

# Bodyboarding but not as you know it

IMAGINE riding down the face of a giant wave, cruising through the barrel, then being spat out, hitting the lip of the oncoming peak and spinning 360°.

Let me introduce you to bodyboarding – but not as you know it.

I'm on Tolcarne Beach with bodyboarding champion and British team coach Rob Barber. Rob is gazing expectantly out to sea because, despite the fact that he's bodyboarded all over the world for the last 20 years, the wave we're waiting for – 'The Wedge' – still makes him drool.

Bodyboarding – real, proper, hardcore bodyboarding – is a long way from boogie boarding in the white water near the shore.

Real bodyboarding involves not just riding proper waves, but all sorts of tricks. A short, light, blunt board means acrobatic jumps, spins in the barrel and, for the more courageous, blasting serials off giant, cliff-size waves – the kind of heavy out-of-control beasts that have surfers quaking in their neoprene booties.

## So, are you excited yet?

My first bodyboarding lesson began earlier that morning beneath a gunmetal grey Cornish sky as an onshore wind whipped up the surf at Newquay's Fistral Beach. It's not Hawaii but it's enough for me – the waves look bigger and bigger as we get closer to the shoreline.

Rob, my coach for the day, has suited me up in a wetsuit and 'death' black flippers and I look like James Bond on a sub-

## Action Girl Jane Labous tries bodyboarding

marine spy mission.

Let's dwell on the flippers for a moment. Yes, I resemble a deranged frog as I goose step across the beach to avoid falling over my flippered feet. No, I don't look cool as I walk backwards into the water holding my bodyboard in front of me for balance.

But boy, is that frog moment worth it once you're in... Don't diss the flippers, is all I can say. Paddling out, they give you the power to propel your bodyboard through the surf. Once you're ready to ride, you can kick yourself onto a wave. And if it's any consolation, Rob manages to look cool in his – the way he strolls around in them, I reckon he could do a 100-metre sprint, no problem...

The surf is powerful but we push through it, making a cycling motion with the flippers. Eventually we find ourselves out back, that sacred spot behind the crashing surf where it's calm and blue and peaceful and we can float in the filtered sunshine.

We're looking for a good wave because it's not worth taking a bad one – if you get a dud you only have to paddle back out.

"Mmm, this one's a peach," murmurs Rob happily as a very large wave comes rearing towards us. Goodness, I think... and then it's upon me and I'm kicking frantically



■ Action Girl Jane Labous on Tolcarne Beach with her bodyboard.

"PADDLE!" shouts Rob. It seems to me that I hang for a moment on the crest of the wave, suspended above the drop – it's only about five feet but it looks enormous. Gosh, I think, peering down, and then I'm off, me and my board diving down the cool

blue edge of the wave. I can feel its contours, every change and movement of it as it bucks beneath me. It's a wonderful feeling, like being part of the wave itself. I shift forward on my board, lean to the left and grip the nose, as Rob instructed. And there I am, trimming

along the wave, heart racing.

"You're ripping!" shouts Rob. I'm a long way from doing tricks, but just riding the wave is enough for now.

Later, at Tolcarne, I'm pumped to go as the tide glides in with the promise of the Wedge.

We paddle out and float like mesmerised seagulls as we watch the wave, mellow tonight beneath a clearing sky.

## The Wedge

Just as Rob said it would, the Wedge hits the cliff and reverberates out, the peak almost triangular where two waves meet to create a right angle. Lying there with a shaft of evening sunshine lighting up the water and just a thin piece of foam separating me from the ocean, I feel deeply relaxed. There's nothing like raw nature and some surf to chill you out.

All of a sudden, the Wedge kicks in and we're treated to some rolling sets of gorgeous waves. I catch a few, not very well, but it's good enough for me as Rob demonstrates how the pros do it with some casual 360° spins. And frankly it's blissful out there – riding, floating, paddling, riding, floating...

Ah, the memories. As I'm writing this, that Wedge is very much on my mind. Oh, goodness, it's 5.30pm... Catch you down at Tolcarne?

Rob Barber's Bodyboarding School runs bodyboarding lessons, starting at £30 per person for a two-hour lesson, with group discounts available. Bodyboarding weekends are £119 per person. Go to [www.RobBarber.com](http://www.RobBarber.com) or call 01627 878671.

Rob also runs bodyboarding holidays to Morocco, Lanzarote, Cape Verde, Mexico and Bali. The next one is to Morocco on November 15 to 22. Go to [www.robbarber.com/coaching\\_morocco](http://www.robbarber.com/coaching_morocco)