



Bellyboger in action.



Hal Baily, Whale Beach.

Source: Photos Dick Ash and Baily, H (1987). 50 years Whale Beach SLSC.

1 Palm Beach to Narrabeen

On Sydney's northern beaches Dick Ash (2009) recalled wooden boards, referred to as "tea trays" being ridden. These were said to be a tear-shaped piece of ply that was varnished and had a chrome towel rack on the front as a handle, but without fins. J.H 'John' Haynes a Palm Beach lifesaver made ply boards, both stand-up and bellyboards for fellow club members. He is said to have made at least 10 bellyboards. Two of his boards are on display at the Cabbage Tree Club, which is associated with the SLSC. One of the boards is an honour board recording Club presidents (Williams (2012)).



Tig Eilbeck with Haynes bellyboard. Source: Brawley, Sean (1996). Beach beyond : a History of Palm Beach Surf Club 1921-1996.

Gary Clist (2009) is a kneeboarder who started on surfplanes before riding bellyboards from 1965-1967. He bought a bellyboard from Robert Hosking from Avalon. The board was 4' by 22-24", 3/8" marine ply. His board had handles, half moon fins and was white with a red racing stripe. Gary stated there was a small group (less than a dozen) who rode bellyboards at South and Middle Avalon, with North Avalon described as 'mal' wave. For Gary, a bellyboard was a progression from the surfplane and he tried a foam board but the buoyancy made it more difficult to get out. Because he had no car and there was always some sort of wave he reported that there was no need to travel and there wasn't contact with other belly boarders. Gary moved to Noosa, but the board needed more solid waves and he changed to surfing kneeboards. Clist (2009) identified Brian Barraclough from Bungan as

a bellyboarder from the 1960s. Paul Gallon identified friends who surfed Little Avalon on a bellyboard as including Dave Flatt, John Bridger, Donald "Ducksie" O'Brien and Malcom Robertson. Nearby at Whale Beach, for many years Hal Baily rode a 1 cm thick, twin finned ply bellyboard. The board had a hand grip and his son Kim, noted: "he loved a big barrel and often ended up surfing it in storm surf on his own (when conditions stopped others getting out). The board allowed him to drive deep under big waves, had two little keel like fins".



Robert Hosking with bellyboard.



Robert Hosking bellyboard.

Photos courtesy Paul Gannon and Robert Hosking.

Also from Avalon, Robert Hosking (Clist 2009) made ply boards with chrome handles. This was a relatively small scale, local production. Gannon (2011) recalls Hosking based his board on one made by Peter Sobels from Avalon SLSC. Sobels' board was made after a trip to Hawaii. Hosking (2011) noted: "Over the years I was making these boards (I built approximately 60) the design changed considerably, but this was probably the final and best. I was getting 4 boards and fins out of a 4 x 6 sheet of 1/2" Cemac Seaply. More recently, Hosking (2012) commented "They certainly went through a continual development phase. The first was 3' long with a square tail and single deeper fin from 3/8" ply then to 3'6", at which stage scalloping the rear was introduced following the lead of Peter Sobels. There was even a tri-fin, and a back to front board starting narrow at the front and having the greatest width at the back! The fins may have been deeper and shorter during this period. The final variation was basically to get maximum length from the sheet of ply with the offcuts to produce the fins. That may be why they are not as deep! Also, our favourite surfing spots were shallow rock breaks (Hosking 2012).



Paul Gannon's board on top of Dave Cairn's GT Cortina, packed for a trip to Noosa, ca. 1970. Photo courtesy Paul Gannon.



33" Deane Brothers board - bottom view.



33" Deane Brothers board - deck.

Photos courtesy Gary Clist.



Copy of a 1960s Hosking bellyboard - concave added.



Hosking bellyboard copy

Photos courtesy Gary Clist.

In 1964 Dave Sams wrote to John Kelly of Hawaii, author of 'Surf and Sea', seeking information about paipo boards. Dave was surprised when he received a letter back (below). Dave got Bill Clymer to make him a board, based on the recommendation of Gordon Woods. In subsequent trips to Hawaii, Dave caught up with Val Valentine who made Paipo Nui boards (based on the design of Jim Growney and John Waidelich) and Paul Swanson. Pete Sobels was another paipo rider from that time. He also bought a Paipo Nui in Hawaii but preferred his homemade, twin finned board.



Pete Sobels at Newport Pool, 1966. Photo Dave Sams.



Pete Sobels's board profile. Photo courtesy Pete Sobels.



Pete Sobels's board handles. Photo courtesy Pete Sobels.



Paul Austin Inns photo. Dee Why 62-63.

John M. Kelly Jr.

4117 Black Point Rd.
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815

May 25, 1964

David Sams

16 Mildred St.

Warawee, Sydney

N.S.W., Australia

Dear David:

It was a pleasure to receive your good letter and thanks for the enclosure of two bucks though that was unnecessary. Better to save your dollars for your first trip to Hawaii!

As to applying the step to a paipo board, at this point I think it would be unnecessary. As you know, the step makes it possible to combine high speed with maneuverability with a surfboard. The paipo is already so maneuverable due to its light weight, small area, low center of gravity and so on, that I hardly think it would gain a thing. As a matter of fact, it was Jim Gowney and John Widenick, the two developers of the ultra high speed skim board (that should read "skim") who passed me with their fast skims when I was riding a very fast Downing gun that gave me the first ideas for the hydro. That is to say, it was being passed by them that triggered the idea of building a faster surfboard and one that was maneuverable as well. Incidentally, Jim and John have told me that the hydro is the only board in the surf that they cannot pass on their skim boards - but neither can they be passed, either.

As to the design of the Gowney-Widenick skim boards, I have enclosed a sketch of the boards they developed which are really catching on here. It is getting to be the usual thing to see a number of them tearing up a surfing site and making board riders and body surfers look as though they were statues. Your dimensions are about right but it is notable that Jim and John employ no skegs. The skeg forces a paipo or surfboard into directional motion which may, and often does, conflict with the inertial line of flight thus producing drag. It is primarily the freedom of inertial line of flight that, in combination with a no-contour-drag shape to the bottom of the board that enables their ultra high speed. In place of the skeg, the skim board rider "rails" the flared after corner into the wave-wall when he wants to change direction. Once set in the desirable course, he allows the board to plane flat to the water thus freeing it and himself of all drag but the slight skin friction between the un-wetted-surface of the board and the water. The total bottom surface area of their boards is important-- it has to be sufficient in size to bear their weight in flight, i.e., to have enough lift. A lot of our skim-board enthusiasts are now standing up on them and hot dogging... fantastic action.

For the last question on bodysurfing the heavies, I use a side position on a steep wall--right in the curl-- with lower arm (right arm on a right slide) bent and extended across the front of my body using the hand as a sort of skeg bearing against the water that rises up the wave. This puts the rider's back smoothly up against the vertical wall of the wave and keeps the right shoulder out of the water thus reducing drag. When the wave is not steep enough--it has to be actually vertical--then you have to roll over on to the conventional belly position with arms at the

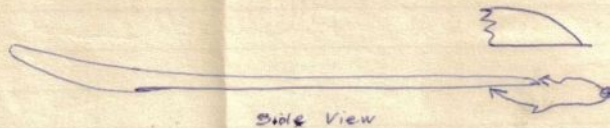
side. The side position just described is for me the fastest bodysurfing position known—I can keep up with a slow surfboard using it. However, once you get into the belly position, you slow down considerably due to drag from the many contours of the body. The side position gets most of the upper body out of the water completely.

These positions will all be described in the book when it comes out this fall.

Thanks again for writing, David. Hope to hear from you again.

Best regards,

John Kelly



Side View



Top View



Front View

• Be sure to have sharp breakaway edges on sides and rear end for no-drag release.

Page 2 of John Kelly's letter to Dave Sams. Photo courtesy Dave Sams.



Dave's Clymer board.



Dave's Clymer board.

Photo courtesy Robert Hosking.



Pete at Avalon.



Sobels' board: 48" x 20" x .5" Coachwood marine ply.

Photo courtesy Pete Sobels.

Gary Sharp and friends rode belyboards around Newport, built out of sheets of Brunzeel Marine Ply, 3/8" thick. Sharp (2012) recalls "We each bought a 4x2 foot sheet and shaped our own designs, cut and shape the fin/s from the offcuts and enamel painted them, usually over a weekend. Cost at that time was about \$20 all up." Gary and his friends rode the boards from 1966-1970. Sharp continued to ride his board around Newcastle (1970-1985), Manly and Freshwater in the 1990's and more recently in Vietnam.



Gary Sharp bellyboard.



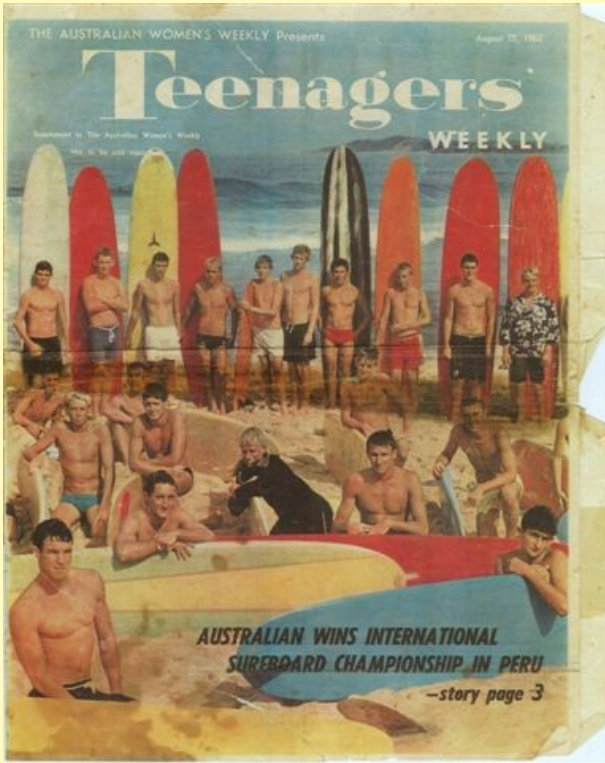
Gary Sharp with ply bellyboard.

Photos courtesy Gary Sharp.

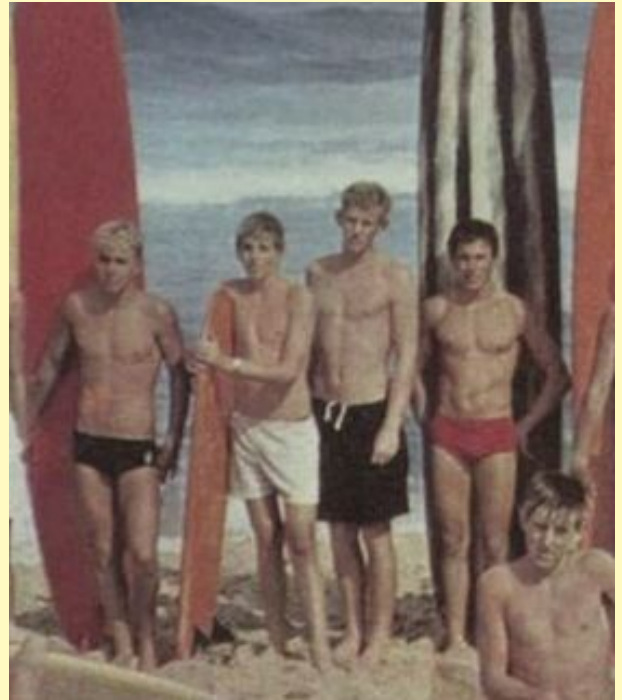
Richard Wright (Wright 1965) of Collaroy questioned why there was not a bellyboard division in contests, given a tandem surfing display at the then recent New South Wales state championships Long Reef. The only identified Australian contests were the chestboard division of the Avalon Board titles in May 1963 (Unknown 1963) The Avalon contest was won by Rodney Sumpter who also placed third in the US Salt Creek bellyboarding contest (Unknown 1964b). Ron Turton has reported seeing this competition and stated Sumpter rode standing up (Turton 2011). Bellyboards were also given as prizes. The Surfing World (Unknown 1964c) offered a Keyo paipo as a prize for the best bodysurfing photo received.



Contest, Narrabeen 1962. Photo courtesy John Knobel.



Teenagers Weekly, August 1962.



Barry Watson - with bellyboard.

Photo courtesy John Knobel.

In the early 1970s there were two attempts to commercially make bellyboards on a larger scale. Originally based in Avalon, Dick Ash (Ash 2009) first produced a bellyboard around 1960 when he cut up an old broken balsa board. Almost a decade later, around 1970 Ash produced the bellybogger, a roto moulded hollow plastic board. After these boards were banned from use within the 'flags' and with the advent of the Morey Boogie board Ash ceased production. However, he has redesigned the bellybogger which he produced from Byron Bay for a period of time.



Dick Ash Bellybogger.



Twin fins and channel bottom.



Plywood 'grate' rails for easy handling.



Get inside on a Bellybogger

- Combines the speed of a surboard and the involvement of body-surfing.
- Based on famous Hawaiian 'Paipi' design.
- Extra flex for bottom turns.
- Indestructible U.V. compound polyethylene.



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Bellybogger advertisement



THE BELLYBOGGER BRINGS BACK THE ART OF REAL BELLYBOARDING

The difference between bellyboarding and bodyboarding is the sensation of speed. You ride on your elbows on a bodyboard. But with a bellyboard you tuck it under your guts, lie low and go for it. It's like bodysurfing with a fast planing surface stuck under your body. A good bodysurfer knows the true feeling of pure surfing. It's real involvement. Being close to the wave on a Bellybogger bellyboard creates the feeling of extra speed.



MOULDED TO FIT YOUR BODY

The scooped deck has a soft pad that grips your body. Simply slip into the scoop and you feel you just can't lose it. When it gets critical grab the grooved rails and pull the Bellybogger along, through or over the wave.



DUAL FINS FOR REAL CONTROL

The Bellybogger has developed hard moulded channel rails. Plus, dual fins plugged in for real carving power. Hang as high as you like. You'll get a great feeling of control. The Bellybogger revives the art of real bellyboarding.

The Bellybogger is available through leading surf shops. If you have any questions contact us at: Inland Design P.O. Box 269 Pahrump Nevada 89049 Phone: (714) 491300 Fax: (714) 491016

BELLY BOGGER

THE FASTEST WAY TO GET YOUR GUTS ACROSS A WAVE

Bellybogger advertisement.



Dick Ash -1960s Avalon area.



Dick Ash - down south.

Source: Photos courtesy Dick Ash.

2 Brookvale to Manly

The known history of Australian surfing has its roots in the Manly and Freshwater area. Some of Australia's great big wave riders from the 1960s came from this area, including Dave Jackman and Gordon Simpson, both of whom rode bellyboards as well as stand-up surfboards. These surfers also had strong links to the life saving movements, as did a number of other belly board riders of the time. This meant that they were also competent bodysurfers. Jackman recalls seeing Tommy Zahn from the 1956 US/Hawaii lifeguard team riding a bellyboard at Manly. This twin-finned balsa bellyboard with redwood stringers resembled those made by Wally Froiseth of Hawaii. Along with his twin brother Mick he made a copy of this twin finned balsa paipo. Jackman would move to New Zealand in 1962 where amongst other surfcraft he rode a guitar pick shaped paipo based on a design he saw in Hawaii. Jackman tried to produce these boards commercially but found little interest in such boards in 1996. (Jackman 2011). This style of twinn finned board was made commercially in Sydney by Bill Clymer, who had moved from Melbourne in 1957 to be at the heart of the surfing industry. Larkin has described the Clymer bellyboards being influenced by a Bud Browne movie shown in Sydney. likely the same film seen by Leigh Tingle. If Zahn did bring a bellyboard to Australia Clymer may also have seen this board. Clymer's boards were twin fins, with a wooden rounded handle that followed the shape of the nose. Most were between 3 to 4', the occasional one being 5'. A number of these balsa boards were made over a two-year period before Larkin moved to Queensland around 1961-1962. Tony Dawes (2010) rode a Clymer style board as did Barrie Stark. Stark recalled that his board was, "Balsa 3'6", round nose, wide square tail, 23" wide. Dead flat with balsa grip at the nose. Bill Clymer loomero. Rode it 1958-1960" (Stark 2011). Stark also recalled "Rat" riding a board, "sometimes prone, kneel or standing up". Bruce Usher noted that the 13 year old Barrie Stark bought 'a "Loomeroo" for 10/-/- pounds' (Usher 2011). Colin Harper also purchased such a board at Manly in 1958 (Regan 2010) though the board doesn't have a logo.



Clymer bellyboard - deck view.



Bill Clymer logo.

Source: Photos courtesy Mike Brown collection.



Bill Clymer bellyboard - bottom.



Clymer bellyboard.

Source: Photos courtesy Mike Brown collection and Surfworld -Torquay.

Henry Marfleet (UK) reviewed his collection Australian surfing magazines from the 1960s and identified a number of letters requesting articles on bellyboards. This included Friendly Bear (1964) who also referred to Burl, Squizza, Dog, Dumper, Tissa, Rabbitt, Bains and Harry as a group based at the Manly surf lifesaving club. Ray Moran from the Manly surf museum has identified these surfers as respectively: Dick Browning, Bob Padman, Roger Griffiths, Tony Dawes (who briefly worked for Bill Clymer), Barry Taylor, Nev Taylor, 'Bains' is unknown and Rob Lovell. Other letter writers were the 'Sunburnt surfer' from Harboard (1965) while Ian Lawson (1963) from Bellevue Hill wanted information on where he could buy one of Leigh Tingle's boards.



Colin Harper's bellyboard advertised in the Manly Daily.



Colin had been inspired by the surfing of Gus Garland and Goose Allen.

Source: Photos by Colin Harper.



Wave with 3 bellyboards. Excerpt from [Tribute to Overhead Ted](#) by Neale Ashby



Peter Raynor board. Sticker 1961-1962



Dimensions: 1230 x 540 x 120.

Source: Sydney maritime Museum.

In addition to solid wooden boards, in the 1960s plywood bellyboards were popular throughout Sydney. Moynier (2010) described his father making him a ply bellyboard at South Curl Curl in 1959. Approximately 3'6" long and 22" wide, rocker was added by soaking the board overnight. Bricks were used to add some nose rocker. Like other paipo this board doubled as a skim board. Bob Rose and Gordon Simpson from Freshwater reported surfing Dee Why. Simpson is featured in the 1961 Bruce Brown film, *Surfing Hollow Days* surfing Waimea on a McDonagh

bellyboard.



Bob Rose's 3mm ply bellyboard: 42.5" x 16". The fin was 2" x 3.5" long. Photos courtesy Bob Rose

Brookvale became the centre of the Sydney surfboard in the early 1960s, producing boards locally and for national distribution. Originally surfboard production was dominated by Dillon, McDonagh, Wood and Bennett (Sutherland M, 2009).

Dick Laycock, a McDonagh employee estimated that he made perhaps 50 bellyboards over a long career. He stated that most surfboard manufacturers only made them in the "single digits" in response to custom orders. These boards were made to the customer's design or the manufacturer would make what they thought would perform. Laycock described flat slabs about 30 mm thick and without fins. Greg McDonagh (2009) stated that he made bellyboards under his own label from 1958-1964. Most were made in the 1960s. He estimated about 20 were made during this time period. Initially the blanks were coolite then later urethane. These boards were twin finned ("like a large waterski fin", "almost a D fin"), and usually about 4' x 2' wide, 2- 2.5" thick. They were described as having a rolled down edge and being flat bottomed. Purchases were from local guys and the advent of boogie board was given as the reason bellyboards declined.



McDonagh bellyboard. Photo courtesy Craig Hosking.



Surfboards including a McDonagh bellyboard being donated to the Australian troops July 1966. Source: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C325996>

Denis McDonagh (2009), Greg's brother became a partner around 1959 in McDonagh Brothers surfboards. He advised that prior to the 1960s surfing was mostly body surfing or rubber surfplanes. He considered surfboards developed out of people wanting to ride something different to the surfplane and that surfing was based around lifesaving clubs and football. The McDonagh's experimented with different foams including refrigerator foam, coolite and polyurethane foam. Greg McDonagh and Barry Bennett were described as perfecting foam blanks in Australia. Sometimes a blank would be blown out of shape or be a third full. As it was costly to make a blank McDonagh suggested bellyboards were sometimes made from these reject moulds that were too short. Second-hand boards were also big business so some bellyboards were off-cuts but there were also custom orders. Typically bellyboards were built like "miniature surfboards". Surfboards at this time initially were sold from factories, before displays and retail outlets were added. The McDonaghs and Barry Bennett eventually opened Surf, Dive and Ski (McDonagh D 2009) to compete with the introduction of 'pop outs' being sold in the Nock and Kirby's department store.

Bennetts also made bellyboards, though kneeboards became a bigger item with shapers like John Ware and Bruce Hart on staff. A 1964 story accompanied with advertisements in Everbody magazine featured a Bennett bellyboard. Twin-finned they ranged from 3' to 4'6" and weighed 6-7 lbs. The cost - 18 pounds (Everbody 1964).



McDonagh bellyboard.



McDonagh bellyboard.

Source: <http://www.soulsurf.com.au>.



McDonagh bellyboard.



McDonagh bellyboard

Source: Photos courtesy Matt Ball.



Gordon Simpson - Waimea Bay.



Gordon Simpson - Waimea Bay.

Source: Photos courtesy Bud Browne's Surfing Hollow Days.



Gordon Simpson - Waimea Bay



Gordon Simpson - Waimea Bay.

Source: Photos courtesy Bud Browne's Surfing Hollow Days.



Bennett bellyboards (twin fin and 4'11 single). Photos John Wood, Everybody magazine 1964 (courtesy Gary Crockett) and Bradley Farrell.



c 1963 Bennett bellyboard- 4'10" x 20 3/4.
Photo: <https://www.vonweirdos.com>



Bennett bellyboard.



Bennett bellyboard.

Source: Photo Unknown and Bradley Farrell.



Bennett bellyboard.



Bennett bellyboard.

Source: Photos Mike Brown.



Bennett bellyboards at Bennett Museum: 9 August 2024. Photo courtesy Wayne Priestly.



Gordon Woods bellyboard.

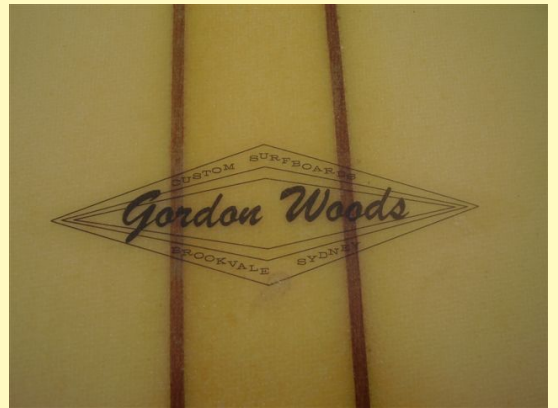


Gordon Woods bellyboard.

Source: Photos Mike Brown.

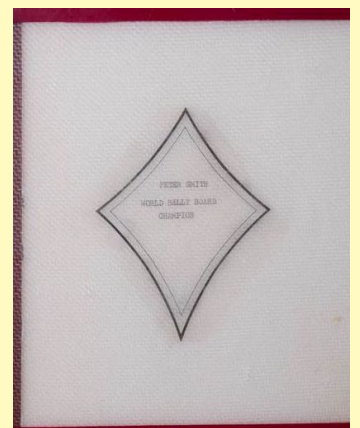


Gordon Woods bellyboard fin.



Gordon Woods bellyboard logo.

Source: Photos Mike Brown.



Keyo bellyboard: Pete Smith 'World Bellyboard Champion'. Photo Henry Marfleet.

Established in 1963, Shane surfboards made a number of bellyboards.



Shane bellyboards. Photo on far right by Gary Clyst.



From left: Far left: Shane bellyboard by Richard Harvey; Photos by Jim Swinton and Sandy Sandrin.



Freshwater grommets, early 1960. Frankie Peard with bellyboard. Photo courtesy Bill O'Donnell.

A later development was Midget Farrelly's "Belly Kneel-rider combination" advertised in Tracks magazine by Farrelly surfboards (Farrelly 1971a, Farrelly 1971b, Farrelly 1972a, Farrelly 1972b, Farrelly 1972c). Five foot long and twenty inches wide, the advertisement for this board refers to surfers exploring "the possibility of using a board that performs more than one function. It would seem that the ideal piece of surfing equipment could be ridden lying down, kneeling up, and possibly in the standing position". These boards were offered as either single or twin fins. Farrelly surfboards also produced "The Belly Rider" which was 48" by 19-20 inches. This board was reported to be able to "out race high speed gun boards". Features included a large single fin or twin fins, a "slight V" bottom and hard edges, while "The nose is sensitive being thin and scooped. A foot before the tail the deck is humped to carry the chest of the surfer". Lengths and widths could be varied and it was described as having "minimal flotation". The advertisement also stated that board had been used in Hawaiian surf up to 15 foot. These boards may well have been influenced by those of Larry Goddard whom Farrelly shared a house with in Hawaii during the winter of 1970-1971 (Goddard 2009).



November 1971 Tracks ad for a Farrelly bellyriders.

THE BELLY RIDER

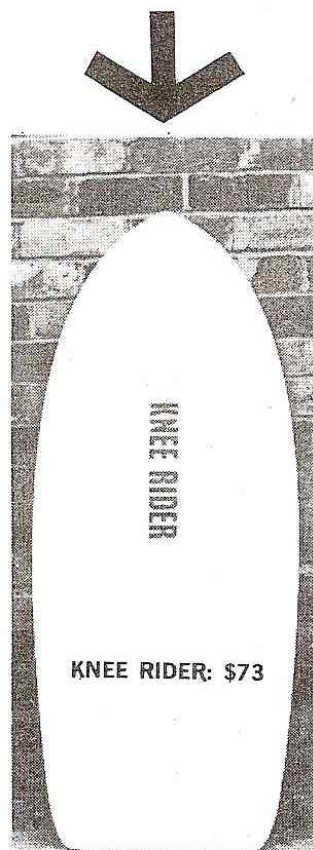
Dimensions: 48" x 19"-20".

This thin, high speed design was created for maximum performance across any challenging wave. This same design has been used in Hawaiian surf up to 15'. There is no other design in Australia like it since nobody has explored the exact design potential. Given a good wave the slight "V" bottom and hard edges will out race high speed gun boards. The nose is sensitive being thin and scooped. A foot before the tail the deck is humped to carry the chest of the surfer. Full carving turns can be had by burying the squarish extremities of the tail. With either a large, single or two small twin fins the Belly Rider is very positive and free in handling.

N.B.:

This is a board designed specifically for surfers who don't get to their knees or feet. It is strictly for the belly rider due to its finely balanced profile and minimal flotation. Lengths and widths can be varied on request.

Knee Riders can have a stretched version of the Belly Rider to 51" at \$73.00.



Farrelly bellyrider

THE BELLY KNEEL-RIDER COMBINATION

Dimensions: 5' x 20".

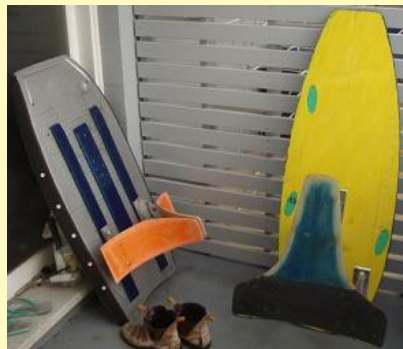
Many surfers have begun to explore the possibility of using a board that performs more than one function. It would seem that the ideal piece of surfing equipment could be ridden lying down, kneeling up, and possibly in the standing position. Waves allowing this is just what the BK is designed to do. The board is shorter than a conventional board to facilitate leverage from a very low centre of gravity. It is also just barely long enough to be operated from the standing position. Imagine the potential for this board in all kinds of Summer waves.

The bottom of the board features a slow curving line lengthways that guarantees lateral freedom at speed. The rails are low and fairly soft. The deck is scooped up to $\frac{3}{4}$ " to make a well and to put the surfer a little closer to the water without interfering with the rail thickness. The BK makes use of one large fin or else two smaller ones, depending on the turning characteristics demanded by the rider. There are two basic prices for the BK Rider. \$80 without a wood strip, and \$85 with.

Farrelly belly- kneel ridercombination.



Photos courtesy from Darren Burge.



Carrying on the tradition of making and riding bellyboards Brett Curtis has experimented with a variety of shapes, design ideas and materials. He was experimenting with foil boards before they became popular. EVA topped, ply paipo with parallel rail fins, 2 hydrofoiled boards to test the function of flat vs curved lifting surfaces and a different approach to foils. Photos courtesy Brett Curtis.