

# Off The Bike **A Hero** in The Shaping

By *Reanne Atherton*

In the summer months Britain's smallest city is heaving with tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, and of course those who can't function without hopping onto their board for a daily dose of surfing. But today, on this cold drizzly autumn morning it was a drastic contrast, and I got the impression that St David's in Pembrokeshire was having some down time. The sound of seagulls filled the eerie silence as I meandered down the empty street and I was surprised to see some of the shops were open for business. Business

was obviously elsewhere. Elsewhere, being in the water.

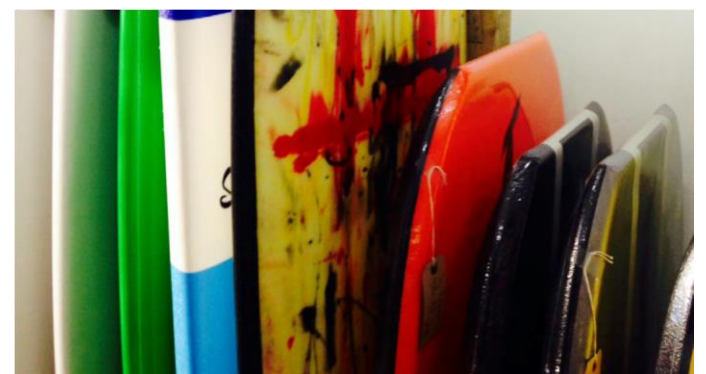
People always associate surfing with warm weather, and with the sun bouncing off the water. But in fact not even the drop in temperature stops those wanting to catch the waves. The harsher weather makes the waves more aggressive so in the winter there is greater offshore wind which gives a better wave shape. It becomes a surfer's paradise with consistent swell.

Dedication to this sport doesn't mean it is essential to be snug as a bug in a wetsuit running purposely towards the sea, while proudly

carrying a board under your arm. One man I was about to meet is so passionate about this sport, that he is spending all the hours he has to make the boards for others to enjoy it.

Grant is the man in charge and creator of the inspiring surf company, *Unsung Hero*. Straight away I knew we were going to get along when he offered me a selection of out-of-this-world coffee. This is a man who knows his coffee beans. I was in my element, being a coffee lover myself this was a perfect start to a meeting. Lined up in front of me there were shots of silky brown liquid, all of which had their own distinct taste. Enjoying the

multitude of flavours from these comforting hot drinks on this drizzly winter morning, it became apparent that this was the link between surfing and cycling. A coffee has a much more deep and meaningful existence than being just a drink. It relaxes and re-energises you, it is a time to sit with your friends and reminisce the hours spent riding the waves, and most of all it gives you that intense buzz you crave; all of this in a cup. That is where cycling and surfing intermingle. It is an addictive drug which you cannot stop taking. Before I met up with Grant he was down the road in his workshop getting all creative and hands on.



*Since you have opened your shop do you have chance to surf much?*

Not a lot now. I used to before I had to earn a living. In the last 18 months I've not really got into the water much. It's bad really as I should try to get out more.

*When did your surf shop open and why?*

About a year ago now; we opened in December 2013. I find it very difficult to be in an office environment, I would much rather be doing this than be bored in an office. It's not easy though and I have worked harder than I have ever worked in my whole life. In the summer we open all week and only 3 days a week in the winter months when it's quiet.

*How did you get into shaping boards?*

I did a degree in naval architecture so technically I'm a boat designer. I just took what I learnt from that as it's all the same kind of materials and hydrodynamics. So I taught myself. Lots of trial and error.

*With the winter in full swing is it less busy with surfers now?*

There are 2 types of surfers, fair weather surfers that come in the summer, but the problem with that is when we have nice weather there is generally no swell so you can't actually go surfing. So during the months of autumn/winter it's the best time to go. But it's been surprisingly warm this winter.

*Does surfing compare to snowboarding?*

Yes, kind of. If you're physically fit and physically agile then you will pick up surfing easily. It's all about practice. When you are standing up, that's the easy bit, the hard bit is when you try to catch the wave. Getting in the right place is the really difficult part.

*How do you catch a wave?*

As a wave comes at you, the shape changes to a bigger peak and also the colour changes. It comes up like a triangle closer to the shore. What happens is the water at the bottom slows down and the water on the top keeps going. You need to be on the wave just as it is peaking. Then you need to paddle in and get onto your feet. It's pretty simple really, and the better you are the bigger the waves you catch.

*Can you get injured from this sport?*

Not really, no. Now and again but it's not that common for someone to get injured. When it does happen it tends to be pretty bad. Like semi-drowning, but it's very rare. Sometimes you could get minor injuries like twisted knees if you fall off awkwardly. It's a relatively safe sport really.

*How would someone go about choosing a suitable board?*

Well, you start off with a sponge board for a beginner. Volume is the key; the more volume, the more it will float and the easier it will be to catch

waves. You pick one for your size and ability and go from there. The worst thing to do is go and buy the most expensive board out as your first one because you won't be able to use it and it'll be a waste of money.

Material is an important factor. The more high performance ones are made of a much lighter material. But the problem with that is they don't last as long.

*How long does it take to make a board?*

A standard board from scratch is about 2 weeks. There are so many different types of boards I can do; there is carbon fibre, foam and wooden boards. It also depends on if the customer wants any artwork. I'd much rather do a board that has something different and unique on it. I have a couple of boards ready made for those that want one straight away.

*How much do the boards cost?*

Standard price is about £450 which is the same as any other board off the shelf. It also depends on the size and material. A very basic entry level board can start at about £280. For someone starting out you would be spending about £300 for everything needed. By the time you have got a board and wetsuit, the rest is free. You don't pay to go out in the sea.

*You also offer surf lessons?*

Yes, we offer coastering and surf lessons. We would eventually like to introduce a few bicycles to hire out from the shop too. We get a lot of

people asking about where to hire bikes from so I think it would be a good thing to have access to.

*I've never tried surfing before and would like to learn. How many lessons would you recommend?*

I would say a couple of lessons and then go out by yourself to get better. You improve really quickly. The main problem with surfing is fitness. It's a really physically demanding sport.

