

What's up with SUP

Stand-up paddle boarding rides a wave of excitement

Stand-up paddling has become as popular in lakeside communities as it has on the beach.

By Mark Cardwell

BODIE SHANDRO IS one chiseled dude, and he should be. A lifetime outdoor enthusiast and self-confessed fitness junkie, he has run, skied, paddled and surfed for much of his 48 years, often in the company of world-class athletes in exotic places that most of us will see only in our dreams. But he says he's rarely been amped like that day in 2008 when he tried stand-up paddling, or SUP, for the first time.

"I couldn't believe it," Shandro recalls from his mountain home overlooking Heffley Lake, a half-hour drive northeast of Kamloops in south-central British Columbia. "It was as if SUP was created just for me: one sport that encompassed my main passions—fun, fitness and freedom."

Based on the ancient Hawaiian sport of paddle surfing, which enabled 1960s-era "beach boys" in Waikiki to paddle out on long boards to take and sell pictures of tourists learning to surf, the sport started to become popular in recent years thanks to hard-core Hawaiian and U.S. West Coast surfers such as living legends Laird Hamilton and Dave Kalama, who started ripping waves using modern boards and paddles.

The strong core workout that SUP can deliver in most weather conditions on open seas or inland waters—and the fact that, unlike surfing, it is relatively easy to learn—has also attracted throngs of cross-training fitness buffs and celebrities. "SUP is fun, you can learn the basic skills in a couple of hours and it keeps you fit with a low-impact cardio and endurance workout," says Shandro. "But the best thing is that it's accessible to almost anyone."

He notes that, among the 300 people he gave SUP lessons to on three continents in 2011, one was 82, another weighed 147 kilograms (328 pounds) and a

large percentage were women.

"Most women who like to be out on the water need help getting a kayak or a canoe off the rack of their car," says Shandro. "But with a SUP board they are totally free. And you don't need the ocean. Almost any body of water will do."

SUP's democratic nature is the main reason, by all accounts, it has become the fastest-growing watersport in the world. And while the speed of that growth has caught manufacturers and retailers by surprise, no one is complaining.

"Demand is huge," says Kyle Reeves, co-owner of SUP board maker Jimmy Styks. Headquartered in Huntington Beach, California, the company started making SUP boards five years ago and is now the world's largest manufacturer.

According to Reeves, demand is still strong along the sun-kissed beaches of Hawaii and California. But the sport's popularity is spreading tsunami-style to inland areas of Canada and the U.S. Reeves says SUP is attracting a whole new crowd to the world of watersports, which has him convinced the sport is much more than a passing fad.

"SUP has moved way past surfer dudes and the core-workout crowd," he tells *The Costco Connection*. "The main market now is the 40-year-old family man who wants to get out on the water and have some fun with his wife and kids." ☞

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The Costco Connection

Costco carries a variety of paddle board packages that include board, paddle, leash, fin and other accessories.

Buying a board

THE "SUP WORLD" features a widening array of boards and paddles designed for everything from surfing and racing to touring and even fishing.

In order to enjoy the sport without breaking the bank, SUP maker Kyle Reeves recommends buying a package that includes a board with an installed deck pad, a leash, fins, paddle and bag.

"You want to get a complete package," he says. "That way you're sure to have everything you need to have fun."

For beginners, he recommends user-friendly boards that are wide, fat and 2.7 to 3.6 metres (9 to 12 feet) in length. Round- or oval-shafted SUP paddles should be 1.8 or 2.1 metres (6 or 7 feet) long and have a blade shaped like a pizza peel (oven spatula).

