

No Need For Skis!

By Richard Gray

In my last article (Get On-Line With Your Feet!) we learned how to Barefoot by the easiest methods going. I used the step off from skis and wakeboards to get you up on your feet for the first time. Now it is time to rid ourselves of these cumbersome devices that take up room in the boat and change graphics every year (necessitating that upgrade every spring) and start doing it “Natural.” No Need For Skis! - the “Natural” way being the front deepwater start.

Equipment check: the optimum will be a standard barefoot rope & handle, a padded barefoot suit, a pair of padded barefoot shorts, a brand new Mercury-Powered Flightcraft tow boat with a boom & skylon, me driving, and your favourite hunk or babe as the spotter. On the other end of the spectrum you could have a campfire dare to Vern, just after midnight at a Wizard Lake social - underwear only, old slalom rope, 1981 Powerslot with 8 “spotters”.

Try to stay as close to the former as possible, although you can bet the latter has been done. Seriously, any boat you regularly ski behind will do. Beg, borrow or steal a padded barefoot suit. (Note: a jump suit has all the padding needed for this.) A boom and/or Skylon would be an added bonus but is not necessary.

Assuming you have logged in some mileage on your feet by using the methods in my last article, and are in tune with the proper body position and “glide,” we will now get you up *ne pas de ski*.

The front deep can be thought of as a process with 4 phases (some say 3 but I like adding the 4th to set you in the mode of controlled movements). These phases are, Pull out of the water, Planing on your butt, Planting your feet and Standing up! You can apply the following recipe to a long line start or a start off the 5' rope off the boom (handle attached to the boom). The same techniques apply to both, but you will need to be patient on the long line, giving extra time for the boat to reach speed and there will be less upward pull helping you to stand up.

Phase 1: To set up for the pull out of the water, place the arch of one foot on top of the rope and the arch of the other foot on top of the bottom foot. Lie back in the water and relax. Have your legs out fairly straight and together, and the handle in by your belly button (photo 1). When you are ready, signal the driver to go then immediately lift your hips up and kick your head back (photo 2). Your driver can pull you up with similar acceleration - or less - than a typical slalom start for you, rolling the speed up smoothly. The goal is to have the boat plane you out on your upper back. The initial plane out happens fairly quickly. A common problem is to hold this position for too long.



Phase 2 is sitting up and planing on your butt. Soon after the initial pull out you can begin to sit up to a position where your planing surface becomes your butt and you are looking straight ahead - feet still on the rope (photo 3). Hold this position for as long as you want to get comfortable. The driver should hold the speed during this phase (around 20 - 25 mph).



Phase 3 is the plant - NOT the stand up!! It is very important to get a good solid plant and ride in a “3 point” position before you stand up. The “3 point” is a position where you are riding on your butt and both feet, **one foot on either side of your butt**, about 6" in front of the point your butt is touching the water (photo 4). The keys to a good “3 point” are to have your knees fairly close together and your feet as wide as comfortably possible. Your arms can be slightly bent at this point and shoulders forward over your butt.



This position is extremely stable and is the foundation for your front standup on the deep start as well as tumble turns. *Hint: If the water is rolly, you can make good use of the “3 point” as a way to negotiate the rough water.*

Phase 4: All that’s left now is to simply **Stand Up!!** In control, slowly push down on your feet and come up inch by inch, much like the muscle movements used to get up out of a chair (photo 5). Let your arms OUT as you stand up - **DO NOT PULL IN AS YOU STAND UP.**



Ultimately, you will end up standing in your good posture gliding across the water, arms slightly bent (photo 6). Take your time and think of every step each time you do the start. If you run into problems **SLOW DOWN** your movements! Follow these instructions and you will master it before the first cottage party.



The front deepwater stand up is the most difficult aspect of, and the gateway to, the “cool guy” (& “girl”) starts like the flying-dock-start, running-beach-start, bridge-start, off-the-top-deck-of-the-houseboat-start and of course, the “I-bet-you-can’t-do-a-flyer-off-the-boathouse-wearing-a-bra-on-your-head-Vern”-start. Once again, start with the former and work your way up, but you can bet the latter has been done.