

Teaching Surf Instructors to Teach

National Surf Schools and Instructors Association



Instructors and Coaches Training Manual



Equipment

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EQUIPMENT

From life jackets to surfboards, it's important that surfing dogs have all the right gear to enjoy this sport safely. Surfing dogs should always wear life jackets when surfing. There are many different ones on the market, check the dog you are training to see if the life vest the owner has chosen fits well for the dog's weight and is a good fit for their body type. Soft-top surfboards are best and most popular for canine surfers. These boards have more grip for a dog's paws and claws and are much safer than the hard boards.

The Board

As with people, the size of the dog will determine the size and type of the board to use since there are no specific boards for dog surfers, yet. So, surfboards used by dog surfers are the same boards used by humans. However, it is highly recommended to use a "soft-top" board.



The spongy surface, relatively longer length, wider width, and thickness offers a higher degree of traction, flotation and protection from injury, compared to hard fiber glass and epoxy boards. It's softer exterior is grippier for the dogs claws and safer to use especially when they "wipe out" by pearling or getting hit by a rogue, off-line, or sneaker wave. Dogs on boards are particularly vulnerable to this since they can't voluntarily choose to avoid it. The wider width allows more room for four paw riding. Most come with standard EPS (expanded polystyrene) or PU (polyurethane) constructions.

For small dogs up to 20lbs, typically a kid's size board, works best. This can be anywhere from 4 ft to 6ft in length. For medium dogs from 20 - 40 lbs and in the 6ft – 8ft range. For larger dogs, 40 lbs and over, the 8ft – 9ft range works best, For X-large dogs over 60 lbs, you'll need a surfboard or SUP over 9ft. You need a lot of extra flotation to keep the dog stable as they glide across the water on their own, this goes for large and small. And for multiple dogs and humans on a board, larger stand up paddle boards 9ft to 12 ft, soft or hard work best.



Another detail to be aware of is the shape. A board that has the right amount of "bottom rocker" works best. The more nose rocker a board has, the better it and the dog maneuver together through the whitewater. This means the nose bends up in the front. A low rocker, or flat board may cause the dog and board to pearl and/or a rail to catch causing the board to wipe out.



For the more advanced surfing dog, notably featured in competitions in the "Shredder" division, there are surfboard companies that will customize and fit a board based on size and weight of the dog. There is not a great many choices out there for these types of boards, however, as dog surfing continues to become more popular hopefully so will the choices for dog surfing specific equipment.

If you use a hard fiberglass or Epoxy surfboard, you will need to cover the deck with traction pads. The dog is already on overload with everything going on around him so trying to stand on your waxed up slippery surfboard won't help the situation.

It's also useful to use stomp pads on soft tops to mark the place you want the dog to stay and provide additional traction. (More on this in Grip/Stomp Pad section).

The more the dogs are able to dig their claws into the surface of the board the better, and of course, this is much easier using a traction pad or soft-top surfboard. Most of the organized Surf Dog Competitions will only allow the use of soft top surfboards for safety reasons.

Grip/Stomp Pad

The board will need to be outfitted with a grip/stomp/traction-pad it will give the dog extra grip to stay on board. On foam boards, some dogs are stable without a traction pad but the extra traction will benefit the dog plus mark their spot, and protect the deck of the board from scratches and claw marks that can turn into unnecessary repairs. These pads typically cost between \$20 to \$75. These pads are also a great addition for stability, plus they tend to prevent the dog from running to the nose and pearling (see Mat Training section).



The stomp pad should be positioned towards the rear of the board. Test out the best place for the stomp pad by first taking the board and the dog into the water, where you can stand, position your dog on the board, and push it lightly, into a little wave. Take note where the dog goes and what position on the board they remain when the board is moving. Place the pad in the place where the dog

rides when the board glides across the water. If the dog has a tendency to run to the nose of the board and pearl, you can resolve this by gluing blockers (i.e. waterproof doggie toys, rubber duckies, or parts of a stomp pad etc.) and place them across the board so that the dog is unlikely to cross over them. Until trained, it's almost automatic that dogs will run to the high end of the board away from the water to shore. One of the most effective ways of training the dog to maintain the correct position is Mat Training.



Mat Training

- Is a versatile foundation skill that can be used to train the dog to stay on the stomp pad, the ideal spot for successful riding.
- It promotes calmness and teaches the dog what to do as an alternative to jumping, barking, bowling over house guests, counter-surfing, or any other undesired activity ranging from improper guest etiquette to separation anxiety.
- Having your dog go to their mat, *and stay there*, is a life skill every dog should learn.
- Mat training allows you to train your dog to go wait on their



mat when you cue them to do so or anytime a predetermined event (such as someone knocking on the door) occurs.

- All you need is a comfortable mat (such as a bath mat), and some treats. A clicker is optional, but helpful.
- It will make positioning on the board much easier. (this will be covered in detail in Mat Training).

Handle, short lead rope

A handle or short lead rope comes in handy when you (the handler) need to retrieve the board. The handle also works well when pulling the board and dog together on the board out into the waves. It also helps with launching the board, allowing you to keep the board stable in the moving water while you wait for the ideal wave. The handle can be put easily on to the foam board, on the tail, where the leash loop would be attached.



The short lead rope works well with bigger dogs who like to pull toys around, the surfboard becomes a big dog toy and looks cool when the dog can pull his own board to the water. But, be careful the dog doesn't bite the surfboard and it becomes a huge dog toy. The short leash can be applied to the leash plug.



Dog Life Jacket/Vest, PFD (pet floatation device)



Safety first. It is absolutely essential to have a life vest or jacket for the dog. All dogs can swim naturally or dog paddle, and will keep their head above water by themselves, but the vest has several other uses. The dog will be tumbling into the water, more than they normally or naturally would if just swimming. Remember also that you will be pushing them into waves in water that is way over their heads. So keeping the dog upright, head above the water, and floating quickly back to the surface after falling off the board. It also makes the dog much more visible, which is particularly important for the small to medium dogs. The life vest should be bright colors, such as red, yellow, orange, or bright blue. You will need to keep your eye on the dog when pushing them, because they will not always be easily within your grasp, as they glide away toward the shore. The dog life vest/jacket, as opposed to a vest for humans, has a small handle on the top, on the dog's back. Use the handle by grabbing it as soon as you see the dog float to the surface. This is crucial to avoid allowing the dog to bob around out in a spot where, another wave can



come in and hit them again, pushing them under. When they swallow salt water, the dog can get sick. So, as you can see the handle is essential. Look for it on the owner's vests that they bring to sessions.

The vest should fit as snugly as possible to keep from getting caught on things, but loose enough for maximum comfort for the dog, just like their collars. The challenge is to minimize the stress on the dog.

Some brands available to purchase,

that you can recommend to owners, are Ruffwear, Outward Hound, Kurgo, EzyDog. Some other brands are available online or in pet stores.

Rashguard and wetsuits

Experience has shown that a canine rash guard can help protect your surf dog. The lighter colored, short haired dogs need protection from the sun. Darker colored dogs need protection from heat from the sun. And in the inverse the rash guard can also help keep the surf dog warmer by insulating their bodies from cold water. If you see your dog shaking, it's time to take them out of the water. Some owners have had custom wetsuits made for their dogs and worn underneath their life vests giving the dog an extra layer of warmth in colder water.



Swim Fins (Optional)

Where you are no longer able to stand in the water, swim fins are extremely helpful in maneuvering and paddling the dog and board through the



whitewater, paddling through strong rip currents or making it to the outside into bigger make-able waves with face. For intermediate dog surfing and shredders they are essential. It also makes it much easier when you are swimming with the dog and board, in the water, looking for those larger outside set waves. Swim fins also make it much easier to launch your dog, giving you drive and flow to catch the crest of a wave, get the board with dog positioned and pushed into the wave. Swim fins help the wearer to move



through water more efficiently, as human feet are too small and inappropriately shaped to provide extra thrust, especially when the wearer is trying to navigate the dog and surfboard through strong currents that increase hydrodynamic drag. Short, stiff-bladed fins are effective for short bursts of acceleration and maneuvering, and are useful for bodysurfing back to shore. (see Intermediate Surf Dog Training)



Video Cameras

The ocean is usually a no-go area for cameras. However, the popular GoPros were developed with things like videoing surfing in mind. Go Pro cameras are the go-to for taking water shots. The camera can be easily installed onto soft top and fiberglass surfboards with additional tools and mounting accessories. Invest in one to capture your session and the dog's best rides.

SUMMARY

The right gear for dog surfing is essential in order to teach and enjoy this sport safely and efficiently. Life jackets, also known as pet floatation devices, with a handle is the first requirement and are absolutely essential. The surfboard itself should be a soft-top. They give the dog more grip, and are much safer than hard boards. These are the only type allowed to be used in most surf dog competitions. The size of the board is highly dependent upon the size of the dog. A short kids soft top board, as opposed to a



long board, are essential for a much better ride for small to medium dogs. In addition, one of the most important considerations for all boards is the shape. Boards with more bottom rocker in the nose work the best. Some companies will customize and fit boards for the dog. The next most important piece of equipment is the stomp pad, or traction pads carefully fitted to the spot where the dog rides in the most consistently smooth manner. As well as providing traction, if positioned correctly, they will help to prevent nose riding, and resulting pearling. This section also introduces mat training, useful for the dog to learn for many many reasons, but primarily for training the dog to maintain the correct board position. A handle, or short lead rope is a handy addition to the back of the board, and has many uses. Some optional choices are rash guards for pet comfort, and warmth, and swim fins for use in outside set wave, intermediate surfing.