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# WHAT ON EARTH IS A WAVE JAM?

The new craze on the street, ladies and gents, appears to be a phenomenon called "Wave Jam". Just what on earth is this crazy venture and who in the world thought of such a thing? We talked to Russ Tetlow and Steve Thorpe to find out...

**Can you give us a brief description of the Wave Jam concept?**

**Russ:** Take the best sailors in the UK to the best locations, at the best time, to maximize real conditions and see exactly who's ripping.

**Steve:** Yes, put the best sailors and photographers together to see, from the footage, who comes out on top.

**Has the idea of a Wave Jam been building for a while, or did it have an instant "hallelujah," light bulb switching on, birth?**

**Russ:** For me personally the idea has been brewing since I started competing in November '94. The conditions were crap, in the wrong direction, with no real waves and nobody who didn't have to turn up attended.

**Steve:** I've been waiting for someone to run a winter wave series for quite a few years and every year nothing happens, despite a few promises. I had been really keen to do contests, but couldn't bring myself to drive 300 miles on a no wind forecast (once the sponsors had stopped insisting on it) and it seemed like the events were jinxed - I had an enforced 2 years off! I got the impression that a few of the top lads didn't actually care; they do so much sailing abroad that a week off sailing now and then isn't a big deal (especially if flapping around for half an hour earns them £500!) - but for me to spend my precious time off work sat around waiting for wind was unbearable. So I guess it's been a long time coming. I remember last summer I started to seriously consider running something myself and started discussing bits with various friends on those long drives to the coast or in the cafe at the beach with whoever was around. Everyone was really keen and came up with great ideas: it all seemed too easy...

Then I had a proper look into what's required to run an event, spoke to the current organisers and realised it's not easy at all; you need land owners' permission, insurance, a health and safety plan etc, etc and before you know it you're back to square one (ie. a pre-planned calendar)

So I started to look into what we could get away with; if there were no sponsors, no prizes and no official contests could we avoid the red tape and run at the drop of a hat? After all we'd just be emailing each other which beach to head to. Sam Noble mentioned the snowboard jams and that's where the name came from. Russ has become more and more involved - we're now joint partners in the Wave Jam thing, which has been good because we're different characters with different perspectives. He's been very good at keeping us heading in the right direction and not getting away from the important reasons of why we're doing it in the first place.

**What is it about the current situation that you think needs improving?**

**Russ:** Competition structure, turnout at locations further afield, the UKWA website, logo, insurance, rescue cover. We need dedicated film crews and cameramen working together to achieve the best action possible. For windsurfing to progress we need weekly TV coverage: more and more publicity.

**Steve:** The current situation is great; we have professionally organised competitions with PWA style judging, all of which is very well run and provides a path for younger sailors to climb. But they lack one thing and that's good conditions. For a lot of the competitors, the conditions are the number one priority and not who happened to rack up the most points, so numbers are falling. We need contests that can run on any beach and on any weekend to give ourselves half a chance, but it's simply not possible to do this and run a real contest.

**Tell us about the first Wave Jam, how did it go, where was it and who was there?**

**Steve:** The first Jam was a two day event at the start of December in Cornwall: Daymer on the Saturday and Marazion on the Sunday. The forecast looked amazing with 25 foot waves and 30mph winds, but with it all coming from the West we needed to stay away from the exposed beaches. We had around 15 sailors turn up over the 2 days (including the Kings, Jan Sleigh, Clyde Waite, James Cox, Dave

Andy King push looping in the Jam



Richard Jones backlooping at Kbay

Swift, Rich Potter, Chris Murray and Nick Moffat), which doesn't sound like many, but when you consider who's training abroad it was pretty much everyone who was free. We had 2 photographers and Alfie with the video camera, so we were all set for a classic.

But as Sod's law would have it, it was one of those super-gusty-squally-weather systems that we get occasionally, although we made the most of it and everyone felt it was a success.

**How do you think Wave Jam will alter competition in reality?**

**Russ:** Lets get something clear, this is just competition in waves, the rest can stay as it is. If this idea gets the headwind it deserves, it will revolutionise the way windsurfing is viewed, revealing its dynamism and finally putting the best sailors on top: the cherry on the cake.

**Steve:** I think Wave Jams can run alongside the current competitions and provide events similar to storm chase scenarios; both have their place. Perhaps we will evolve eventually and meet somewhere in the middle.

**How do you see the scoring working in a Wave Jam situation?**

**Russ:** To be finalised, it's only very loosely put together at present, with the emphasis currently on allowing people to get out on the water, not sitting around on the beach waiting for their heat.

**Steve:** We have considered a few options for this; online judging after the events using video footage, expression sessions or sailor judged heats. I entered a sailor judged contest in Maui a few years back and it worked fine, but it does rely on people's integrity and not just voting for their best mates. I don't see the results as being that important, the emphasis is on fun and we all win by getting a great days sailing, coverage in the mags and the respect of our peers if we're ripping.

**What is your highest aspiration for Wave Jam competition?**

**Russ:** We are going to get our heads together PROPER in the very near future to formulate a workable plan to improve on what we believe is a very exiting concept to take windsurfing forward. We want free parking for all entrants, their fuel costs covered, prizes for the competition itself and the profile of the sport massively inflated. By sailing at usable beaches (therefore advertising what each beach/location has to offer for the normal beach user) we want to link Joe public to their seaside resort and then show them how other users (us) can bring extra revenue to those beaches when the peak period is at its lowest. We want sailors to get paid, like in other sports, and to take windsurfing off the shelf and put it right up there alongside motorsports. We're setting the bar high, but with a realistic understanding that it may not get to where we think it should be.

**Steve:** At the moment I'd just like to see some good coverage in the mags of all the top British sailors: help to promote them and the sport, and have some fun.

But as for where it might lead, that's a bit of a scary thought! We must be a pretty tasty prospect for some real sponsorship money, which could be put into rescue cover, prizes, trophies, covering sailors costs. And I'd love to see some windsurfing on the telly. We're going to put a lot of thought into this as Wave Jam gathers momentum.

**Could it be adapted for use on the PWA?**

**Russ:** It depends on how the whole concept develops. The key is selling this dynamic sport without ruining the main objectives: which are to get the best sailors out in the best conditions, enjoying what they were born to do: have fun. If we hit on the winning formula of combining free sailing with competition, who knows?

**Steve:** I guess many of their events have more or less guaranteed wind, so they don't have the same problem. (except in Tiree!) But I'm sure other countries could use a similar idea, and there may well be some that already do. Certainly the international GPS speedsailing stuff, such as Driven by Wind, has a similar approach.

**Will it take over the world?!**

**Russ:** Windsurfers have been having fun the world over, shying away from competition because you spend too much time sitting around waiting to go out and enjoy yourself, and not enough time actually doing it. If we keep this idea centred on enjoyment, the world is our oyster. If it takes off here, there is no reason why it shouldn't catch on elsewhere.

**Steve:** Yes! It's the way forward. There are so many people now with high quality digital cameras and camcorders, who also have the know how to get stuff on the net, that we could all be jamming! 📸



Tweaked aerial from Andy Swift at Dayme