

Coaches' guide to better wakeboarding:

Let the wake do the work

By Frank Good, photos by Ross Outerbridge

Sometimes knowing how something works can help you to use it to your advantage. Have you ever wondered how a wakeboarder can get 10 feet of air from a 2 ft. bump in the water when a snowboarder can't get as high from a wake-sized mogul in the snow? If you're currently involved in wakeboarding and aren't familiar with the how's, what's, and why's of the wake, you should find this information useful.

The first step towards improving your riding is to visit a WSWC certified wakeboard coach. With some advice on technique, tips from an educated coach, and a good understanding of how wakeboarding works, you can turn your dreams into reality

UNDERSTANDING THE WAKE

The first thing a rider needs to recognize is that the wake represents more than just a convenient jump ramp behind the boat. Just as a surfer needs to understand the dynamics of the ocean and how waves are created, wakeboard riders who are serious about getting 'airtime' should know a little bit about the dynamics of a wake, and how they can use it to their advantage.

Firstly, try and think of the development of a wake as being similar to that of a wave. The water should normally be flat, but as the boat travels through it, a wake is created. The wake can also be thought of as being a wave, which is water being pushed by energy. Bigger wakes indicate more energy is pushing the water, so they deliver more force. When used effectively, the wake can provide a great launch pad for numerous airborne moves.

Now that you're more familiar with wave dynamics, it should make more sense when you're next out on the water. If you are able to use the wake to push you up into the air, and not try to jump off the top of it, you will end up using less of your energy on the take off, and leave more to perform the more complex moves. So go on, try it!

This is how a good rider like Kris Killick (pictured) makes it look so easy and effortless. He lets the energy of the wake do a lot of the work, and only uses the necessary effort to execute each move.

Once you understand the basic water and wake theory, wakeboarding becomes all about body position and timing, which basically means learning how to put your body in the right position at the right time.

Now, let's move on to how to get some seriously big airtime!

If you ride over the wake you will feel it push you up, but you won't get huge air without some refinements to your technique. If your goal is to jump higher, then you will need to build up your energy while approaching the wake with a progressive edge, and then release it against the force of the wake to get air.

PROGRESSIVE EDGING

You probably have heard of progressive edging before. What it means is that you increase your edge pressure and angle of approach the closer you get to the wake. The goal is to have your maximum cut at the wake so you can use the force of the wake to push you up. In addition, by cutting at the wake with a progressive edge, you will build pressure on the board, and tension in the line. As you hit the wake that energy will be released by simply standing tall and pushing the board against the energy of the wake.

The end result will be that you get pushed up higher in the air to help you hold your grab, spin, or flip. The only effort on your part is holding your body position against the boat. Let the wake do the rest of the work, and you will be going bigger, in more control, and soaring like a pro.

Here are a few simple tips to help you get the most out of your wake jumps:

1. Cut out beside the boat 10-15 feet and coast until the boat starts to pull you back.



2. Gently roll your board over on one edge. There is no need to slash a quick turn to point the board at the wake! Turning hard is just a waste of energy, and it doesn't help you to edge progressively.



3. Once you are on the board's edge and approaching the wake, continue to dig the edge in harder. Think about continuously turning the board in an arc towards the wake, while showing more of the base of your board to the boat.



4. Build up your edge so that it is strongest at the wake. You don't need to pull your hardest at the wake, but ensure that the strongest part of your cut is AT the wake. It might only be 10% of your hardest possible cut, but it is the hardest part of any moment in your approach towards the wake.

At this point of the approach your body should be positioned such that you approach the wake at a 90° angle. Coupled with a comfortable body position, try and lean against the pull from the boat. Don't forget to keep edging as you are riding up the wake to hold all of your energy.



Most beginner riders think that in order to get height, you must cut as hard as you can. Wrong! There is no doubt that a hard cut will develop a lot of speed and give you distance, but it won't give you any height. This is an example of using too much force at the wrong place, at the wrong time. By using the correct progressive edge, you will use less energy on your approach, and in effect, get more air.

Now that you are at the wake after a good progressive edge, use the energy of the wake to pop you in the air.

5. As you ride up the wake on edge, stand tall! If you are bent over as the wake pushes you up, it will put you in a bad position in the air, and on your landing.

Keep your handle by your waist, your hips up towards the handle (don't pull the handle towards you), and your chest and head up. In this position you can push straight down on the wake.

Now, resist the force of the wake pushing up on you by pushing down against it. To time it properly, think about trying to break the board between your feet at the peak of the wake.



6. Release your “edging energy” straight down, and you will feel the wake “pop” you. Don’t forget to keep your eyes open and bend your knees on landing, because you’ll be dropping from much higher in the air.



ADDITIONAL TIPS

A good progressive edge will build up energy all the way to the wake so you can use the energy of wake, but you have to hold that cut all the way up the wake! One of the biggest

mistakes that people make is to “flatten off” their board at the wake after a good approach. This wastes all of the extra force they created by cutting at the wake.

You want to release that energy down against the wake so that the wake pushes you up with more force, and you get more air. This is what is referred to as “popping”. By pushing the board down into the water the water pushes back and “pops” the rider into the air. This is a lot like jumping on a trampoline — you push down and the energy stored in the springs is released to push you up. You can practice popping on the water by doing ollies (jumps done without the wake). Ollie by pushing the board into the water with force, then stand tall as you get pushed up. Hopefully you now see how a good wake jump uses this technique as well — you push against the wake, and it pushes you into the air. The more energy you have in your push, the higher you go.

Frank Good owns the Good Times Wakeboarding School in Ottawa and is a WSWC certified WB course conductor and coach.