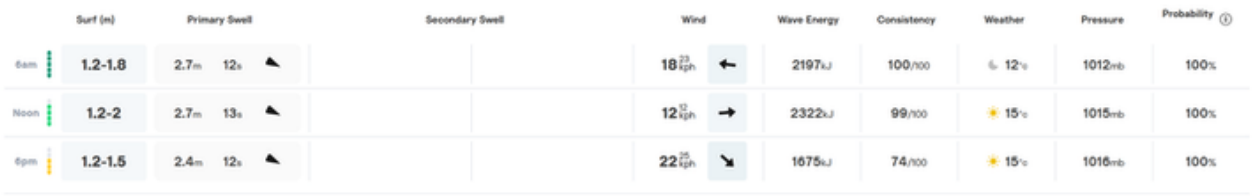
THE WATERMAN SAFETY CHECK

Indicator	What it looks like	The strategic purpose
1. The sweep	Foam or debris drifting sideways (parallel to shore).	Your conveyor belt. Enter up current so the sweep drifts you onto the peak.
2. The channels	Darker, deeper gaps where waves aren't breaking.	Your safe lanes. The path of least resistance to get out the back.
3. The rip	Rippled, choppy water or sediment rushing out to sea.	Your elevator. Use the current flowing through the channel to save energy.
4. The peak	The highest point of a wave where the wave first breaks.	Your launchpad. This is the exact spot you need to be to catch the wave.
5. The shoulder	The smooth, green, unbroken slope next to the whitewater.	Your runway. This is where the actual wave riding happens.
6. The set interval	The timed pulse between groups of larger waves.	Your clock. Time your entry during a lull to minimise energy expenditure.
7. The close out	A wave breaking all at once like a falling curtain.	Your red flag. Avoid these as they offer no line to ride and increase injury risk.
8. Boils	Bubbling, swirling flat spots in the middle of the surf.	Your landmines. Signals shallow rocks or sandbars just below the surface.
9. Wind texture	Spray blowing back (offshore) or crumbly mess (onshore).	Your quality control. Tells you if the wave face will be smooth or chaotic.

02.3 / DECODING SWELL FORECASTS

Most of us these days complement our real life scans by using digital swell prevision tools to get a better understanding of the conditions for the day before we ever get to the break.

By utilizing data from platforms like Surfline.com, we can decode the invisible forces of the ocean, ensuring we are not wasting energy and time on a guess. We will start by decoding a standard Surfline.com forecast, reading it from left to right to build a complete pre-flight picture of the session.



- Surf: This is the potential ride height. Moving left to right, the first block indicates the predicted face height of the waves. In the screenshot, the 1.2-1.8m range at 6am suggests head high to overhead conditions (from the point of view of a stand up surfer on his board, please note waves can seem much higher from within the water for us bodysurfers who are at sea level). This is your first indicator of the physical scale of the swell you will need to navigate during your entry.

- Primary swell: This is the energy pulse, It is the most critical data set for understanding wave power. It is broken into three parts:
  - Height (e.g., 2.7m): The open-ocean size of the pulse which indicates the potential height of the coming waves.
  - Period (e.g., 12s/13s): As we learned in the physics section, these double digit numbers indicate a long period swell. This confirms that the wave will have deep water mass, a significant inhale, and a stable power pocket.
  - Direction (the arrow): This arrow shows where the energy is coming from. If the arrow is angled (like the west/northwest tilt shown), the pulse will hit the friction zone at an angle, creating the lateral peel and the long shoulders we hunt for.

- Secondary swell: This is the hidden rhythm. Even if not present in our example, this data point tracks an independent energy pulse originating from a separate origin, often arriving from a different direction than the primary swell. For the practitioner, a long period secondary swell can act as a quality filter, occasionally overriding a messy primary windswell to produce organized A-frames or wedges. However, if the secondary direction is too varied, it can create crossed seas that make the channel chaotic and harder to navigate.

- Wind: The wind column on a forecast determines the physical texture of the wave face by measuring the speed and direction of air movement relative to the shoreline. As a bodysurfer, you are scanning for the green light window where the wind provides structural support to the energy pulse rather than collapsing it.

- Wave energy: The punch factor, this number quantifies the raw power of the swell. It combines height and period into a single value of kinetic energy. A higher kJ rating means a more explosive peak, be prepared for a high intensity drop and a strong Bernoulli effect suction on the wave face.

- Consistency: The wait time rated out of 100, this tells you how often the sets will arrive. A 99/100 consistency indicates a very busy ocean with constant energy pulses. This informs your entry protocol: you will have fewer clear lulls, so timing your swim through the channel will require absolute precision.

02.4 / THE 10 MINUTE WARM UP

To ensure athletic longevity and peak performance, the pre session warm up is a non-negotiable mandate. It is our absolute insurance policy against injury, specifically the shoulder and lower back strains common in water sports and it must never, ever be skipped.

To maximize efficiency, perform this 10 minute routine while executing your ocean audit. By syncing your physical mobility with your tactical scan, you prime your joints for the entry while simultaneously mapping the peak.

At The Bodysurf Method, we are staunch advocates of yoga as the ultimate tool for waterman longevity. We have engineered a sequence that is stripped of fluff and focused entirely on the kinetic requirements of wave riding.

This simple yet comprehensive neck-to-ankle flow prepares your body for the physical demands of the ocean, ensuring your joints are lubricated, your breath is calm, and your muscles are elastic before you make your first drop.

Body part	Asana	Execution
Neck	*Cervical rotations*	Stand tall with shoulders relaxed. Drop your chin toward your chest. On a deep, slow inhale, begin a 360° rotation by rolling your right ear toward your right shoulder. Continue the movement very slowly until your eyesight is directed toward the sky at the top of the arc. As you begin the descent on the left side, initiate a slow exhale. Perform 5 deliberate circles clockwise, then reverse for 5 circles counter clockwise. Maintain a slow pace to ensure the cervical spine is fully lubricated.
Shoulders	*Eagle arms (Garudasana)*	Extend arms forward. Cross your right arm under the left, bending at the elbows. Wrap your forearms so your palms (or back of hands) touch. Lift elbows to shoulder height and push your hands away from your face. Breathe into the space between your shoulder blades to open the recovery arc of your stroke. Switch sides.
Torso & sides	*Standing side bend (Parsva Tadasana)*	Interlace fingers and reach your arms overhead with palms facing the sky. Root your feet into the ground. As you inhale, grow tall. As you exhale, lean your torso to the right, pushing your left hip out slightly. This opens the intercostal muscles and lats, crucial for maximizing lung expansion and engaging your rail. Switch sides.
Spine & core	*All-fours cat-cow (Marjaryasana Bitilasana)*	Come to your hands and knees on the sand. Cow: Inhale, drop your belly toward the ground, lift your sit-bones, and look toward the horizon. Cat: Exhale, press your palms into the sand, round your spine toward the sky, and tuck your chin to your chest. Repeat 5 to 10 times to lubricate the vertebrae for long-axis rotation.
Hips (Inner)	*Seated Butterfly (Baddha Konasana)*	Sit with your spine tall. Bring the soles of your feet together in front of you and let your knees fall out to the sides. Grasp your feet or ankles. Keeping a flat back, gently hinge forward from the hips. This opens the adductors, allowing for a more stable, responsive base when you are locked into a steep wave face.

Hips (Flexors)	*Crescent lunge (Anjaneyasana)*	From a standing position, step your right foot back into a long stride, staying on the ball of the back foot. Bend your front knee to 90° (ensure it stays over the ankle). Reach your arms up or place hands on your front thigh. Sink your hips forward to stretch the psoas, the primary engine for a powerful, high torque fin kick. Switch sides.
Knees & Quads	*Hero pose (Virasana)*	Kneel on the sand with knees together and feet slightly wider than your hips. Slowly sit your hips down between your heels. If this is too intense for the knees, perform half hero by extending one leg straight forward. This deep stretch in the quads and knees is critical for the repetitive force of using surf fins.
Legs & Back	*Forward fold (Uttanasana)*	Stand with feet hip-width apart and a slight "micro-bend" in the knees to protect the joints. Hinge at the hips (not the waist), lowering your torso until your belly touches your thighs. Let your arms dangle or grab opposite elbows. Let the weight of your head decompress the spine and lengthen the hamstrings to ensure a streamlined horizontal plane.
Ankles	*The pivot*	Sit or stand on one leg. Lift the opposite foot and draw the largest, slowest circles possible with your big toe, focusing on the full range of motion in the ankle joint. Perform 10 rotations clockwise and 10 counter clockwise. This ensures your fins translate muscular power into immediate propulsion.

02.5 / BREATHWORK

Following the physical mobilization of the 10 minute warm up, we shift our focus from the muscles to the lungs and the brain. In The Bodysurf Method, breathwork is not a passive relaxation technique but a critical conditioning tool designed to expand our aerobic capacity, increase CO2 tolerance, and build the breath retention necessary for heavy hold downs in the impact zone.

By engaging the diaphragm, we aren't just oxygenating our blood, we are tuning our autonomic nervous system. By using breathing techniques, we aim to transition from a “fight or flight” state to a “calm assertive” state that lowers our baseline heart rate, ensuring we remain centered and analytical when the inhale of a large set begins to pull us onto the peak.

Mastering our breath ensures that our movements remain fluid and efficient, preventing the panic-induced oxygen burn that often sidelines less-prepared athletes.

You will find a breakdown on how to practice two critical breathwork techniques on the next page.

- Sama Vritti: Also called boxed breathing, this is the ultimate tool for nervous system regulation. Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4, exhale for 4, and hold empty for 4. This four-corner approach creates a cognitive anchor, stripping away pre-session anxiety and centering our focus. It trains the brain to remain calm during the empty phase by simulating the moment after a wipe out when we are holding our breath before getting back to the surface.

- Kapalabhati: This exercise involves short, explosive exhales followed by passive inhales. This fire breath serves as a metabolic wake up call, purging residual CO2 and heat mapping the respiratory muscles. It improves cardiovascular snap, preparing our lungs for the high-intensity sprint required to match the velocity of the energy pulse. Kapalabhati is a powerful technique and should be practised as follows with steady and controlled focus.
    - Find your base: Sit or stand with a tall, straight spine. If you are on the beach, stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and a slight bend in the knees. Place one hand on your lower abdomen to feel the muscular engagement.
    - The exhale (active): Take a comfortable breath in, then sharply contract your lower abdominal muscles to force a quick, short burst of air out through your nose. Think of it like a sneeze controlled by your stomach.
    - The inhale (passive): Immediately relax your abdomen. The lungs will naturally and silently draw air back in on their own. Do not try to sniff or force the air in and let the vacuum created by your relaxed belly do the work.
    - The rhythm: Start slowly at about one exhale per second. As you become more comfortable, you can increase the pace to two exhales per second. Aim for a round of 20 to 30 breaths.
    - The finish: After your final exhale, take a deep, slow breath in and hold it for a few seconds to feel the shining or heightened alertness in your head, then exhale slowly.

02.6 / THE WATERMAN KIT

At this stage in The Bodysurf Method, it is logical to address our hardware before we start thinking of entering the water. While we provide an exhaustive, technical deep dive into hardware specifications within Phase 6: The Gear Lab, you must first understand the fundamental tools required to interface with the wave's anatomy.

SURF SPECIFIC SWIM FINS

At the most basic level, you only need one piece of equipment to begin with: a pair of swim fins. These are your primary tool for propulsion and the only thing standing between you and a successful session.

- Purpose built design: Unlike pool or diving fins, surf fins are short and stiff, designed for the explosive bursts of speed needed to catch a wave. They provide the control and thrust necessary to navigate the water safely.

- Prioritize longevity over performance: When selecting your first pair, the most important feature is comfort. Many beginners make the mistake of buying elite performance fins that are too stiff. These often lead to blisters, foot cramps, and unnecessary strain on the knees and joints.

Technical note: Choosing between asymmetric vs. symmetric fins is a nuanced decision. We provide a comprehensive deep dive into how blade shape affects your line and comfort within Phase 6.

HANDPLANE

While not mandatory for catching a wave, at The Bodysurf Method we are very pro handplane. It serves as a technical extension of your leading arm, providing mechanical advantages that improve the quality of your session.

- Extended ride time: By increasing the surface area of your leading hand, the plane creates significant lift. This keeps your upper body higher on the wave face, reducing drag and allowing you to hold your line for much longer rides.

- Energy recovery: This is the most overlooked benefit. Because it provides extra buoyancy, it assists in keeping your torso elevated while you are kicking back out to the peak through the channel. This reduces physical effort, allowing for better recovery and more waves per session.

Technical note: Selecting between different handplane shapes, from traditional wood to high buoyancy foam, depends on wave types and your personal weight. Detailed hardware specifications can be found in Phase 6.

02.7 / THE WATERMAN CODE

Surfing etiquette is a set of unwritten rules, primarily focused on safety and respect, designed to ensure a smooth, enjoyable experience for everyone. As a bodysurfer, we have a smaller physical profile, which makes our adherence to these rules even more critical for visibility, safety and mutual respect.

Rule	Technical definition	The waterman's objective
Right of way	The surfer closest to the peak has priority.	Avoid dropping in and wait until the peak is clear before committing to the ride.
No snaking	Swimming around another surfer to steal the inside priority position.	Maintain the natural rotation of the lineup and respect those who were there first.
Paddle wide	Staying in the whitewater or going around the breaking wave when heading out.	Never paddle through the impact zone where active riders are on the wave face.
Equipment control	Maintaining physical contact with your handplane at all times.	Never ditch your handplane as it could cause injury to yourself and others.
Communication	Verbally calling left or right on a wave that is splitting both ways.	Eliminate confusion and prevent collisions by signaling your intent early.
Local respect	Acknowledging the priority of those who surf the spot regularly.	Avoid crowding the peak and earn your place through patience and technical skill.
The apology	Owning a mistake immediately if you break a rule or cause a close call.	De-escalate tension and maintain the good vibes of the session through accountability.

These rules are the base line that we need to understand, integrate and follow once in the water.

However, we need to remember that sometimes safety needs to come first. Even though we might have the right of way on a wave, some surfers might not have seen us or may underestimate our ability to catch a given wave, therefore dropping in on us. It is better to put our ego aside, let that wave go and nullify the risk. We can then communicate our presence and willingness to share the peak with board riders or simply move to another part of the wave that might be less suited to board riders and therefore less crowded.

02.8 / PHYSICAL READINESS CHECK

In this final section for Phase 2, we pivot from the theoretical physics of the wave to the physical readiness of the bodysurfer.

In The Bodysurf Method, we do not prioritize traditional gym strength but rather a specific state of pliable power, which is the ability to maintain a streamlined posture while our heart rate is elevated and our oxygen reserves are under pressure. This physical baseline is a safety requirement as the ocean is a moving, high energy medium that will ruthlessly expose any lack of core tension or joint mobility.

Before attempting to apply the laws of fluid dynamics in the impact zone, every practitioner must possess the aquatic endurance to tread for 20 minutes, the psychological composure to remain submerged for 30 seconds without gasping upon surfacing, and the thoracic mobility to reach for a high line without compromising the shoulder's rotator cuff. By establishing these benchmarks, we ensure that our body acts as a high performance hull rather than a drag inducing anchor.

THE BUOYANCY AND RECOVERY BENCHMARK

The ocean is a moving, unpredictable medium. Before testing your line in the surf, you must prove your survival metrics in a controlled environment like a pool, ideally while wearing your swim fins.

- The 20 minute tread: can you stay afloat and keep your head clear of the surface for 20 minutes without touching a wall or the floor? This is the fundamental endurance requirement for open water safety.

- The calm recovery: can you remain submerged for 30 seconds, surface, and immediately execute a controlled, rhythmic inhale without gasping? The ability to suppress the panic reflex is your primary survival tool.

- The streamline kick: using your fins, can you swim 100 meters on your stomach without your hips sinking or your form breaking? Efficiency is a safety feature as the less energy you waste on propulsion, the more you have for the ride.

CORE TENSION AND SPINAL PROTECTION

Bodysurfing is a study in skeletal alignment. You must possess the isometric strength to resist the vortex of the wave as it attempts to contort your frame.

- The benchmark: a 60 second hollow body hold. Lying on your back with your legs and shoulders slightly off the ground, can you maintain a “banana” shape without your lower back arching? This mimics the tension required to protect your spine during a high velocity drop. If your core is weak on land, the ocean’s energy will manifest as a lower back strain in the water.

THORACIC AND SHOULDER MOBILITY

For the 30+ Waterman, shoulder health is the maintenance cost of our discipline. Years of sedentary work often result in a forward slump posture that creates a mechanical bottleneck when you attempt to reach for the high line.

- The test: prone snow angels. Lying face down, can you move your arms in a full arc from the spear position to your hips without your hands or forearms touching the floor? If you lack this mobility, the ocean’s energy will meet a stiff joint rather than a pliable one, significantly increasing the risk of a rotator cuff strain.

If you cannot meet these benchmarks in a pool, do not enter the impact zone. Technical mastery is built on a foundation of physical readiness. Use these tests as your “pre-flight” check to ensure your body can handle the energy it is about to encounter. If unable to pass these tests, it might be better to work on one’s fitness outside of the ocean for a while before attempting them again.

With the completion of our pre-session scan, our transition from observer to practitioner is nearly complete. We have successfully mapped the submerged 90% from our elevated vantage point, decoded the atmospheric and oceanic data of the swell forecast, and primed both our physical joints and our nervous system for the high-torque environment of the surf.

We are no longer standing on the sand as spectators, we are standing there as technicians with a fully realized plan for our session. Our gear is checked, our lungs are energized, and the ocean's rhythm has been translated from chaos into a legible map of safe lanes and peaks.

The dry work is finished. Our mental and physical blueprints are locked in. Now, it is time to cross the threshold where the sand meets the tide and translate our preparation into movement. We leave the shoreline behind and step into the inhale of the ocean as we begin Phase 3: The Entry, where we execute the precise mechanics of breaching the inside and claiming our spot in the lineup.

03 /
THE ENTRY

03.1 / Enter Using The Inhale

03.2 / Channel Navigation

03.3 / The Silent Swim

03.4 / Duck Diving

03.5 / Peak Positioning

03.6 / Tips To Ease Your Entry

The transition from the shoreline to the water marks the moment where theory becomes practice.

The art of the low resistance entry is built upon the foundation of Phases 1 and 2, putting the physics of flow into immediate, tactical use.

For the Waterman, the goal is not to fight the ocean, but to navigate it with such efficiency that our heart rate remains at a base rate until the moment of interception.

03.1 / ENTER USING THE INHALE

Once we have an understanding of the conditions for the day, have warmed up and formed our plan for our session, it is finally time to enter the water.

The transition from land to sea is a tactical maneuver that relies on timing the ocean's respiratory cycle. In The Bodysurf Method, our aim is to never have to fight the shorebreak but to hitch a ride on its receding energy. By waiting for the final wave of a set to break, we capitalize on the inhale timing, which is the moment of maximum hydrodynamic suction where the backwash rushes seaward to meet the next incoming pulse.

During this window, we must practice the discipline of walking (backwards) vs. swimming, staying on our feet and maintaining a low center of gravity for as long as possible. This provides a stable anchor against the turbulent shorebreak, allowing us to bypass the washing machine effect of the shallowest water.

Only once the water depth reaches our waist and the suction is at its peak should we transition our body into a streamlined hull shape, letting the natural conveyor belt of the receding tide pull us toward the channel with minimal physical exertion.

03.2 / CHANNEL NAVIGATION

Once we have utilized the inhale to clear the immediate water's edge, our objective shifts to identifying and entering the low resistance path we mapped during our 10 minute scan.

This is the tactical application of finding the gap in the friction zone where the seafloor is deep enough for the energy pulse to pass underneath without breaking.

We must scan for specific visual cues by primarily looking for darker blue, rippled, or mushy water that contrasts with the surrounding white foam of the breaking sets. This darker hue indicates a depth where the vertical orbits of the water particles can complete their rotation without hitting the seafloor.

By steering our bodies into this zone, we engage with the conveyor belt, a natural seaward flowing current that provides a constant push away from the shore. This allows us to bypass the impact zone, the area where the wave's kinetic energy is converted into a downward hammer blow, with near zero paddle effort, preserving 100% of our oxygen and energy for the peak interception.

03.3 / THE SILENT SWIM

Once we are within the pull of the channel, our focus shifts entirely to metabolic efficiency through the silent swim.

The silent swim is our primary tool for metabolic conservation, ensuring we reach the peak with a resting heart rate and a full anaerobic reserve. We move away from the frantic, high cadence splashing of a standard freestyle and instead adopt a rhythmic, low drag profile that mimics a planing hull.

We initiate the movement with a long axis rotation, where our power is generated not from the shoulders, but from a subtle roll of the hips and torso. With each stroke, we reach forward to our maximum extension, piercing the water and holding the glide for a count of two. This minimizes the frontal surface area we present to the water, significantly reducing the drag that typically spikes a swimmer's heart rate. Our arms move in a relaxed, recovery arc, entering the water with a soft “spear” rather than a slap, maintaining the surface tension of the water around us.

While our arms provide the direction and rhythm, our fins provide 80% of our actual thrust. We utilize a small, high frequency flutter kick that stays entirely within the shadow of our torso. By keeping our legs straight but not rigid, we ensure that the fins stay submerged in high density green water, maximizing their displacement. We focus on core suppression, keeping our spine neutral and our head low in the water; for those of us who have never been in the ocean, this low profile prevents the seesaw effect where the legs sink, creating massive drag.

When we need to monitor the incoming energy pulses, we transition into a tactical side stroke. We rotate onto our side, using a scissor kick and a single arm pull while keeping our face partially out of the water. This allows us to maintain a constant visual on the horizon and scan for the peak and the set rhythm, without breaking our streamlined momentum. This stroke is our low gear, used when we are within the channel and want to observe the impact zone from a safe distance while continuing our seaward transit.

WATERMAN NOTE

- The head down plane: The single biggest mistake newcomers make is swimming with their head up, looking forward. This drops your hips and creates a massive plow effect, causing immense drag. Keep your chin tucked slightly toward your chest and look down at a 45 degree angle. This acts as a cantilever, lifting your hips and fins to the surface so you glide over the water.

- Long axis rotation: Power does not come from your shoulders, it is generated in the hips. Imagine a steel rod running from the top of your head down your spine. As your right arm reaches forward, your right hip should rotate slightly downward. This engages your core and lats, generating torque while protecting the delicate rotator cuff muscles.

- The high elbow glide: After your hand pulls past your hip, lift your elbow high toward the sky, keeping your forearm and hand completely relaxed (a dead wrist). Pierce the water with your fingertips in front of your head and actively reach and glide for a split second before initiating the next pull. In the ocean, distance per stroke is far more valuable than stroke rate.

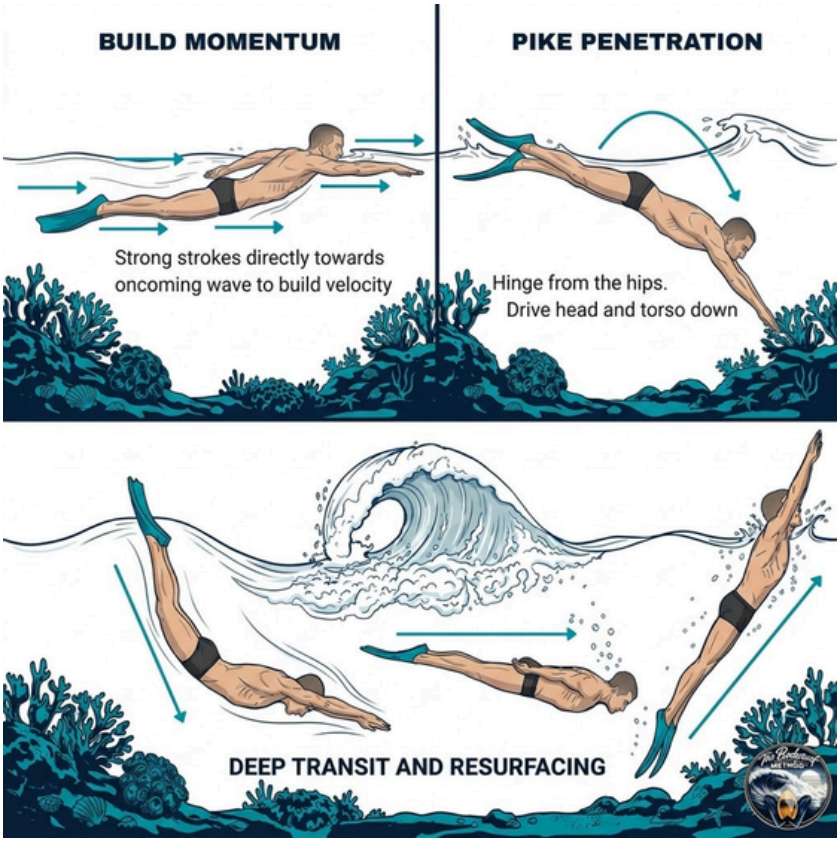
03.4 / DUCK DIVING

Your commute from the shoreline to the peak is never a passive float but a tactical navigation of the impact zone. As you make your way toward the peak, the ocean will inevitably send layers of energy directly into your path such as rolling whitewash or pitching lips. To reach the lineup with a low heart rate and a clear mind, you must know how to bypass these obstacles rather than fight them.

For the waterman, and especially for those who have never been in the ocean, mastering the following two evasion maneuvers is the difference between a controlled transit and an exhausting struggle. We utilize the head-first duck dive to maintain forward momentum and the feet-first pencil dive for deep-water survival.

THE DUCK DIVE

The duck dive is your standard tool for forward progress. The goal is to slip beneath the surface turbulence into the quiet water near the seafloor without losing the speed you've built by swimming toward the horizon.



- When to use it: Navigating rolling whitewash, punching through smaller crumbling waves, or anytime you are actively swimming and want to keep moving forward.

- Build momentum: Never meet a wave while floating stationary. Speed is your ally. Take two to three strong, deliberate strokes directly toward the oncoming whitewater to build forward velocity.

- The pike penetration: Roughly one to two meters before the wave reaches you, take a breath, tuck your chin to your chest, and throw your arms forward and downward. Simultaneously, hinge sharply at your hips (the pike position), driving your head and torso toward the bottom.

- The vertical leg drive: As your upper body submerges, throw your legs straight up into the air. The weight and gravity of your legs descending will drive your body deep under the surface, slicing through the wave's energy.

- The submarine glide: Once submerged, lock your hands in a spear tip position and make your body rigid. Allow the wave to roll harmlessly over your back.

- Resurfacing: When the roar turns to a quiet hum, angle your hands upward and use a powerful, synchronized kick with your fins to breach the surface and resume swimming. Look for pockets of air and translucent water to guide your way up.

THE PENCIL DIVE

While the duck dive is about progress, the pencil dive is about instant, maximum depth. This is the most vital safety maneuver for those new to the surf. When a wave is too large or breaking too heavily to swim through, the pencil dive drops you safely beneath the impact cylinder where the water remains calm.

- When to use it: A heavy set is pitching and closing out directly on your head, or you are facing a towering wall of thick foam that a duck dive cannot penetrate.
- The vertical transition: Stop swimming forward. Tread water to orient your body completely vertically, facing the incoming wave.
- The elevation: Just before the wave hits, perform a quick, strong scissor-kick with your fins and press your hands down. This pushes your torso high out of the water to take a “70% sip” of air.
- The plunge: As you descend, squeeze your legs together. Throw your arms straight up toward the sky. Pushing your arms up forces your body to shoot straight down like a weighted dart.
- The anchor: Keep your arms extended and your body perfectly straight. By sinking fast, you anchor yourself in the dense, undisturbed water below the turbulence.
- The ascending breach: Keep your eyes open. Once the bright white foam passes and the water turns a calm, dark green, separate your legs and kick smoothly back to the surface.

WATERMAN NOTE

Scenario	Primary Tactic	Why?
Rolling whitewash	*Duck dive*	Slice under the mess and keep swimming toward the peak.
Crumbling wave face	*Duck dive*	The energy is dispersed, spear through it to maintain speed.
Pitching lip (breaking on you)	*Pencil dive*	You need instant depth. A duck dive leaves your legs exposed to the impact.
Massive wall of foam	*Pencil dive*	Prevents you from being pushed backward by the surface turbulence.

As the above table illustrates, your choice of tactic, whether slicing through with a duck dive or anchoring deep with a pencil dive, serves a singular purpose: energy conservation.

By neutralizing the ocean's attempts to push you back toward the shore, you arrive at the lineup not gasping for air, but with a calm heart rate and a clear mind.

03.5 / PEAK POSITIONING

Once we have exited the channel and utilized our conveyor belt, we must transition from transit to tactical positioning.

We are now out back where the surface smooths out. We don't just swim aimlessly toward the horizon but we use our shore based landmark that we identified during our scan, to triangulate our starting point directly on the peak. We aim to align ourselves with the landmark, exactly on the highest point of an incoming energy pulse. These are the exact coordinates where the wave's vertical motion begins its transformation into forward kinetic energy. Regardless of the wave type, whether a rolling sandbar break or a steep reef, the goal remains the same: pinpointing the apex of energy.

To hold our position against the sweep, we again use our fixed point on land such as a specific dune, a lifeguard tower, or a distant building and continually re-align ourselves with our reference point. By maintaining this alignment, we ensure we aren't being swept down-beach away from the primary power source. For those of us who have never been in the ocean, this stationary mindset is crucial as it prevents the common mistake of drifting out of position and wasting precious energy swimming back to the take off zone. From our seaward position, we scan the horizon for the apex, the highest, steepest point of the swell as it begins to interact with the seafloor's friction zone. We are looking for the stacking of the horizon, where the water gains vertical height and darkens in color. Our objective is to sit close to this critical point, watching the set rhythm to predict exactly when the next pulse will sharpen. We stay low and quiet in the water, maintaining our metabolic reserve, and wait for the horizon to shift, signaling that the peak interception is imminent.

Positioning on the peak is the final act of the entry protocol. We have successfully audited the break, used the inhale, navigated the channel, preserved our heart rate through the silent swim, and used shore-based triangulation to find our starting point. We are no longer just swimmers in the ocean and have become a synchronized part of the lineup, waiting at the precise intersection of depth and energy.

For those who have never been in the ocean, this moment can feel like standing on a moving platform. It requires a calm, observant mind to hold your ground while the horizon begins to stack.

03.6 / TIPS TO EASE YOUR ENTRY

OXYGEN MANAGEMENT

For those who have never been in the ocean, the instinct is to take a massive, chest expanding breath before diving under a wave. Don't. A chest full of air makes you very buoyant (like a cork), which can keep you within the turbulent impact zone. Instead, take a relaxed, 70% breath, a “sip”. This allows you to stay calm, reduces the pressure on your lungs when submerged, and makes it easier to drive your body down toward the seafloor during a duck dive or pencil dive.

THE DRIFT OFFSET

Even the best channel has a sweep. If your audit showed a current moving left to right for example, do not enter the water directly in front of the peak. Enter 20 to 30 meters up current. By the time you have finished your silent swim and reached the take off zone, the ocean will have drifted you perfectly onto your starting point. If you enter at the peak, you will be fighting against the current to maintain your heading.

THE HORIZON GLANCE

Once you are at sea level, your perspective shrinks. You can no longer see the sets coming from the outside. To stay oriented, use the horizon glance: every few strokes of your silent swim, lift your eyes just above the surface during the extension phase of your stroke. Don't pop your head up (which drops your hips and creates drag) and just peer over the waterline. Look for lumps and the darkening of the horizon that is your early warning system for an incoming set.

MANAGING THE COLD SHOCK RESPONSE

For those of us surfing in colder waters, understanding how to mitigate cold shocks is critical. When you first hit the water, your heart rate will naturally spike due to the temperature change. A Waterman knows this is a metabolic trap. Before you begin your swim to the back, spend 30 seconds floating in the waist deep inhale zone. Splash water on your face and neck. This triggers the mammalian dive reflex, lowering your heart rate and preparing your circulatory system for the work ahead.

TRIANGULATION LOCK

Once you reach the peak, don't just look at the horizon. Turn around every so often. Check your shore based landmarks! If they've shifted, you've drifted. Use a quick, powerful scissor kick to reposition yourself immediately.

TACTICAL DEPTH ADJUSTMENTS

In knee deep water, use the high step or backward walk to clear the water's resistance without tripping on fin blades or straining hamstrings. Once the depth reaches your mid thigh, transition into a horizontal inhale glide.

During deep duck dives, you must equalize to protect your ears from pressure. To do this, simply pinch your nose shut and exhale gently through your nose with your mouth closed, or wiggle your jaw and swallow to open the eustachian tubes. This balances the pressure in the middle ear with the external water pressure, preventing pain or eardrum damage.

04 /
THE INTERCEPTION & THE RIDE

04.1 / Matching Velocity

04.2 / The Drop

04.3 / The Plane

04.4 / The High Line

04.5 / The Safe Exit

“The mechanics of the drop, the line, and the glide.”

Phase 04 marks the transition from being a stationary observer at the peak to becoming a high speed planning bodysurfer. We will be diving into the explosive physical shift required to match the wave's velocity and the fluid dynamics that keep you locked onto the face.

04.1 / MATCHING VELOCITY

Positioned at our triangulation point, we are now on the peak in a state of active stasis. While treading water at the peak, we maintain a metabolic base rate, utilizing the buoyant lift of our fins to remain vertical and observant. The interception is our calculated transition from this static position to a tactical surge. As the submerged 90% begins to interact with the friction zone, we will feel the water around us begin to draw toward the horizon and lift vertically. This is our trigger. We must now convert our stationary potential into kinetic energy to match the wave's forward velocity.

It is important to recognize that no two waves possess the same energy signature. A strong pulse, especially on a shallow friction zone, provides immediate gravitational assistance but requires us to use a high intensity, short duration burst to avoid being sucked up over the falls. Conversely, a softer, rolling swell in deeper water requires a longer, sustained build up of momentum to ensure our body matches its velocity before the peak passes. We modulate our output based on the “thickness” and speed of the approaching pulse.

Here is a step by step approach to matching velocity.

THE POWER TRANSITION

As we wait, we look for the stacking of the horizon which is the moment the distant blue line turns into a defined, darkening wall of water. We watch for the draw back, where the water level suddenly drops as the wave begins to inhale the surrounding ocean to build its height.

his is our visual cue that the energy pulse has arrived. Our heart rate will naturally spike as the adrenaline hits, but this is where we must remain technically disciplined.

Instead of reacting with a panic sprint, the frantic, splashing struggle that wastes oxygen and ruins our positioning, we maintain our calm and keep breathing in a composed maner until the last moment. We are waiting for the wave's base to reach us. Being patient here ensures we don't burn our anaerobic fuel too early, leaving us breathless before the ride even begins.

As the water lifts us vertically, we rotate our torso from the vertical tread into a horizontal plane. We time this rotation so our first stroke coincides with the peak of the wave's suction.

Our goal is to match our body's movement to the wave's speed. If the wave is a fast moving hollow pulse, our body transition must be sharp and immediate. If it is a slower, deep water swell, we use a more gradual, rhythmic build up. By syncing our first few strokes with the wave’s forward surge, we use the ocean’s own momentum to pull us onto the surface, ensuring we glide with the energy rather than fight against it.

It is worth metioning that on small days, when the incoming pulses seem slow and the suction effect feeble, we can start swimming before the energy reaches us to faciliate volicity matching.

THE 3-5 STROKE RULE

In order to march the velocity of the incoming enery pulse, we use the 3-5 stroke rule. We rotate our torso from a vertical tread to a horizontal plane and initiate 3 to 5 explosive, high cadence freestyle strokes. Unlike the long axis glide of the silent swim, these strokes are shallow, “choppy”, and high torque. We are seeking immediate surface friction to “bite” into the water and overcome inertia.

- Maximum displacement kick: Our fins must shift from a stabilization flutter to a high torque pulse. We drive the kick from the hips by utilizing the lower back and ankle elasticity established during our warm up (Phase 02). Our goal is to create a “bow wake” with our own body. We want to feel our chest rising onto the surface of the water before the peak overtakes us

- The Spear: Once we have achieved matching velocity, we extend our lead arm (or handplane) and lock the elbow. This arm acts as our “nose”, piercing the surface tension and stabilizing our heading. This stabilization is vital as it prevents the wave’s upward energy from “rolling” our hull.

WATERMAN NOTE

THE WHITE WATER FOUNDATION

In The Bodysurf Method, we recognize that the peak is a high stakes environment. For those who have never been in the ocean, attempting to intercept a green wave at the peak without a foundation is a metabolic trap. We must first master the art of becoming a planning object by practicing with the energy of the white water. This builds the muscle memory of the spear and the rigid hull without the risk of being pitched over the falls.

Before we don fins or head for the channel, we must learn to turn our body into the equivalent of a surfboard. Our goal is to ride the high energy white water of a broken wave from the waist-deep transition zone all the way to the sand.

- Timing the tide: Depending on our home break, it can be best to plan these foundation sessions around low tide. At this stage of the tidal cycle, the retreating inhale (Phase 03) creates steeper, more powerful walls of white water that provide the necessary thrust to engage our body and become a planning hull.

- The visual lead: Standing in thigh-deep water, we keep our eyes on the horizon. We aren't looking for an incoming energy pulse but we are looking for a massive, broken wall of white foam. By the time this energy reaches us, it should be a fast moving, consistent ledge of kinetic force.

- The launch preparation: As the foam approaches, we turn toward the shore but keep glancing at the horizon over our shoulder. We stand with knees slightly bent and arms at our sides. We take a deep breath in order to improve our buoyancy.

- The engagement: Just as the white water reaches our lower back, we drive our chest down toward the surface. We do not jump, we launch. We swing our arms forward into the spear position, letting the wall of foam overtake us and lift our hips to the surface

- The streamline: Once we are moving, we lock into our most rigid form. We squeeze our biceps against our ears and press our hands and feet together. Our spine must remain a straight line from the crown of the head to the heels. To keep the water out of our sinuses while our face is submerged, we exhale a steady, microscopic stream of air through the nose.

- Hull awareness: While we hydroplane, we bring awareness to our hands and feet. These are our rudders. Even in the white water, a slight tilt of the palms or a press of the toes will begin to steer the hull.

The objective is simple: maximum distance per wave. Once we can ride the white water from the impact zone to the dry sand with near-zero effort and a perfectly rigid frame, we have earned the right to don our fins and begin our first transit to the peak.

04.2 / THE DROP

The drop is our critical transition from generating propulsion to managing the forces of gravity.

As the wave's energy begins to lift our body, we execute the weighted entry by utilizing the thoracic flexibility established in Phase 02. We drive our chin toward our chest and press our sternum firmly into the water’s surface, shifting our center of mass forward to put more weight towards “the nose” of our hull. This maneuver ensures we remain locked into the wave's downward slope rather than be ejected out the back by the swell's upward lift.

We then encounter the ledge, a sensory moment of weightlessness where the water's resistance suddenly vanishes. At this exact point, we must cease all paddling as any further movement of our limbs creates parasitic drag that disrupts the laminar flow and slows our descent.

Finally, we dictate our angle of entry by aiming our leading arm, our spear, at a 45 degree angle toward the open shoulder. We avoid taking off straight toward the shore which would dump us into the flats where kinetic energy is wasted and we instead maintain our position on the steep face where the wave’s potential energy is most concentrated.

LEFT OR RIGHT?

By now, we are actualy bodysurfing! But how do we know which way to go?

We utilize our scan from Phase 03 to decode the peak's geometry in real time as the pulse arrives. We are hunting for the apex which is the highest, most vertical point of the swell where the energy is most concentrated. This point represents the wave’s maximum potential energy. This helps us determine the direction of the peel, or how the wave will unzip along the friction zone.

If we identify the apex to our left, we recognize that the wave will break toward our right, we therefore must angle our spear and our chest to the right to stay on the open face. On the other hand, if the apex is to our right, we angle left.

However, if we see the entire horizon line wall up into a flat, level shelf, it indicates a close out. There is no rideable line here, only a high impact collision zone. We do not commit to the drop and we immediately abort by executing a pencil dive (Phase 03) to sink beneath the energy and preserve ourselves for the next set.

04.3 / THE BOTTOM TURN

The bottom turn is our foundational step for our ride, where we convert our vertical momentum into horizontal speed at the base of the drop. To achieve this, we execute the bottom turn by banking our entire frame into the wave face, pointing our inside shoulder (the one closest to the water) toward the crest.

We apply firm, focused pressure with our lead hand or handplane against the water which creates a fin effect that allows us to carve our body upward and across the slope. This maneuver requires us to transition from the mobility of our warm up to the total rigidity of a steel rod. We tension our glutes and core to create a solid, non-reactive hull that can withstand the high-velocity pressure at the wave's base.

If we allow for a soft or collapsed midsection then the wave's energy will buckle our frame, causing us to sink through the surface tension and lose the plane.

To further optimize our hydrodynamics, we employ the trailing arm tactic: we take our off-hand and tuck it tightly against our hip or up the face of the wave behind out back for added steering and stickiness. By doing so, we reduce our frontal surface area by approximately 30%, drastically decreasing parasitic drag and increasing our velocity as we lock into the high-speed glide.

During the bottom turn, look at where you want to go. This is always true when bodysurfing but especially so during this critical first maneuver. Therefore remember to look towards the crest of the wave, and you will naturaly and effortlessly start setting up a correct riding line.

04.4 / THE HIGH LINE

We aim for the high line, the upper third of the wave face where the potential energy is at its highest. In this zone, we find the power pocket which is the critical energy intersection just ahead of the breaking foam. Here, we manage a delicate physical balance: gravity attempts to pull our body toward the base of the wave, while the wave’s circular orbital motion tries to lift us over the crest. By positioning ourselves in this pocket, we allow these opposing forces to cancel out, resulting in maximum forward velocity without the need for additional paddling.

To maintain this line, we utilize the rail trim by engaging the core strength developed in Phase 02. We use our hips to tilt our body, digging our inside rail (the side of our torso closest to the wave face) into the water to lock our trajectory onto the slope.

We also exercise precise speed management to stay in sync with the wave's tempo. To accelerate and outrun a closing section, we arch our back and lift our chest slightly, reducing our friction surface area and allowing our body to plane higher and faster. On the other hand, if we find ourselves outrunning the power pocket, we intentionally decelerate by dropping a hip or digging in with our trailing arm. This intentional drag allows the wave to catch up to us, keeping us perfectly positioned for the remainder of the ride.

04.5 / THE SAFE EXIT

Our aim is to end every ride with a controlled disengagement, as preserving our energy for the next transit is the hallmark of a disciplined Waterman. To avoid the high impact hammer blow of a close out, we must exit on our terms.

As the section ahead begins to lose its rideable shoulder, we execute a backdoor exit. We steer our leading arm and our momentum through the wave face, punching through the thin curtain of water to emerge into the calm, green water behind the wave. This is our most efficient exit as it utilizes the wave's own energy to deposit us back into the channel, positioning us perfectly for our next entry (Phase 03) without the need for a long, taxing swim around the impact zone.

However, if the wave envelopes us and we can no longer outrun the breaking lip, we must execute a lateral disengagement to avoid being carried over the falls. When we are planning, our body is effectively glued to the water’s surface by hydrodynamic suction and we need to break this bond. We must immediately collapse our steel rod rigidity, drop our inside shoulder (the one closest to the wave face) and drive our head and lead arm deep into the heart of the wave. By rotating our frame toward the wave and diving vertically, we penetrate the surface tension and sink beneath the wave's rotational energy. This allows the heavy impact of the lip to pitch harmlessly over our head while we emerge safely in the calm water behind, effectively neutralizing the wave's power before it can throw us into the impact zone.

In Phase 04, we have transitioned from being stationary at the peak to being a high speed planing hull. We have learned that the ride does not begin at the drop, but during the power transition, where we remain patient and disciplined to avoid the panic print. By mastering the 3-5 stroke rule and the spear, we have synchronized our body’s movement with the wave's energy, converting potential into pure kinetic energy.

We have established that the white water foundation is our essential proving ground and a place to calibrate our steel rod rigidity and body awareness before facing the green water of the peak.

Whether weighting the nose during a vertical drop, carving a bottom turn to engage the plane, or trimming the high line to find the balance between gravity and orbital motion, we now treat our body as a technical wave riding instrument.

Finally, we have committed to the safe exit, ensuring that every ride ends with a controlled punch-through therefore preserving our energy and protecting our frame for the next set.

Now that we have mastered the mechanics of the interception and the fundamental glide, we are ready to increase our technical vocabulary. In Phase 05: Technical Maneuvers, we move beyond the linear ride. We will explore how to manipulate the wave’s face with advanced carving techniques, spin rotations, and tube riding strategies. It is time to take our foundational plane and transform it into high performance wave riding.

05 / TECHNICAL MANEUVERS

05.1 / Wipe Out Management

05.2 / The Handplane Carve

05.3 / The Spin

05.4 / Weight Shifting

05.5 / Barrel Riding

In this Phase 05, we move beyond the fundamental glide to explore the high performance limits of bodysurfing.

However, before we get into learning new tricks, we believe in a safety first approach through wipe out management techniques. Managing a high velocity impact is a technical discipline in its own right, requiring precise body orientation, breath control and mental hardiness to neutralize the ocean's raw power.

Only once we have mastered the fail safe protocols will we transition into advanced maneuvers such as the handplane carve, the spin, weight shifting, and the tube riding protocol.

We must address the ego narrative here: it is tempting to rush toward these tricks, but a Waterman understands that technical maneuvers are only as good as the line they are built upon. It may take weeks or months of disciplined practice to get our foundations strong enough to warrant these additions. We believe it is far better to invest time perfecting a clean, high speed line than to attempt a “trick” on a weak foundation and lose the plane entirely.

05.1 / WIPE OUT MANAGEMENT

In The Bodysurf Method, we do not view a wipeout as a failure but as an integral part of the game we play. The more we start taking on bigger waves and practicing tricks, the more we risk wiping out. It is therefore critical to learn to manage this energy transition before we start practicing advanced technical maneuvres.

The moment we compromise our line, get hammered by the lip, or breach surface tension and lose our connection to the face, we need to downshift from a performance state of active glide to a survival state of controlled recovery. This is a technical discipline that requires us to manage our biology and physics simultaneously.

If we fight the ocean, we lose. Instead, we learn to flow within the chaos.

THE MENTAL ANCHOR

The greatest threat during a wipeout isn't the ocean but ourselves if we get overcome by panic. Panic causes an immediate spike in our heart rate, which accelerates oxygen consumption and leads to premature carbon dioxide buildup.

- We must remind ourselves that the average hold down in waves up to double overhead height rarely lasts longer than 5 to 8 seconds. As we can all handle 30+ seconds in a calm environment, the “danger” we feel is primarily psychological.

- The moment we go under, we begin a slow, rhythmic count in our head: One-one-thousand, two-one-thousand... This does two things: it anchors our focus away from the turbulence and provides a real-time data point on how much time has actually passed. When we realize we are only at “four”, our lizard brain calms down.

- We never exhale our entire breath during the impact. We keep our 70% sip of air. This air acts as a literal life jacket, increasing our buoyancy and making it easier for the ocean to eventually spit us back to the surface.

WATERMAN NOTE

THE 3 MINUTE TRUTH

A vital training protocol is the static apnea drill. In a controlled environment, ideally a calm pool with a partner, practice finding your maximum breath hold while remaining motionless. You will likely discover that you can remain submerged for 3 minutes or more as nearly everyone has this capacity dormant within them.

Now, compare that to a heavy water hold down, which rarely exceeds 5 to 8 seconds. Even when you factor in the anaerobic strain, the cold, and the turbulence, your physiological oxygen tank is far larger than your panic suggests. By hitting that 3 minute mark in a pool, you provide yourself with a powerful psychological anchor. When the ocean pins you down, you can consciously reassure your lizard brain that you are only a fraction of the way through your reserves, giving you the clarity to stay focused and wait for the surface to reappear.

THE HOLD DOWN PROTOCOL

We utilize two distinct physical states to navigate the turbulence wash cycle. We start with the brace to survive the impact, then transition to the ragdoll to survive the turbulence.

- The impact brace: As the lip impacts or the suction pulls us over the falls, we must protect ourselves. We tuck our chin against our chest, pull our knees towards our belly, and position our hands towards our neck and head. By becoming a compact sphere, we reduce the lever arms that the turbulent water can grab, preventing our limbs from being wrenched or dislocated. Note that it is important to be strong but not overly tensed to minimise oxygen consumption.

- The Ragdoll: Once the initial hammer blow of the lip has passed and we are being tumbled, we do something counter intuitive: we go limp. We stop tensing our muscles entirely. Tensing up against the ocean's power is like trying to stop a freight train with a wooden board and you will simply snap. By remaining loose, our body folds with the water's energy and does not resist it, drastically reducing the risk of muscle tears or joint injuries and minimising oxygen consumption.

THE RESURFACE PROTOCOL

The wipeout isn't over until we have cleared the impact zone.

- We always resurface with one arm extended vertically above our head. This protects our skull from our own handplane, other surfers’ boards, or floating debris that might be hidden in the foam.

- We do not gasp. We perform one sharp exhale to clear the water from our lips, followed by a deep, controlled inhale.

- Before we even wipe the water from our eyes, we look towards the outside (the horizon). We need to know immediately if there is another wave in the set coming our way? How much time do we have before the next impact? If a second wave is incoming, we immediately execute a duck dive or pencil dive (Phase 03) to get under the pulse.

WATERMAN NOTE

THE EGO CHECK

If we find ourselves tensing up or panicking during a routine wipeout, it is a signal that our hold down tolerance is not yet ready for the size of the swell. We swallow our pride, move back to the white water foundation (Phase 04), and recalibrate.

05.2 / THE HANDPLANE CARVE

Ihe handplane is not merely a buoyancy aid but an external, handheld keel and a dynamic hydrofoil surface. While our torso acts as the hull, the handplane provides the directional bite required to command the wave's face. By engaging the handplane’s rail, we transition from simply sliding with the energy to actively driving through it. This is the mechanism that allows a Waterman to climb toward the crest or cut back toward the power source, turning a linear glide into a high performance, multi dimensional ride.

THE MECHANICS

To execute a carve, we must manipulate the angle of attack which is the pitch of the board relative to the water's flow. Unlike the flat plane used for speed, the carve requires us to set an edge to create lateral resistance.

Not all handplanes are the same shape and they will feel and act different in the water. Practice makes perfect and the exact angle of attack needed to carve will come to you after a few tries.

The following sections are universal to any handplane and will get you carving in no time.

GRIP AND WRIST LOCK

The handplane must become a rigid extension of your skeletal structure.

- Keep your wrist straight and locked. A floppy wrist leads to snapping the plane, which causes the leading edge to catch and for you to wipe out.
- Apply downward force through the heel of your palm. This keeps the nose of the plane slightly elevated (approx. 10-15°), preventing the handplane from nose diving beneath the surface.

THE INITIATION

To start a carve toward the crest (an upward or “backside” carve), you must rotate the handplane so its inside edge, the one closest to the wave, engages with the water first.

- Subtly roll your wrist to tilt the handplane toward the wave face.
- You do not carve with your arm alone but also with your shoulder. Retract your scapula and set your shoulder back and down. This locks the handplane into your core’s kinetic chain, allowing your entire body weight to back the maneuver.

THE EXECUTION

Once the edge bites, you must commit your center of mass to the turn.

- As the handplane engages, simultaneously dig your inside rail (the ribs and hip closest to the wave) into the wave’s face.
- Imagine a central axis running from your head to your heels. To tighten the carve, pull your external shoulder away from the wave. This rotational torque forces the handplane to act as a pivot point, swinging your body hull upward across the face.

THE S

Linking carves into a complete cut back is how we manage the wave's tempo. By shifting the handplane from its inside edge to its outside edge, we create a S pattern that allows us to reposition ourselves close to the power pocket should we start to outrun the wave.

- To climb, tilt the inside edge of the handplane toward the crest to carve upward into the high line.
- At the top of the wave, flatten the board to achieve a momentary, zero friction glide.
- To drop back towards the power pocket, roll the outside edge of the handplane downward and look towards the power pocket, driving your sternum into the descent to convert that potential energy back into forward velocity.

WATERMAN NOTE

COMMON ERRORS

Error	Consequence	Correction
Over rotating	The handplane skids out and loses grip.	Decrease the tilt angle and keep the board flatter to the face.
Leading with the arm	Shoulder strain and unstable hull.	Rotate your entire torso and keep the handplane centered to your chest.
Nose diving	Immediate wipeout.	Apply pressure to the heel of the palm to lift the nose of the handplane
Not looking towards where you are going	Unoptimal line and wrong positioning on the wave face	Always look towards where you want to go, if you want to carve up the face then fix your gaze on the apex. On the other hand should you want to cut back towards the power pocket, make sure you look towards it.

05.3 / THE SPIN

In The Bodysurf Method, we do not view the spin as a flashy aerial maneuver, but as a technical exercise in fixed axis rotation: your leading arm remains a locked, stable spear while your entire frame rotates around it.

By mastering the transition from an engaged rail to a flat planing surface, we gain the ability to navigate the wave’s energy, execute a complete 360 degree spin and continue our line with zero loss in velocity.

We will follow with a step by step guide to help you suceed in your first spins.

THE HIGH LINE SETUP

As it is a lot harder to spin on the flats or in a soft section of the wave, we aim to set up a high line to help us complete the spin much more easily. We use the gravitational push of the upper third of the wave face to overcome the friction of our own body.

- Use a subtle handplane carve to move into the high line.
- You must be at maximum planning speed. If you are sluggish, the wave's suction will trap your hip during the turn, causing you to wipe out.

Take a sharp inhale (70% capacity) and hold it. This creates a pressurized, air-filled chest cavity that increases buoyancy and makes your torso more rigid and therefore easier to rotate.

BREAKING THE RAIL

To rotate, you must momentarily stop being engaged with the wave's face.

- Flatten the plane by briefly moving the handplane from its 15 degree carving tilt to a 0 degree flat position. This breaks the bond between your inside rail and the wave face.

The motor of the move is the head whip.

- Snap your head over your external shoulder (the one facing away from the wave). You aren't just looking but you are leading with your chin to force your spine and hips to follow the rotation.

THE FIXED-AXIS ROTATION

This is the hallmark of technical bodysurfing: rotating around a stable point of contact.

- Your leading arm (and handplane) stays dead straight, pointing directly down the line. It does not tuck or move. Your entire body rotates underneath and around this extended arm. It serves as your pivot in the water.

- Keep your external arm and off-hand pinned tightly against your hip or tucked into the small of your back. Some bodysurfers also like to keep the arm behind them, fully extended, in line with their leading arm to act as a support during the spin. Our aim is to remove any parasitic drag that would catch the water and stall your rotation.

THE BLIND SPOT

For a split second, you will be facing the horizon and then up towards the sky, all the while moving shoreward. This is where most beginners lose their orientation.

- As you face upwards, try to keep your eyes level with the horizon. Do not look down at your chest or fins, as this will cause you to nose dive.
- Continue rotating your neck until your eyes find the green water of the wave face again. Once your eyes spot the line, your body will naturally snap back into the forward-facing position.
- Your fins should be quiet. Any aggressive kicking here will stall your momentum. You are simply letting the torque generated by your head and shoulders carry your legs through the arc.

THE RECONNECTION

Completing the spin is about stopping the rotation before you over-rotate and lose your heading.

- The moment you face forward, roll your wrist to tilt the handplane 15 degrees back into the wave face. This bites the water and acts as a brake on your rotational momentum.
- Drive your sternum back down into the water to re-establish the steel rod rigidity and lock back into your line.

WATERMAN NOTE

SUMMARY OF THE SPIN

Step	Action	Why?
Setup	High line + speed	Uses gravity to overcome hull suction.
Breath	Hold (70% capacity)	Maximizes buoyancy and core rigidity.
Leading arm	Keep the spear straight	Acts as the fixed pivot axis for the spin.
Trailing arm	Pinned to hip/back or in line with leading arm	Minimizes drag and prevents catching the water.
Eyes	Spot the line	Guides the body back to the planning state.

05.4 / WEIGHT SHIFTING

When we're moving at the speeds required for high performance riding, we have to realize that even a two centimeter shift in our center of mass is the difference between flying past a section or stalling on the shoulder.

For us bodysurfers, weight shifting is the subtle art of managing our longitudinal trim. It is how we adjust where our weight sits along the steel rod of our body to play with the balance of friction and gravity.

Here are four techniques for us to practice in the water.

THE NOSE-HEAVY DROP

To generate initial velocity during the drop, we must overcome the wave's upward orbital motion which actively tries to eject the rider out the back of the peak.

This is achieved through the thoracic press, a technical maneuver where you drive your sternum and chin down toward the water's surface to shift your center of gravity forward of your center of buoyancy.

This shift creates a downward pitch in the water, a state known in fluid dynamics as trimming down by the head. By leaning into this descent, you effectively reduce the surface area of your hull that is fighting the upward rush of water, allowing gravity to pull you into the descent with significantly more speed and precision.

THE SPEED SHIFT

Once you have reached the base of the wave and executed your bottom turn, your technical goal shifts from falling to hydroplaning through a process known as the planing lift.

To maximize speed, you must reduce the wetted surface area by subtly arching your back and lifting your head and upper chest to move your weight slightly rearward. This chest arch increases the angle of attack of your torso, allowing the water hitting your chest to create hydrodynamic lift. This lift effectively raises your body higher out of the water, reducing parasitic drag and allowing you to break free from the wave's surface tension to accelerate.

Mastering this speed shift requires finding the sweet spot: if you arch too high, you create induced drag that acts as a brake, so the objective is to maintain the minimum wetted surface required to stay on top of the water.

THE STALL

Technical bodysurfing often requires you to decelerate to stay within the power pocket or wait for a barrel to form, a tactical maneuver known as the stall.

To execute this, you must shift your weight toward the tail of your body by dropping your hips and heavying your legs, which significantly increases the displacement of your lower body. This deeper immersion creates a massive surge in pressure-drag as your fins and legs act as a sea anchor, pulling you back toward the energy of the breaking foam.

To recover from the stall and re-engage your speed, you simply re-weight the nose by driving your hands and chest forward, effectively flattening your body back into a high-speed planing state.

THE HEAD LEAD

The human head weighs approximately 10-12 lbs and, because it sits at the furthest tip of our technical spear, it acts as a powerful lever for weight distribution during the ride.

This directional weighting means that if you look toward the beach, your head's weight shifts toward the shore, causing your rail to disengage and your body to slide down the face of the wave.

Therefore, by keeping your eyes tracked on the high line or the lip, you maintain a slight upward weight bias that helps keep your inside rail glued to the steep, critical part of the wave.

By mastering this subtle shift in your center of mass, you can dictate your line across the face without the need for aggressive physical movement.

WATERMAN NOTE

SUMMARY

Goal	Physical action	Result
Accelerate	Arch back and lift chest	Reduces wetted surface area and increases hydrodynamic lift.
Drop	Press sternum and chin down	Shifts center of gravity forward to engage gravity and overcome orbital motion.
Decelerate	Drop hips and sink legs	Increases displacement and pressure drag to stay in the power pocket.
Course correction	Head rotation	Uses the head as a technical lever to weight or disengage the inside rail.

MICRO ADJUSTMENTS

For the Waterman, weight shifting should be nearly invisible. We aren't thrashing our bodies, we are using micro-tensions in the core and glutes to tilt our frame by degrees. If the movement is visible to an observer on the beach, you're likely over-correcting and wasting energy.

05.5 / BARREL RIDING

The tube is not just a visual experience, it is a high-pressure environment where fluid dynamics and body tension are the only things keeping you from being pulled into the lip or falling into the trough.

To ride the barrel, you must transition from a standard glide to a specialized weight bearing stall.

The objective of barrel riding is to intentionally slow your velocity to match the speed of the breaking wave, allowing the curtain of water to wrap over your frame. This requires a precise balance of drag and structural rigidity.

THE TRAILING ARM STALL

To stay inside the pocket, you must use your trailing arm as a secondary keel by extending it deep into the wave face behind you to create the essential frictional drag that pins your hip into the power source and prevents you from outrunning the barrel. This maneuver, known as the trailing arm stall, allows you to anchor your weight against the upward draw of the wave's face, effectively slowing your forward velocity to match the internal tempo of the breaking lip.

By maintaining a rigid extension of this trailing limb, you transform your lateral profile into a high-drag surface that counters the natural acceleration of your hydroplaning body, ensuring your position remains centered within the high pressure zone of the barrel. As the curtain wraps over you, this manual braking system provides the stability needed to navigate the turbulent foam ball without losing your technical line or being prematurely ejected from the wave.

To maintain a seamless connection with the natural speed of the wave, you must master the rhythmic modulation of the trailing arm by momentarily releasing your hold on the water to gain a burst of velocity before re-engaging the arm to stall. This tactical release allows your body to snap back into a high speed planing state, moving you forward if the tube begins to outpace your position, only to be followed by a controlled re-entry of the arm to anchor yourself once the pocket is re-secured.

By alternating between this streamlined free glide and the frictional drag of the trailing arm, you create a dynamic oscillation that keeps your body perfectly synced with the shifting tempo of the breaking lip. This constant micro adjustment of the drag profile ensures you are neither outrunning the energy nor being consumed by the foam, allowing for a precise, high-performance line that adapts to the internal physics of the barrel in real time.

NAVIGATING THE FOAM BALL

Inside the barrel, the wave is no longer a solid green face but a vibrant, turbulent mix of air and water known as the foam ball. You must maintain maximum steel rod rigidity here because the high level of aeration significantly reduces the water's density, making it far less buoyant than the green water on the open face. If you go soft or allow your core to collapse, this lack of lift will cause your body to sink into the turbulence, resulting in an immediate loss of plane and a likely wipeout.

To counter this, you must keep your handplane angled slightly upward to intentionally create a high pressure wedge that allows you to plane over the internal turbulence rather than being consumed by it. By maintaining this rigid physical frame and a positive angle of attack, you force your body to skim across the aerated surface, preserving your velocity and structural integrity as the wave’s energy churns around your frame.

Inside the barrel, your visual focus must be locked onto the breaking lip and the overhead arc of the wave to maintain a high performance line. By tracking the downward trajectory of the lip as it impacts the flats, you gain real time data on the wave's speed, allowing you to modulate your trailing arm stall with precision. Simultaneously, a subtle glance toward the “ceiling” of the barrel helps to naturally shift your head and thoracic lever upward, preventing a nose dive and ensuring your chest remains in a high planing position.

This vertical visual orientation creates a physiological anchor that prevents the disorientation of the foam ball, keeping your torso rigid and your line glued to the upper third of the wave face where the energy is most concentrated.

By looking “into the light” of the lip rather than down at the spray, you use your head to maintain a slight upward weight bias, allowing the water’s suction to hold you in the pocket rather than pulling you over the falls.

THE EXIT SQUEEZE

As the barrel begins to pinch or close, you must immediately shift your technical orientation from a defensive stall back into a high performance planing lift to escape the collapsing curtain.

This transition is initiated by driving your chin and sternum down toward the water's surface to re-engage your center of gravity, while simultaneously pulling your trailing arm out of the wave face and tucking it into a streamlined position.

By removing the frictional drag of the trailing arm, you allow the immense internal pressure of the compressed air and water within the barrel to act as a propellant against your rigid body. This concentrated energy is converted into a final burst of exit velocity, effectively firing your body out of the tube before the lip impacts the flats.

Success in this phase depends on your ability to snap from a high drag anchor to a zero friction spear in a fraction of a second, ensuring that your momentum carries you past the falling section and back onto the open shoulder of the wave.

WATERMAN NOTE

THE POCKET OF SILENCE

Technical tube riding is the ultimate test of breath control and composure, requiring you to maintain a state of high tension stability as the lip shadows your body and the roar of the ocean shifts into a localized, pressurized hum.

If you feel the instinctive urge to gasp or kick aggressively, you are likely reacting to the psychological claustrophobia of the closing curtain rather than the actual physics of the wave. A waterman remains outwardly motionless within this vortex, not through passivity, but by trusting the structural integrity of the thoracic press and the trailing arm stall to hold a precise line until the light reappears.

This "stillness"is actually a dynamic calculation where you are constantly micro-adjusting your core tension to stay glued to the wave's high energy curve while resisting the internal force and spray that try to destabilize your body.

By suppressing the flight response and maintaining this rigid, spear like orientation, you allow the wave's own circular motion to carry you through the tube, ensuring that you do not disrupt your planing surface with unnecessary movements that would only increase drag and cause you to wipe out.

Mastering the technical maneuvers we discussed in Phase 05 is not about adding "flair" to your surfing, it is about expanding your vocabulary in the language of the ocean.

By understanding the wipeout as a managed transition, the carve as a shift in fluid resistance, and the spin as a fixed-axis rotation, you move away from being a passive participant in the wave's energy. You become a navigator.

Remember that every high-performance turn or weight shift is built upon the "steel rod" foundation. If your line is weak, your tricks will fail. If your line is pure, the maneuvers will feel like a natural extension of the wave's own momentum. Practice these micro-adjustments until they become invisible, and you will find that the ocean begins to open up in ways a board rider will never experience.

While the waterman is the primary engine and the hull of this operation, the tools we choose to extend our reach into the salt are critical.

In the final Phase of The Bodysurf Method, we move from the biology and physics of the body to the technical specifications of our equipment.

To achieve the "bite" in a carve or the "burst" in a drop, your gear must be an exact match for your anatomy and the conditions of the day. We will now enter The gear lab, where we break down the fluid dynamics of fin design, the hydrofoil properties of the handplane, and how to curate a kit that supports a lifetime of high-performance longevity.

06 /
THE GEAR LAB

06.1 / Swim Fins

06.2 / Handplanes

06.3 / Additional Kit

In the previous Phases, we have optimized the biological engine, our body, and mastered the fluid dynamics of the high performance ride. In this final Phase, The Gear Lab, we move into the technical specifications of the equipment that allows us to command the wave's face with ease and precision.

For the Waterman, gear is not a matter of fashion or brand loyalty, it is a clinical assessment of mechanical advantage and joint longevity. The tools we choose: our fins, handplanes, and wetsuits, are the interfaces through which we translate our physical intent into hydrodynamic results. Whether it is the torsional stiffness of a fin blade required for a high velocity drop, or the rail profile of a handplane designed for a deep carve, every piece of kit must be an exact match for your unique biomechanics and the energy of the day.

We will now break down the physics of our equipment, ensuring that your hardware is never the limiting factor in your pursuit of the perfect glide.

In The Gar Lab, we focus on longevity. As we age, the impact of some gear on our ankles, knees, and shoulders becomes a technical debt we cannot afford to pay. By understanding the “why” behind equipment design, you can curate a kit that supports a lifetime of high-performance riding.

06.1 / SWIM FINS

Swim fins are not just simple swimming aids but our primary thrusters and secondary stabilizers. Our fins are the mechanical interface between the power of the glute driven kick and the fluid resistance of the ocean. To achieve the initial burst of velocity required to catch a wave, our fins must provide immediate energy transfer without the energy bleed found in soft, recreational rubber.

Once we have reached planning speed and are locked into our line, our fins stop being engines and start being rudders. By engaging our inside fin (the one closest to the wave face) and keeping our ankle rigid, the side-rail of the fin acts as a secondary keel. This provides the bite necessary to hold a high line on a steep, vertical face.

BLADE STIFFNESS AND TORSIONAL RIGIDITY

The physics of the energy burst relies on the stiffness of the fin blade. When you kick, the blade should resist the water enough to create a high pressure that pushes you forward
.

- A stiff blade acts like a spring. As you load the fin during the downward stroke, it stores potential energy and releases it in a “snap” at the end of the motion. This is what allows a waterman to match the velocity of an incoming energy pulse.

- If a blade is too soft, it simply folds under the pressure of a high intensity drop. This results in wasted caloric energy and a failure to reach planning speed before the wave breaks.

- High performance fins often feature stiff lateral rails that run down the sides of the blade. These rails prevent the fin from twisting or spiraling in the water, ensuring that every ounce of force is directed straight behind you.

While stiffness is king for performance, it carries a technical debt for the body. A blade that is too rigid can put excessive strain on the legs and achilles tendon and the collateral ligaments of the knee. To protect our joints, we must look for a fin that balances a stiff blade with a soft, ergonomic foot pocket. The goal is to have the blade do the work while the foot pocket absorbs the micro vibrations and prevents rubbing and cramping.

For the long term waterman, we believe that comfort is the top priority. Buying a pair of super stiff high performance fins, while it might make sense on paper, is a real life trap for two main reasons:

- Excessive rubbing from uncomfortable fins will literally cut holes in the side of our feet and ankles. This will force us to remain out of the water and will impair our progression.

- Overly stiff blades might not be aligned with our current physical capacities. Cramping up after 15 minutes of swimming will definitely side line us for the session.

SO HOW DO WE CHOOSE OUR FINS?

Choosing the right fins is a critical yet complicated process of matching your unique anatomy to the mechanical requirements of the wave. While a surf shop is the ideal place to visit to find the perfect match, we might not all have access to one. Whether purchasing online or in a surf shop, we must do so with a technical understanding that goes beyond marketing and the size printed on the box.

The greatest challenge in selecting a fin is that a size large from one manufacturer is rarely identical to a large from another. Even within the same sizing, the internal volume of the foot pocket varies significantly across brands. Some brands, such as Dafin, tend to feature a wider, more rectangular foot pocket that accommodates a flatter arch or a wider forefoot. Other high performance brands may utilize a more tapered fit that suits a narrower heel. The height of the pocket (where it sits over your bridge) is a critical technical point. If this is too low, it restricts blood flow to your toes, causing cramping within minutes of entering the water.

At The Bodysurf Method we believe that the most important criteria of selection should be the comfort of the foot pocket. This really is what allows a waterman to bodysurf day in and day out and stay in the water for however long they desire. Depending on their specific foot anatomy, some bodysurfers will prefer one brand, or even one specific fin model over another and through trying on a few pairs, will be able to identify what works best for them.

However, some of us with sensitive feet might never find the ideal pair of fins, and this is where the purchase of 2mm neoprene booties can make a world of difference. They will provide the added padding and therefore comfort that some fins might lack. It is important to remember that sizing up a little might be required in order to accommodate for the booties.

Innovative brands like Yucca (the US bodysurf specialists) have pioneered the concept of varied stiffness. Instead of a one size fits all flex, they offer variants such as soft, standard, and ultra soft. They basically mix a choice of soft or stiffer foot pockets with a choice of very stiff all the way to very flexible blades. It makes it a lot easier for us to find the perfect pair!

Many brands also utilize a dual-durometer construction, where the foot pocket is made of a lower-density, softer rubber for comfort, while the blade and side-rails are made of a high-density, rigid rubber for maximum energy transfer - this can help us select some models to try on.

Our aim will always be to find that sweet spot: the intersection between comfort and power. We are looking for a blade that is rigid enough to provide that initial burst but a foot pocket that is soft enough to avoid hot spots and blisters.

MATERIAL AND BLADE SHAPE

The material of your fin dictates its buoyancy and its feel against the skin, which has a direct impact on your swimming technique.

Material	Buoyancy	Performance characteristics
Natural rubber	Floating	Most rubber fins float, which is a major safety advantage if a tether snaps in heavy surf. However, floating fins create a positive buoyancy at the feet, which can lift your heels too high and slightly disrupt your swimming technique.
Silicone	Sinking/neutral	Silicone is prized for its extreme comfort and anti chafe properties. It feels like a second skin and rarely causes fin cuts. However, silicone fins do not float, and their increased flexibility often results in a lower snap or burst velocity compared to high grade rubber.

The shape of the blade determines how the water sheds off your feet during the power stroke and how much bite you have when holding a high line on the wave face.

Feature	Symmetric	Asymmetric
Visual profile	Both fins are identical, there is no left or right specific shape.	The blade is angled or longer on one side, creating a distinct left and right fin.
Thrust profile	Provides a balanced, center aligned burst. Ideal for a traditional kick and straight line speed.	The offset blade creates a directional push. It is designed to mimic the natural outward angle of the human foot during a kick.
Lateral control	Offers consistent lift but can slide more easily when trying to hold a steep, vertical line.	The longer outside edge acts as a tactical skeg, providing superior grip when your body is tilted on its rail.
The drag factor	Generally more streamlined for pure swimming and distance surface intervals.	Can create a slight twisting force if the user's kick technique is not disciplined.

At The Bodysurf Method we will always prioritise comfort and longevity, this is why we usually choose to wear symmetric fins in order to minimize the impact on our knees. However, specific material shapes and stiffness are really a matter of personal preference and are still debated to this day.

THE “TRY ON” PROTOCOL

When testing fins at a shop, or at home once you receive your package, do not simply check for length. Stand up and put your weight into the fin to see where the rubber compresses against your toes. If you feel any pinching while standing, that pressure will triple once you are under the strain of a heavy water kick.

FIN TETHERS

At The Bodysurf Method, we are strong advocates for the use of fin tethers. Your fins are your primary life support system in the water and losing a fin in a heavy impact zone is not merely a logistical inconvenience, it is a critical safety failure. Attempting to swim through a high energy washing machine cycle with only one fin creates a dangerous asymmetry in your propulsion, leading to rapid exhaustion and a loss of directional control. For the waterman utilizing silicone fins, tethers are an absolute necessity, as the negative buoyancy of silicone means a lost fin will sink immediately.

The method by which you secure your fins dictates both your comfort and your launch time on the beach.

- The minimalist string: These are simple, shoestring like, high strength cords that loop around the heel strap and tie off at the ankle. While they offer the lowest drag profile and are virtually indestructible, they provide zero padding. For the 30+ waterman, the friction of a thin cord against the achilles tendon during a two hour session can lead to cuts and skin irritation.

- The padded heel strap system: This is the gold standard for performance and longevity. These tethers feature a padded neoprene sleeve that slides over the existing heel strap of the fin, providing a layer of cushioning that prevents blistering. Attached to this sleeve is a secondary strap with a secure clip that goes around the top part of the foot to secure the fin while retaining comfort. The padded clip on the system significantly streamlines the process of putting on your gear before entering the water. Because the tether stays integrated with the fin's heel strap, you can secure your fins with a single click.

06.2 / HANDPLANES

The decision to use a handplane is a choice between the raw organic glide and mechanical lift. While the purist bodysurfer relies solely on the surface area of the chest and palm, the high performance waterman uses a handplane as a tactical extension of his skeletal structure. A handplane is not a flotation device but a hydrofoil designed to plane over the water's surface tension, reducing the wetted surface of your body and increasing your terminal velocity.

DO YOU NEED A HANDPLANE?

Selecting whether to use a handplane depends entirely on the wave's energy and your desired line.

- The case for the handplane: In smaller, gutless waves, a handplane provides the extra lift needed to keep riding when the wave lacks the power to support your weight. In large, vertical surf, the plane acts as a rail, allowing you to hold a high line in the pocket that would be near impossible with a bare palm.

- The case for the bare hand: If you prefer total tactile feedback from the water, the bare hand is the only way to feel every micro current.

MATERIAL SCIENCE

The material of your handplane dictates how it handles the vibrations caused by high-speed movement over water. On the next page, we have compiled an overview of the differences between materials below.

Material	Performance characteristics	Longevity & feel
Wood	Naturally buoyant and vibration dampening. Wood absorbs the noise of the wave, providing a smooth, organic glide.	Requires occasional oiling. Offers a classic, heavy-duty feel that cuts through chop.
Compressed foam	Extremely lightweight and highly buoyant. These handplanes sit high on the water, making them ideal for beginners or very small surf.	Prone to dinging or snapping in heavier conditions. Can feel less precise at high speeds.
Recycled plastic / composite	High torsional rigidity and razor thin rails. These provide the most bite and the fastest release of water.	Virtually indestructible. The stiffest option, providing the most direct energy transfer from your arm to the wave.

SHAPE AND HYDRODYNAMICS

There are many different shapes out there, and while it might not make a world of difference which one you choose when first starting out, it is important to understand the impact of these shapes on the hydrodynamics of the ride. The outline of the rear of your handplane, especially, determines how water releases from the hull and how much control you have when tilted on your rail.

Tail shape	Hydrodynamic function	Best for
The fish / swallow tail	The V shaped cutout allows water to funnel through the center, while the two extended points act like twin fins. This gives you maximum hold and tracking in steep faces.	Technical tube riding and heavy, vertical waves where sliding out is a hazard.
The square / diamond tail	This shape maximizes surface area at the back of the board, creating immediate lift and keeping your chest high out of the water.	Smaller, flatter waves where you need to generate artificial speed and plane easily.
The pin / rounded tail	Water flows smoothly around the curve without hitting hard corners, making transitions between carving and going straight feel incredibly fluid.	Smooth, open-face carves and drawing clean, continuous lines without twitchiness.

If you are hunting for the barrel, the fish/swallow tail is your best weapon because those two points anchor into the wave face while the cutout prevents the plane from feeling too buoyant. If you are just looking to glide as far as possible on a crumbling wave, the square tail is king.

The size of the handplane itself also needs to be taken into account. Obviously, the larger the handplane, the bigger the surface area and therefore the lift it will give you when riding. But there is always a tradeoff. A large handplane might make it more difficult or near impossible to swim normally and might also render duck dives more difficult in heavier conditions as they float a lot more. However on smaller days, a combination of a large handplane made of foam with a square tail will be of great help and you might even be able to sit on it and chill in between sets.

The good thing about bodysurfing handplanes is their price point in comparison to surf boards and bodyboards. They are so much cheaper. Therefore building a quiver of different handplanes each suited for specific conditions is much more financially viable.

THE LEASH

At The Bodysurf Method, our protocol is clear: always use a leash. As a waterman, you need to be in total command of your equipment at all times. We believe that operating a handplane without a leash is not a sign of purism but a failure of responsibility.

A handplane during a wipe out becomes a high velocity projectile, and failing to tether it creates an unnecessary risk of injury to others in the lineup.

Furthermore, for the dedicated waterman who has hunted for the perfect piece of timber or composite hardware, losing a prized tool to the current is a logistical and emotional setback that is easily avoided.

- The safety trade off: While some argue that a leash creates a tangle risk, the Waterman’s defense is simply situational awareness. In a heavy wipeout, you must remain conscious of the fact that your plane is tethered to your wrist. The standard protocol is to use your free arm to protect your head and neck, anticipating the movement of the plane in the washing machine cycle.

- The ascent guide technique: In the event of a deep, disorienting hold down, your leash becomes a tactical survival tool. By feeling the tension on the cord, you can use the natural buoyancy of the handplane as a biological compass. As the handplane pulls toward the surface, you can follow the line of the leash to determine exactly which way is up, allowing you to reach the surface with minimal oxygen expenditure.

- The Waterman's compromise: To minimize drag, avoid thick, urethane surfboard leashes that act like parachutes. Instead, utilize a thin, high-strength braided cord or a low profile wrist tether. The goal is a connection that is virtually weightless in the glide but unbreakable under the strain of a 6 foot set.

06.3 / ADDITIONAL KIT

To finish The Gear Lab, we must address the marginal gains: the specialized add ons that protect your long term health and provide a technical edge in challenging conditions. For the 30+ waterman, these are not luxury items, they are essential tools for maintaining sensory clarity and physical safety over a lifetime of sessions.

EAR PROTECTION

Exposing your ear canals to cold water and wind, warm water and its bacterias or even sand debris over many sessions can lead to infections or even to exostosis, a condition where the bone grows over the canal to protect the eardrum, eventually leading to hearing loss.

Unlike standard wax or foam plugs, high performance designs (such as SurfEars) utilize an acoustic mesh that allows you to maintain your balance and hear your surroundings while blocking the water. Protecting your ears is a long-term investment in your spatial awareness and equilibrium.

THERMAL MANAGEMENT & BUOYANCY CHEAT

While a wetsuit's primary job is warmth, for the bodysurfer, it is a performance enhancing piece of kit.

- The 2mm top tip: Even in warm water, wearing a 1mm or 2mm neoprene top or springsuit is a major tactical advantage. The nitrogen filled cells in the neoprene act as a distributed flotation device. This extra buoyancy makes it significantly easier to tread water during long lulls and keeps your hips higher in the water during the glide, reducing drag and increasing your planning efficiency.

- Full suits for the cold: In sub 18°C water, a full 3/2mm or 4/3mm suit is required. Remember that as suit thickness increases, your movements might become more difficult and restricted. Ensure your wetsuit is high stretch to allow for full lung expansion and complete arm rotations.

IMPACT PROTECTION

A helmet is often seen as a tool for big wave surfing or reef breaks, but for us bodysurfers, the greatest hazard is often other people.

In a busy break, the primary risk is not the reef, but a stray surfboard traveling at high velocity. Because a bodysurfer sits lower in the water, you are less visible to a surfer dropping down the line. A lightweight, surf-specific helmet provides a critical layer of defense against a fin-to-the-skull or a nose impact from a runaway board.

Choose a helmet with a low profile and drainage channels to ensure it doesn't create drag and neck strain when you are submerged.

07 / CONCLUSION

07.1 / A Method By Bodysurfers for Bodysurfers

07.2 / Help Us Grow The Lineup

You began this journey standing on the sand, perhaps looking at the ocean as a chaotic wall of white water and unpredictable energy. Through The Bodysurf Method, you have deconstructed that chaos into a clinical map of Ocean Literacy. You have learned to read the submerged 90%, to identify the rfiction zones, and to respect the delicate physics of the power pocket. You transitioned from a swimmer into a bodysurfer, preparing your body with the breathwork and mobility required to endure the impact zone and thrive within it.

Think back to where you started and where you are now. You have moved from simply catching waves to executing high performance Technical Maneuvers, from the calculated fixed axis spin and the deep handplane carve to the pressurized silence of barrel riding.

You have calibrated your gear, from the torsional stiffness of your fins to the hydrodynamics of your plane's tail. You are no longer fighting the ocean; you are participating in its flow.

07.1 / A METHOD BY BODYSURFERS, FOR BODYSURFERS

This manual was written by bodysurfers, for bodysurfers. We believe that this sport is the purest interaction between human and nature, and our mission is to ensure that the global community of watermen continues to grow in both skill and safety.

Because the ocean is an infinite teacher, the conversation never truly ends. Feedback from our peers is the lifeblood of this method. Whether you have found a new tactical depth adjustment or have a question about fin stiffness for your specific anatomy, we want to hear from you.

Connect with us: Please email your feedback, stories, or technical questions directly to arno@thebodysurfmethod.com.

07.1 / HELP US GROW THE LINEUP

If The Bodysurf Method has helped you find your line or improved your composure in the water, we would be incredibly grateful if you could take a moment to leave a review on Google. These reviews are vital as they help us gain visibility and allow us to reach more bodysurfers across the globe, building a more educated and respectful lineup for everyone.

Stay connected with the community and share your progress by following us on social media:
Instagram & Facebook: @thebodysurfmethod

The light at the end of the barrel is no longer a mystery, it is your destination. Hold your line, trust the physics, and keep your chin down. We look forward to seeing you in the lineup.

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First page photo by Drew Farwell