

Baptism of Fire

INAUGURAL SUP CONTEST – PUERTO ESCONDIDO. SEPTEMBER 19TH – 22ND 2008

TEXT AND PHOTOS: MOONWALKER

Stuffing a longboard cleanly into a heaving beachbreak barrel is no easy feat – especially at the shifting lineup of Mexican Pipe. Make that board a couple of inches thicker, a foot or two longer, add a paddle, and you've got a recipe for mayhem. Gather 24 of them, stick a nutcase on each one, and it's reasonable to expect a spectacular maelstrom of whirling boards and plummeting paddles.

Somewhat disappointingly for

spectators though, serious wipeouts were rare at the inaugural Puerto Escondido Stand-Up Paddle Contest. Instead, the assembled SUPers – all self-confessed addicts of big, powerful waves – charged the hollows with glee. Like kids testing new toys in a playground, they pushed themselves and each other into more critical situations, and mastered most. The lure of a US\$ 12,500 prize purse (the largest yet for a SUP event) was an added motivation.

The event was the brainchild of third generation local Zicatela surfer Angel Salinas, who is also responsible for the longboard tuberiding contest that started in '99. Some might say he's a little sadistic putting such craft in such conditions, but the truth is that Angel wants the best surfers to rise to the occasion, and if the equipment was a little challenging – so be it. Sure the riders suffered a few broken boards and paddles and had some serious beat-downs, but rise they did.

... AND SEVERAL TONS OF WATER



(main photo) Puerto Escondido has a rep as the world's heaviest beachbreak. Fair enough.
(inserts) Chuck "Mister Commitment" Patterson.





(opposite top and centre) An exceptional longboarder, shortboarder and SUP surfer, Californian Drew Brophy also has a reputation as one of the USA's most gifted young surf artists. Check him out: www.drewbrophy.com (opposite bottom) Noah Shimabukuro (who slays Pipeline on a longboard) - now the inaugural Puerto Stand-up Champ. (this page top) Duane Desoto on a freight train! (centre) L to R: Puerto claimed a few. Ekolu Kalama and a big, perfect pit. The finalists.

It's not often in surfing that you see something happening right in front of you that's going to have repercussions for the rest of the sport. With these guys pulling into and mostly making it out of these large barrels, they proved the legitimacy of these new craft. Big waves, hollow waves, small waves and flat water, SUP's can do it all. It just comes down to the skill and determination of the rider.

"This particular contest is really going to change things," said winner, Oahu's Noah Shimabukuro. "I mean before this event, I don't think there's ever been a SUP contest in big hollow waves. And the guys from Hawaii like Ekolu Kalama and Duane Desoto were really pushing the limits, not to mention the guys from California, Puerto Rico and Mexico. I hope there are more countries represented next year, it would be great to see some Australians make it over. The boards we're riding were pretty much everyday boards for everyday waves. But these weren't everyday waves; these were

big, gnarly and could probably kill you if you were caught in the wrong position. To witness that . . . I think it was pretty cool. It's a special time to be involved in stand-up paddle right now, and also to be a part of this first event and see what can be done."

Now this is all good and grand, but what's it actually like surfing a SUP out there?

Says Noah, "Well I've been to PE half a dozen times and I know the power and how the waves break here, so prior to this trip I was kinda tentative. A lot of my friends were telling me 'don't go down there, you're gunna' die', 'it's a really bad idea doing SUP in big hollow waves'. But actually it's way safer than you may think. You can get into the waves way earlier meaning you're able to line the ride up a bit easier. It's something that a good surfer can achieve . . . definitely not for beginners but it is achievable."

Over the period of a week, with the contest plus free-surfing time there was a real bond

that developed between the surfers.

"I swear the most eclectic group of surfers showed up for this event," said Andrew Logreco, competitor and Puerto regular. "Traditional longboarders, high-performance longboarders, shortboarders, even tow guys, and the thing that brings all these people together is that they're watermen . . . now I know that's an overused term, but their desire to ride and explore the limits of a relatively new style of board has seen this group come together that might never have met. And it's all because of SUP."

Big hollow waves, broken boards, and lessons learnt - a stamp in time on surfing's history and a giant leap in SUP evolution and validation. *

Results.

1. Noah Shimabukuro (HAW)
2. Garrett McNamara (HAW)
3. Scott Chandler (USA)
4. Kealii Mamala (HAW)