

State of the Stand Up Industry



by Jimmy Lewis

There are lots of stand up boards and paddles on the market today. There are the established big brands and there are small, relatively unheard of brands and seemingly more and more with each new issue of a stand up magazine. Everyone wants to sell you a stand up board and paddle. There are shop owners who have “their own” brands now. Costco sells stand up board and paddles. The Chinese manufactures of any product related to stand up paddling or surfing sends emails to any and all shops and business who have anything to do with sports, whether it’s water sports or not, offering said business to produce boards, paddles or whatever, for them. Many of these shops go for it and get boards made from these factories with their shop name or, more often, some clever Hawaiian sounding name for “their brand.” These shops or other eager entrepreneurs, see a way to make some money off of this new sport and there’s NOTHING wrong with that.

It’s the person who’s going to be BUYING these boards that needs some information. Now WHO is designing and shaping these boards? And how are they built? Most people, especially the end buyer now days, don’t know that this is an important thing to know. Most of the stand up boards on the market today, even a few of the “big” brands, are using what I call a “regular surfboard lamination” construction. That consists of a shaped piece of Styrofoam with a shell of epoxy and a few layers of fiberglass. Some are putting a thin veneer of bamboo or some other type of wood, claiming that this is a “sandwich” and that it’s BETTER than a PVC sandwich. This is fantasy. The bamboo or whatever wood they might be using is a LITTLE bit better than another layer of fiberglass but it will dent after a short period of time on the water just as a board that’s built with only the layers of fiberglass.

Some people have no idea what sandwich construction is. I'll explain simply:

Sandwich construction is where you have two or more pieces of fiberglass on each side of a thin piece of foam material, usually 1/8" or 1/4" PVC high density foam. This is vacuumed onto the Styrofoam blank on the top and the bottom of the board creating the "sandwich" construction. The thicker the piece of material that's between the layers of glass (the glass being the "bread" of the sandwich and the PVC or other material being the "cheese" of the sandwich.) the stronger and stiffer the board will be. Boards with only 2-3 layers of glass do not have much impact strength and they dent easily, especially over a period of time. Having a thin piece of bamboo between two layers of glass is NOT much of a sandwich because the bamboo is not thick enough to create the proper engineering of the sandwich principal. PVC Sandwich is the lightest, strongest construction available. And it's a little more expensive to do because the PVC high density foam used to create a proper sandwich construction is expensive.

Quality of the construction of the boards, regardless if it's a sandwich construction or regular surfboard lamination construction, is important. One of my deckpad suppliers who is in China, has told me that because of the stand up craze, ALL of the major board manufacturers in China are having a BOOM in business. This is because there are so many people coming out of the wood work to get these boards made so they can cash in on this new market. She told me that now the factories are super busy but don't have enough workers to produce so they try to entice workers from OTHER factories to come and work with them. So at this time in China, the workers are moving around a lot, from factory to factory looking for better pay. What this means is that the quality is not consistent.

Most people are not aware of this but all of the boards on the market are all hand made. Some may have molds to keep the board shapes the same but most everything else, including the shaping, is done by hand. They don't just mix up a few chemicals and pour them into a mold and a finished board pops out. Making surfboards (stand up boards) takes skill. Even though all of these boards are made in large quantities, they are all individually built by hand. And those hands need to be skilled and the quality control people in the factories have to be skilled at overseeing the construction. When there is a gypsy work force, this quality and consistency takes a back seat to quantity!! And that's all these companies care about. There is one factory that my China deckpad supplier told me about that had JUST received an order for 2500 stand up boards!!! And the week before this company was just about to close the doors on their business. That means that since they were JUST about to go out of business, their business had probably been sliding for quite a while and they probably had been laying off workers for a while. Now with orders totaling 2500, where do they get workers to build these boards? They have to hire them

and train them. Meaning that the quality of the boards is going to be marginal for a LONG time before the new work force has it dialed on how to do them correctly.

So when you go into a shop and the shop has its own brand to sell you, and that board is a few hundred dollars less than a bigger brand named board, you can be pretty sure that board was a generic shape from a Chinese factory that this shop owner had built with their own brand name on it and that it's probably not built to last more than a few months before it starts having problems— more than likely, denting of the deck and any other area where it might have impact or pressure. Also those boards without sandwich construction are heavier. Weaker and heavier.

The same goes with paddles too. Paddle makers send out mass emails to shops and the shop owner will order a pile of the paddles with a fancy name on it and sell them. The fact is that anything will work. Boards or paddles, anything will work. But there's a HUGE difference in something that will merely work and something that works great!! Anyone can feel the difference, not just experts. In fact it's the novice that can really feel the difference even more so than someone with more experience.

There are a few paddle makers who DESIGN the paddle themselves, such as Jimmy Terrell of Quickblade Paddles. He designs ALL of the Quickblade paddles. He's not buying generic shapes from a manufacturer and putting his logo on it like many shop owners and other "brands" do. Just as I do ALL of the designs and shapes of every one of the boards in my line. I don't have anyone else doing boards for me like SEVERAL of the "big" brands do, where they have some ghost shapers doing the boards and then they put their name on the boards. When you go shopping for a board or when you're doing research on what board to buy, do some investigating on WHO is behind the brand (who designed and shaped the boards). There are some brands that have someone's name on it, but those "names" have never shaped a board in their lives (or at least never did it for a living). There are brands that don't use the shaper's name as their brand such as Paddle Surf Hawaii, but there IS a guy who shapes and designs those boards (Blane Chambers). The brand 404 also has a real shaper behind their name. I've been shaping for 44 years and I put my name on all the boards that I make. My signature, along with the shark logo is my brand.

Check things out before you go out and buy something that you've "saved" a few hundred dollars on.

Thanks and aloha,

Jimmy Lewis