First and foremost, I’m a surfer and my philosophy for kitesurfing is to ride the wave and not the kite. Having said this, the kite provides a great extension to surfing, adding more accessibility, speed and power to each wave. There are a couple of key techniques for using a kite in waves. The first is to use the kite to whip yourself onto a wave, depowering it while you ride the wave, using the wave’s power as you would surfing. Then, when the wave has finished, you repower the kite and head out the back again. The second technique uses the kite to catch the wave as well as providing extra power to allow faster, more powerful turns. I believe it is important to master both these techniques, as both ways work best in different conditions and it’s nice be able to combine the two seamlessly on a single wave if need be. Like anything, it takes practice, the right products and some specific techniques to master these skills.

“Surf when it’s glassy and kite when it’s windy.”

Ben Wilson
Ben Wilson

Ben has spent the last eight years turning his passion and experience into a world-class company with best friend Dano See. After his 10 years as a team rider for Slingshot and having travelled the globe in search of big swells, Ben understands the value of bridging the gap between the two. He was one of the first to use a surfboard in harmony with a kite and continues to drive the sport in new directions. He continues to chase big swell and believes that the largest waves can only be ridden with a kite. For Ben, kitesurfing is the ultimate extension of surfing, providing the opportunity to enjoy even blown out onshore conditions.

Contents

1. The Right Kite
2. If You’re Kitesurfing You Need a Surfboard
3. The Harness
4. Kite Position
5. Catching a Wave
6. Surviving a Wipeout
7. Body Position
8. Riding Toe-side
9. The Search for Perfection
The Right Kite

Kitesurfing is a three-dimensional sport with a lot of elements at play, so having simple equipment that won’t tangle you up is crucial. More bells and whistles means more lines and unnecessary gadgets to get in the way. Before you hit the water, you need to choose the right kite for wave-riding. You’re looking for something that sits comfortably in the air and turns consistently throughout the power zone so you aren’t jerked around. A kite that turns erratically when you’re trying to surf will end up pulling you off the wave and leaving you stuck between sections and out of rhythm. You also need a kite that drifts well and floats down the line with you.

If You’re Kitesurfing You Need a Surfboard

If you’re going surfing you need a surfboard. There’s no point riding a twin tip in the waves if you are trying to surf the wave because you’ll just sink in between turns. I recommend only ever getting a surfboard from a surfboard shaper or a brand that has a surfboard shaper with years of experience. They have all their rockers, templates and details fine-tuned so you’re getting the best. What I see a lot of since this wave craze has started is kiteboarding brands who have been making twiptips for years jump onboard and start making surfboards with no experience. I always work with the best shapers like Rawson, DHD and Tokoro as they know what works and have years of experience refining their boards.

The Harness

You should always use a waist harness as it pulls you out rather than up and out like a seat harness. A seat harness should only be used by people with back problems or injuries that prevent using a waist harness.
Kite Position

Once you’ve got equipment organised, you can focus on kite positioning. Setting yourself up to catch a wave requires some calculation, as you need to think about both your position in relation to the wave and the angle of the kite.

Check that you are always:

1. Turning the kite before the board
2. Making the same turn with the board as with your kite*
3. Travelling at the same speed and in the same direction as your kite
4. Keeping your kite at 45° or lower. When the kite is at 12 o’clock you have the least control. You have the most control when the kite is down at the waterline so your baseline is halfway between at 45°. Always work from this point whether you’re riding a wave or tacking up-wind.

In contrast to surfing, when you’re kiting aim to catch the wave further out, well before it breaks. Once you’re in position and have chosen a wave, adjust the angle of your kite and prepare yourself to catch it. Parking the kite in the right position and allowing it to drift down the line allows you to ride the wave and pick it up again when needed.

*Understanding the difference between turning your kite and steering your kite is crucial. Turning your kite changes the leading edge’s angle of attack. If you’ve changed the kite’s direction, you will need to do the same turn with your board. Steering your kite is simply moving your kite up and down without changing the leading edge’s angle of attack.
Catching a Wave

In contrast to surfing, when you are kiting you need to catch the wave further out, well before it breaks. Once you’re in position and have chosen a wave, adjust the angle of your kite and prepare yourself to catch it. Parking the kite in the right position and allowing it to drift down the line allows you to ride the wave and pick it up again when needed.

When it comes to speed, you don’t need to be going flat-out, just fast enough to stay on the plane. Having said that, it’s better to keep moving though as speed can be quickly washed off but takes longer to build up.

Surviving a Wipeout...

Visualising what each wave is likely to do will help ensure you and the kite are in the right place. But when you do wipe out there are a few things to remember that will help get you back out while keeping your kite in the air. Keeping the kite flying is the main thing but once you’ve got it under control, aim it out to sea at about 45°. Sheet it in as you go under waves but sheet out when you feel the pressure of the wave pulling you the opposite direction. If you let that tension build, you’ll become a catapult and may get sling shotted out the back of the wave and crash your kite. If you’re stuck under the water and can’t see or feel where the kite is, don’t fly it at all.
Body Position

Whether you’re on water or land, the closer together your legs and more upright you stand, the less balance you’ll have. The further you spread your feet apart whilst lowering your centre of gravity, the more stable you are. To keep a solid stance on your board, make sure you bend your knees and bring your centre of gravity lower. Try to make sure your body is always relaxed and not stiff.

Foot placement also affects the way you ride. The closer your back foot is to the tailpad, the sharper and more vertical your turns will be. Weight is kept mainly on the front foot and through the toes/ball of foot while the back foot controls your direction and keeps you balanced. Being mobile on your board allows for more variety and control, allowing dynamic moves and also helping you get around efficiently.

When trying to maximise up-wind direction, move your feet as far up the board as possible and make sure your board is as flat as possible in the water so you’re maximising its surface and planing area.
Riding Toe-side

It’s really important to remember that your board must mirror the kite during major movements. For example, if you turn your kite long and slow through the power zone then you’ll need to do the same with the board. Mastering toe-side riding is just as important as heel-side riding, because when you ride a wave you’re constantly going between toe-side rail and heel-side rail. Here are some key tips for going up-wind toe-side:

1. Make sure your kite is pulling you off your hip and not your stomach. This won’t tweak your body as much and will give you a better angle of attack
2. 90% of weight should be on your front foot
3. 10% on your back foot – it’s there for balance and steering
4. Your kite should always be at 45°
5. To control your speed, sheet in and steer your kite up and down instead of turning; every time you turn the kite pulls you off course
Since starting Ben Wilson Surf (now BWSurf) in 2005, Dano and I have gone from making instructional films and hosting coaching camps to designing, manufacturing and distributing our own range of kites, boards, bars and accessories. During our time in the industry we’ve been lucky enough to meet some incredible characters, help shape the sport and share the stoke with as many people as possible. Every day we refine our techniques, look for better ways to build our products and bring kitesurfing to the mainstream market. We’re passionate about building the global community and the best quality products. As the only surf-specific company, we understand the rigors of riding in swell so you’ll receive the boards, kites and bars for tough conditions.

The Noise Pro kite is the culmination of nearly 15 years of experience and development from Dano and myself plus our Team Riders and network of over 100 Test Team crew around the world. We’ve managed to simplify its design and remove the unnecessary ‘features’ because when you’re in the surf, the last thing you need is an extra bit of rope or adjustment to get tangled in. It’s been a process of fine-tuning and streamlining our design to make a kite that’s stable, safe and a true complement to surfing.

It’s the same story with our range of boards. Each one has everything you need without the bells and whistles and each one is great to ride with or without the kite. Surf in the morning and kite in the afternoon, that’s our philosophy.

Our search for perfection never ends.

~ Ben Wilson ~

For more information on BWSurf products, visit the website at www.bwsurf.com or call Josh on 0417546504