

How To Cross Step

By
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The true essence of longboard surfing is discovered through mastering the style and flow of cross stepping. No one has ever said "Wow! Did you see that nice shuffle to the nose?" "Cross stepping defines the difference between ugly and beautiful..." says Joel Tudor when asked about the state of the art of longboarding. Joel goes further in pointing out the real difference between shortboards and longboards is that we can walk on our boards. That's easy for Joel to say, but what about the multitudes that desire to learn this almost mystical experience of walking on water? (I was thinking "biblical experience" but offer mystical as a safe option)

The elements required to implement cross stepping are basic and easy to comprehend. However, there is nothing easy about putting this knowledge into practice, but it will help immensely in speeding up the learning process.

The first element is understanding how the mind and body work when faced with an issue of balance. The unconscious mind likes to keep your body comfortable, which means you usually seek a posture of least resistance when you are thrown off balance. If someone pushes you from the front you will instinctually go up and backwards which is not a balanced position. The lesson here is the mind needs to overcome the natural reaction and consciously control the body to work at maintaining a balanced posture when attempting to walk on a surfboard.

Try cross stepping on land and pay attention to what happens. As you lift your foot to step forward you tend to go up and forward which is OK when the ground is not moving. But it's a whole different story on a moving surfboard. Surfing is unique in the sports world because it involves three moving objects the surfer, the board and the wave, all operating independent of each other. Surfing then becomes a science in physically/mentally understanding the successful coordination of the three moving objects.

The second element is being **centered**. Balance is easily achieved when you maintain a centered posture with knees bent, head and shoulders up with no bending forward at the waist and your arms down because then you are maintaining the strongest and most efficient stance. The trick is to maintain this posture as you move. With this in mind, try to cross-step again, slowly this time, concentrating so you do not go up or forward as your foot moves from back to front. This requires you to keep your stationary leg/knee well bent with no upward movement as you step. Stop mid step and hold this position for a few seconds.

At this point you're balanced on one foot which is the third basic element. Cross stepping is simply balancing on one foot at a time. As you start to put your foot down, land toes first, then bend your stationary knee more to bring your heel down. To successfully take the next step, you should briefly be in a balanced/centered position with equal weight on both feet before you initiate the next step. Learning to walk slowly and precisely will translate, over time, into that look of controlled style the masters display with seemingly no effort.

The usual mistake is to rise up instead of bending your knees as you move. This is the mind wanting you to be comfortable because it's easier to stand taller than it is to bend your knees. The second mistake is made when instead of standing taller the surfer tries to have a low posture by breaking forward at the waist. This causes you to drop your head forward, stick your butt out and your straighten your knees. This posture is comfortable, but doesn't work, because you are no longer centered or using your legs at optimum strength and efficiency. Almost 100% of the mistakes made when you are surfing come back to this basic science. Here is where the next element, leg strength, enters into the equation.

The most overlooked element of the physical nature of surfing is the importance of leg strength and how it affects your overall performance level. The stronger your legs the easier it is to maintain and control the correct posture for optimum surfing performance. If you are weak in the knees/legs then you will seek a more comfortable position (which won't help your surfing) at just the wrong moment.

The 4 Basic elements of cross stepping to remember are:

1. Mentally overcome your natural reactions to being unbalanced.
2. Maintain a centered posture
3. Learn to be balanced on one foot
4. Improve your leg strength

Pay attention to the three basic points of being balanced and centered:

5. Knees bent at least 3 to 5 inches and don't stand any taller than this
6. Head and shoulders up with no breaking forward at the waist
7. Arms down, hips slightly pushed forward
8. Knees slightly in towards one another (not bow legged), with the feet slightly rolled to the insides

Movement comes from the knees not the waist, head and shoulders.

This lesson in cross stepping can be used to improve all aspects of your surfing. You can also use an INDO BOARD to practice these techniques on dry land.