



Dog on Board

— SUP with your pup —

THE RACE WAS ON. A DOZEN people on stand-up paddleboards paddled ferociously across the Santa Cruz Harbor, flinging water with every stroke, and nearly 300 spectators had gathered on this overcast Saturday morning to watch their antics. The big draw? Dogs. Each paddler was toting at least one four-legged companion. Some sat between their owner's legs, ears flapping. Others stood at the front of the board like hood ornaments, tongues flying. On one board, a pair of Rat Terriers scurried back and forth as though their movements could help propel their

vessel. There was a bit of sliding, and a lot of laughter.

The event, dubbed DogJam! by its creator, Neil Pearlberg, is an annual fundraiser for the Santa Cruz Animal Shelter and something of a rare breed on the stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) scene. But as more people take to the sport, it's likely their dogs will, too. "A stand-up paddleboard just happens to perfectly fit one person and one dog," says Pearlberg, owner of Santa Cruz Stand Up Paddleboard Co. (supclass.com). "Plus, you get a dog on a stand-up paddleboard and he just seems to know what to do."

Pearlberg's dog, Rusty, an Australian Shepherd/Bernese Mountain Dog/mutt mix, doesn't like water, but will always get on the paddleboard. The pair is known around town for paddling ocean waves together. "I think it makes him better on the board—the fact that he's not interested in jumping in and swimming," says Pearlberg. "There was one time when I got knocked off by a rough wave and resurfaced to see Rusty still on, just surfing by himself."

SUP, an ancient form of surfing, has its origins in Hawaii. And before it had a name, it was the way surf instructors gained perspective to observe students



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and read the incoming swells. Stand-up paddleboards, which resemble surfing's longboards, stretch 10 to 12 feet and are geared more toward balance than speed. A single long-necked paddle is used to move the board through the water.

The sport has exploded in the last five years, thanks to celebrity advocates like big-wave surfer Laird Hamilton, and the fact that, unlike most board sports, SUP is easy to get the hang of. It's not overly technical; doesn't require a high fitness level; and can be done on lakes, rivers or the ocean, on still water or in waves. For dog owners, it opens up a whole new way to experience water sports with their pooch.

"Any dog can do it," says San Diego-based dog trainer Lara Schindler (**happydoghappyowner.com**). She started her Portuguese Water Dog, Snorkel, on a

stand-up paddleboard when he was four months old, but says dogs of any age can get involved; they don't need to be puppies. "This is one activity where the type of dog really doesn't matter," she says. "They can be any age, any breed, even any size. I've seen people SUPing with 100-pound dogs."

What matters, according to Schindler, is making the dog's first experience with the board a positive one. She suggests starting slowly on land, ensuring that your dog knows the basic commands—"sit," "stay" and "down"—before you go on the water. "You don't want the dog to be afraid of the board or the water, and you need a way to [keep] him from just jumping off the board whenever he wants," she explains.

Schindler also recommends starting on a bay or a lake, as it can be tricky to maintain your balance in waves, which

Practice Safe SUP

Veterinarian Shea Cox provides some practical tips for SUPing with your pup.



1. Make sure your dog's life jacket fits properly and let him get used to wearing it, both on land and in the water, before you go out on the board.
2. Have water available and offer it frequently. If your dog gets thirsty, he may try drinking salt water, which can lead to toxicity. A few gulps won't hurt, but watch for vomiting and early neurological signs of salt poisoning, such as dullness and depression.
3. Salt can be irritating to paws and skin, too. Rinse salt water and sand from your dog's coat after a swim, and always clean and dry his ears. Water trapped in the ears can result in a bacterial ear infection, particularly if the water is at all contaminated.
4. Dogs, especially those with short hair, white fur and pink skin, can easily sunburn. Some dogs have just a thin coat of hair on their bellies, and reflected light from the water can burn their undersides as well. Limit your dog's exposure during peak sun hours and apply sunblock to the ears and nose (and belly, if needed) 30 minutes before going outside. Dogs can be protected from sunburn by vests that block ultraviolet rays and sunscreen made with dog-repellent ingredients to keep them from licking it off.
5. If your dog is predisposed to eye problems, you may want to invest in a pair of Doggles to protect his peepers.
6. Running on sand is strenuous exercise. A dog who is out of shape can easily pull a tendon or ligament, so keep a check on your dog's activity. Hot sand can also blister tender paw pads.
7. Scan the water and sand for jellyfish. Be aware that sea lice can cause itchy red bumps on dogs.
8. Never, ever leave a dog unattended in your vehicle in the summer months. Heatstroke and death can occur within minutes in warm temperatures.

Dr. Shea Cox is a Bark blogger; get more good advice on canine health at thebark.com/content/she-a-cox-dvm



makes it scarier for your dog. Outfitting your dog in a life vest will help your peace of mind if he accidentally falls off, as well as give you a handle to lift him back on the board. Schindler teaches people to stand-up paddleboard with their dogs in one-hour private lessons. She says that's about as long as it takes, even for people with no prior SUP experience.

Stand-up paddleboarding instructor Linda Brown, owner of Michigan-based Paddle the Mitten (paddlethemitten.com), echoes Schindler's thoughts on the ease of learning the sport, but says every dog is different. All three of her Dachshunds enjoy SUPing on Michigan's inland lakes, but learned at different paces. Kraut, the six-year-old, took to it immediately, and charges right up to the front of the board. The youngest, Gretchen, was the shyest. "Her first time out, she did fine until she realized the other two were still back on the shore," Brown says. "Then, she jumped in and swam back."

While Brown typically SUPs with one pup at a time, on occasion, she's had all three on the board at once. Kraut stands at the helm; Gretchen sits between her legs; and Fritzie, the oldest, patrols back and forth. "I can't say I recommend it," she laughs. "They're stubborn and don't listen to me all at once."

Whether Brown has one dog on the board or all three, she uses the HovieSUP Nomad—a generous 12 feet


long, it supports up to 350 pounds. She suggests buying a bathmat with suction cups for the front of the board, where most dogs like to sit, to reduce sliding. (The middle and rear sections of most boards have a non-slip surface.)

Brown's favorite client is Judy Huston, also a Michigan resident, who decided to take up the sport at age 71—and to do it with her 92-pound White Shepherd, Kole. Huston, a former windsurfer, heard about SUP from her son and thought it would be something fun to do with Kole, who has developed intervertebral disc disease (IVDD) and can no longer participate in many activities for fear of injury, and Callie, her 15-pound Sheltie.



"The trickiest part with Kole on the board is balance," Huston says, "He's so big, you really feel it if he moves around." She asked for a HovieSUP Nomad of her own for Mother's Day so she could practice with Kole on the pond in her backyard. "I'm so looking forward to it," she says. "I think it will be the most fun I've had with my dogs on the water in my whole life." **B**

Mark Your Calendar

DogJam! Paddle & Surf Show is on deck at the Santa Cruz Harbor on August 11, 2012. Find out more at supclass.com or check out DogJam! on Facebook.

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