

TRAVEL | WAVES | TECHNIQUE | BOARDS | SURFERS

# SURFING LIFE



**WHO'S INFLUENCING WHO?**  
BOARD SPORTS: STEALING OR SHARING

**THE BOARDRIDER EFFECT**  
CLUB LIFE HERE, AWAKENING THERE

**MOSQUITO COAST**  
ARE WE IN A BUZZ OVER NOTHIN'?

**ESCAPING SHADOWLAND**  
TOM CARROLL & LAURA ENEVER NEUROHACK FEAR

**BERSIH  
PUNTORAMA 4.0**

SPLASH OF GENIUS.  
SPLASH OF MADNESS.





**ON THE COVER:**

Flying through the air with the greatest of ease, Harry Bryant has been doing this since he was knee-high to a grasshopper on the Sunshine Coast. Although he now resides in NSW, he spent most of his time travelling the world, that is, before 'Rona did a dump on us all.  
COVER SHOT BY JOHN RESPONDEK



*"Better Together"*

**HELPING HAND**

**Big shout out to Mens Shred.** Although we're a unisex publication, we feel strongly about supporting this cause. We see the statistics and the epidemic that faces us daily. *Surfing Life's* goal is to help people escape into their love of surfing every time they pick up an issue. We know you can't put your head in the sand, but we recognise that everyone needs help and sometimes that help is to draw away for a little respite.

@mensshred

**QUESTION: WHAT IS THE MANOEUVRE YOU ARE MOST ENVIOUS OF?**



KATE MCMAHON

The Jesus Christ Pose inside the belly of a big barrel. I barely have the skill (or guts) to get more than a cheeky head dip, so I can only imagine what riding a cavernous cone would feel like.

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**PODCAST**

SPOTIFY/ITUNES The Paddle Out  
INSTAGRAM @the\_paddle\_out  
ONLINE thepaddleout.libsyn.com



BRAD BRICKNELL

Anything in the air! I wish I could fly, but I'm more like a millstone than an albatross. I did a few alley-oops in my youth, but every time I try take flight these days I end up under water in tears. It's the most frustrating thing in the world—seeing it but unable to execute it! I admit it. I'm envious of airs.

**FEMALE CONTRIBUTORS WANTED**

We're not being sexist; we want everyone to contribute. However, there seems to be a shortage of female contributors in our lineup and we'd like to remedy that. If you write or shoot surf and dream of seeing your work in print—now is your chance. This is not a guarantee, just a guarantee that we're searching and want to find you.



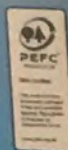
CHAS SMITH

If I could do any surfing manoeuvre, and hit it every time, it would be a Shane Beschen-esque blowtail. Just sliding across the top of the wave all low and juicy; dropping jaws on the beach and in the lineup. The blowtail is underappreciated, I feel, and ready for a comeback. Airs are boring.



JOSH BYSTROM

The manoeuvre I'm most envious of is a quality layback barrel. I have images imprinted in my mind of Tom Carroll surfing perfect Kirra with headgear on and half his body in the water ... just perfectly poised. Nowadays, I feel there has been a resurgence with guys, like Clay Marzo and Asher Pacey, pushing the limits on both their backhand and forehands, which have been doing the rounds online. This reaffirms that an old school move is still relevant and won't be lost to the generations!



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**ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS**

*Surfing Life* magazine acknowledges the traditional owners of the chagun (earth) and yarraburn (work and play). We pay respect to the traditional owners of the Yugambah language region of South East Queensland, the Kombumerri, Mununjali, Wangerribi, their Elders, past, present, and future. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the land and water and pay our respects to them, their culture and present. The words chagun and yarraburn are words from the Yugambah language of the Gold Coast region's Yugambah language.

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# MOSQUITO COAST

With more froth than your arvo pint, we dissect what could be your biggest surfing challenge

WORDS BY KATE MCMAHON  
PHOTOS BY TRAVIS JOHNSON

**I**t's my lowest point in surfing. Straddling my board with not one, but two middle fingers raised, a whispered f-bomb drops from my mouth. I lower my arms and hang my head in absolute shame. That is no way to behave to a fellow surfer, especially when they're 12 years old.

But the end of my tether has been reached, all tattered and torn in bitter frustration. The ability to enjoy my daily surf has been continuously stifled by the little black dots buzzing around me like mozzies. Zipping to my inside, dropping in, or swinging around mid-paddle out and snagging their 11th ride to my none. The Michael Douglas *Falling Down* moment I play out in my mind, has me screaming over the sound of the ocean, asking if anyone has a can of the reddest paint possible to slather me in. If I'm going to get treated like a priority buoy, then I may as well look like one.

A few days later, when I'm once again in the lineup at my local, patiently waiting for my turn that never seems to come, my friend paddles over, then sits upright. "That's my nemesis," she says with a smirk. I follow her gaze and look over my shoulder expecting to see a boisterous local puffing his chest. Instead, I see a young boy drop into yet another great ride. And beyond him, are other fully-grown adults with teeth clenched at their waveless existence. That's when I realize *see you*. Time for my quest to tap into the psyche of the greedy gnat.





"There's sound research that reports society is becoming more 'me' focused, with higher rates of narcissistic traits as compared to 30 years ago," says Libby Purcell, a surfer, mum to two young surf-rats and child psychologist from Old Bar, NSW. "This goes some way to explaining the frothing groom phenomenon, where only their own perspective exists," Libby says.

Finn Cox, 18, can attest to that. "I'd surf with a bunch of mates, just out the front, and we'd send people in—like, adults—even though we were only 12," says the Margaret River local who was crowned Western Australia's 2019 U18 state champ.

While you've gotta give Finn and his mates props for their bravado, that Finn explains was borne from their exposure to Hawaiian localism in the surf media, Libby says we need to watch for the warning signs. "Narcissistic

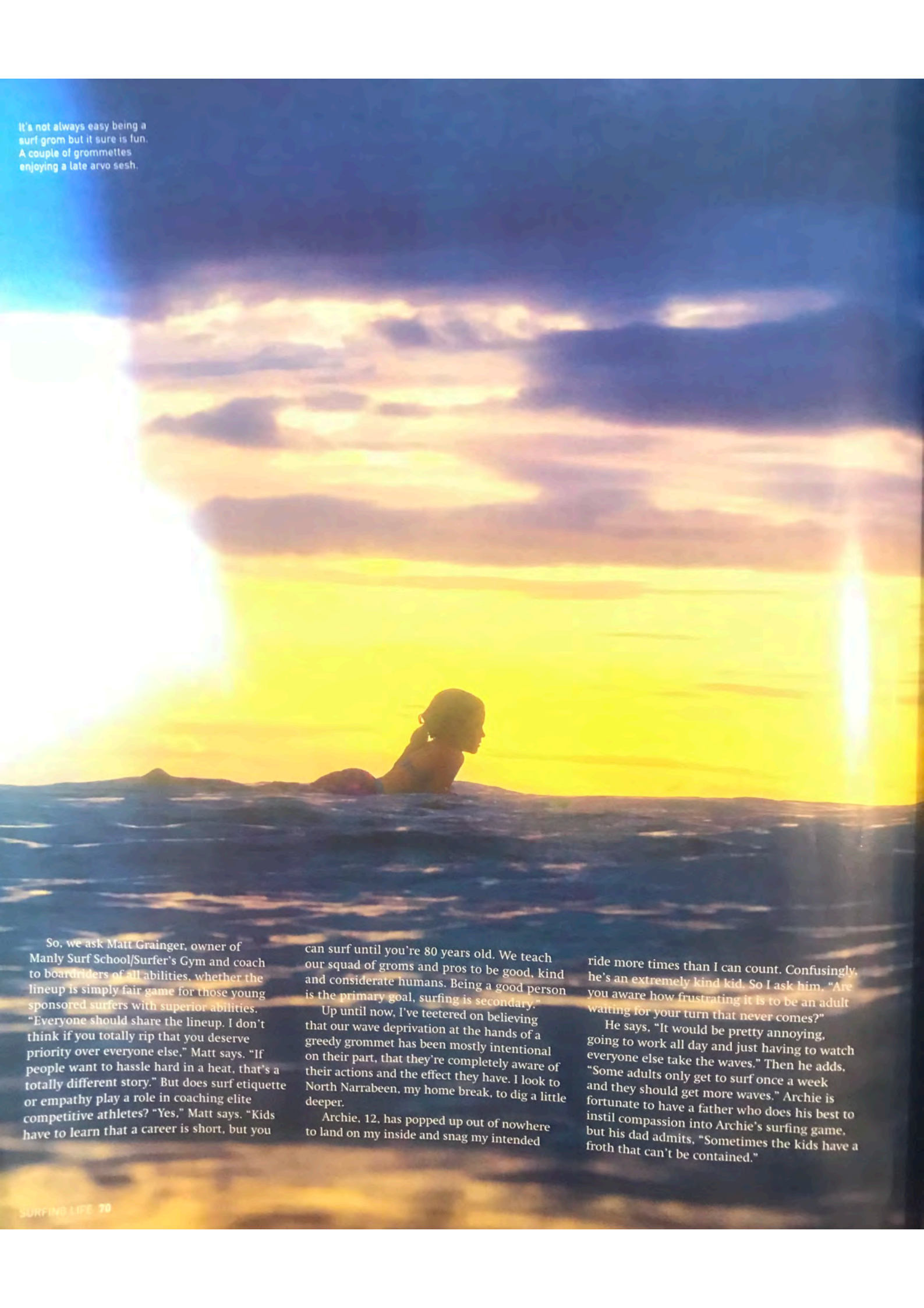
traits also means there is little empathy and no sense of guilt, combined with a huge need for admiration," she says.

It's no real surprise that our core beliefs are shaped during our early learning years, and Libby points out there's been a huge shift in how children now interact with each other. "Many years ago, the '70s and '80s, kids played unsupervised. This meant that adults weren't there to intervene when things went wrong. Kids had to sort it out by themselves—sharing, turn-taking, and fairness had to operate in order for kids' play to continue," Libby says. "A big part of play is the development of empathy. And empathy is what stops people from becoming narcissistic."

Finn does admit that since his micro-grom days, he's probably changed for the better. "I was pretty bad back then. I just hassled everyone—would go everything." Now, he's

selectively brutal when it comes to wave sharing. "I let the local crew go 'cos I know they've been waiting. But if it's just some random dude ... I'm not going to let someone who's crap get the best waves."

Ooof, this hits hard. Should our surfing ability dictate our right to an equal wave quota? If someone has the skills to paddle in and pop to their feet, should what they do once on the wave really matter? We all thrive on the thrill of the ride, whether we're wiggling down the face in a poo-man stance or stylishly smacking it top to bottom. Finn supports his argument by likening it to being at the skatepark. "Say I'm crap at skating, I'd let all the good skaters go before me, because you just wanna see what they're doing and respect them. You know how annoying it would be for someone to get in their way," he says.



It's not always easy being a surf grom but it sure is fun. A couple of grommettes enjoying a late arvo sesh.

So, we ask Matt Grainger, owner of Manly Surf School/Surfer's Gym and coach to boardriders of all abilities, whether the lineup is simply fair game for those young sponsored surfers with superior abilities. "Everyone should share the lineup. I don't think if you totally rip that you deserve priority over everyone else," Matt says. "If people want to hassle hard in a heat, that's a totally different story." But does surf etiquette or empathy play a role in coaching elite competitive athletes? "Yes," Matt says. "Kids have to learn that a career is short, but you

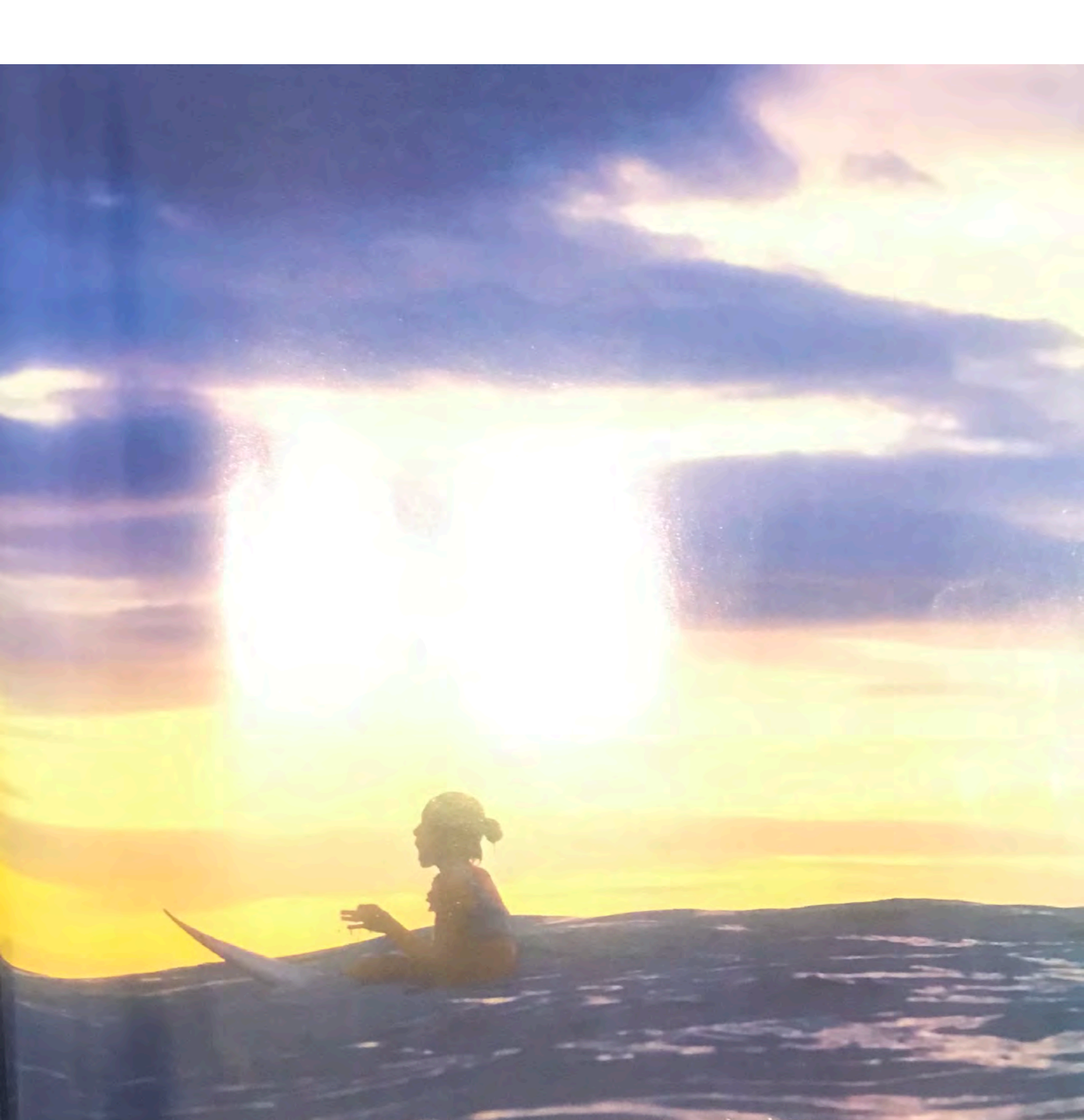
can surf until you're 80 years old. We teach our squad of groms and pros to be good, kind and considerate humans. Being a good person is the primary goal, surfing is secondary."

Up until now, I've teetered on believing that our wave deprivation at the hands of a greedy grommet has been mostly intentional on their part, that they're completely aware of their actions and the effect they have. I look to North Narrabeen, my home break, to dig a little deeper.

Archie, 12, has popped up out of nowhere to land on my inside and snag my intended

ride more times than I can count. Confusingly, he's an extremely kind kid. So I ask him, "Are you aware how frustrating it is to be an adult waiting for your turn that never comes?"

He says, "It would be pretty annoying, going to work all day and just having to watch everyone else take the waves." Then he adds, "Some adults only get to surf once a week and they should get more waves." Archie is fortunate to have a father who does his best to instil compassion into Archie's surfing game, but his dad admits, "Sometimes the kids have a froth that can't be contained."



One thing you'll notice at North Narrabeen is the number of parents pushing their micro-groms into waves from the main peak. During Archie's early years of surfing his dad, Chris, had the train of thought that he was simply showing Archie into the waves that Chris would have otherwise been catching. But perhaps early exposure to this prime placement in the lineup fosters a certain sense of entitlement once the training wheels are whipped away. Back in the day, groms were relegated to surfing the shore, the outer lineup being a part of the pecking order process you had to work up to. Libby asks that before you decide to push a young

beginner from the main peak, you consider this: "It can mean skipping the fundamental lessons of the playground that: a) shapes the type of surfer they become, and b) teaches them to be a part of something much bigger than themselves," she says.

As surfing adults, we all have a responsibility to curate a positive surfing culture that's absorbed by our youth. After all, it will mould the surfer they are for their entire ocean years, and those traits will likely follow them onto land. Libby explains that having a parent who plays fair can be a huge advantage for a grom's development in becoming

a decent human.

"We learn a lot by what is known as 'modelling behaviour' or 'monkey see, monkey do'," Libby says. "If you have a parent who gives you the green light—either overtly by doing it themselves, or worse, by actively encouraging you—to hassle, snake, and drop-in, then you're pretty much conditioned that this is fair play." Libby warns that this conditioning can foster an inability to identify their own lack of surfing etiquette. "These kids don't really understand the flip side of this because they may not have well-developed empathy, so it's difficult to convince them otherwise."

Raya Campbell probably having as much trouble as anyone finding waves out at the most crowded wave in Australia.



And if you think your between-waves behaviour doesn't have an impact, then think again. At Snapper Rocks on any given day you'll likely see 11-year-old Jai on the ride of his life. Then doing the run-around to paddle out for the next one, and then the next. But his impressive wave quota isn't the result of greed or ego; he's respected as one of the sweetest kids to call the Superbank his playground. He's aware of his ability to snag stacks of rides and doesn't mind giving some away, if you're wave-starved. What makes him feel icky, though, is when things get ugly.

"A lot of people swear at me; the older people," Jai says. "I just paddle away. It's not


worth it to swear back at them." Picture that: what it's like for an 11-year-old to be berated in public by a much larger adult. "It makes me feel upset that people actually swear at kids. And also, not being nice out at people's local break—not being respectful," Jai says.

Archie unites with Jai on that sentiment. And while he tries to brush off the intense localism North Narrabeen is notorious for, he would like to point out, "We surf here when it's bad, when it's okay, and when it's good. Then when it's good, everyone comes over to our beach and tries to hassle and take our waves." Although, Archie does admit that being constantly blocked by a grom would

be annoying. "The adults should be able to drop in on you when you snake them," he says, before offering this insider info: "I just try to push it to see how far I can get. If I get dropped in on, okay. If I don't, then I'm lucky."

So, we conclude that there are young surfers who intentionally snag more than their fair share of waves at your expense, and there are those who're in a bubble of oblivion. But the contributors to this story all have similar advice for you when it comes to negotiating with a greedy grom:

"Have a nice, calm way and just say, Oh, you're getting quite a few waves, do you reckon I could get a couple off you?" Jai says.



"If they were mean, I'd probably just try to menace with them."

"The best approach is to paddle out, sit there for a bit, a bit wider, and try to make conversation—try to talk to everyone you can who looks local," Finn says. "The crew who do that to me, I'd be lettin' them have every wave that's theirs. It's when they're not like that, and they paddle straight around ya to the inside, you're like, nah, you're not gonna get any waves!"

"Talk to them and ask, do you realise you snaked me? Just get their opinion on it," Archie says. "If they were nice, I'd probably listen to them. But if they were mean, I'd probably just try to menace with them," he says. Libby suggests starting with outright bribery: a pie with sauce can work wonders. Failing that? "Use pleasantries and light humorous banter, so they may start to relate

to you more and give you a pity wave," she says. Still having no luck? Libby advises to be direct: "Hey, I've noticed you've taken the last ten waves, maybe it's my turn now?" And the last resort? "Have a polite chat with their folks who're most likely filming their offspring from the beach: evidence of those said ten waves," Libby says.

Being kind, and perhaps, making some new little mates sounds like a much more united prospect than snapping and snarling, which is sure to have a ripple effect beyond just our wave needs.

To end, we ask Jai what makes him happier: getting all the rides, or sharing them? And straight from the mouths of babes he replies, "Definitely share the waves. It makes the world a better place." 🐦



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# SURFING LIFE



**FOR THE LONG RUN**  
ISABELLA NICHOLS IS POISED, READY  
TO POUNCE ON HER ROOKIE YEAR

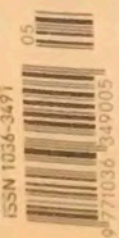
**NO BAIL OUT REQUIRED**  
SOLI BAILEY'S HORIZON OF INFINITE POSSIBILITY

**TAPPING INTO MANA**  
TAHITIAN LOCAL VAHINE FIERRO SHARES A TANGIBLE ENERGY

**ETHAN EWING THE ENIGMA**  
MYSTERIOUS OR QUIET? A GLIMPSE INTO ETHAN'S IDYLIC LIFE

## HOTTEST 100

SURFING'S MOST TALENTED  
AUSSIE GROMS PADDLE  
THROUGH 2020'S RANKS



QUESTION: WHOSE SURFING LIFE WOULD YOU'VE LOVED TO LIVE ?



**BRAD HUTCHINS**

If you've read *Barbarian Days*, then you know I'm about to say, "William Finnegan". If you haven't read it, then your homework has been set. Empty Nias. Empty Restaurants. Kirra in the '70s. J-Bay in the '80s. Packing Honolulu Bay pits while high on acid, not to mention the endless adventure and exploration in between. Iconic.

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**KATE MCMAHON**

There aren't many humans who are considered The Greatest of All Time at their certain something who don't get peppered with tall poppy taunts, or who are completely void of clickbait antics. But Stephanie Gilmore is one of them. So, not only would I love to know how to ride a wave so beautifully dynamic, but to also show you can be the best without being an entitled tool. Plus, being a fellow muso, I would totally take advantage of her endless opportunities for mad collabs and stage invasions.



**JED SMITH**

I'd have to say Peter McCabe or Jim Banks (probably Banks, since McCabe paid for his good times with a stint in a New Caledonian prison). They had the best of the golden age of Indonesian surf travel: Desert Point, Lakey Peak, G-Land, Ulus, Padang, etc. Board technology had advanced enough so they could get properly pitted. Jim is still ripping well into his sixties, with a beautiful family, a quaint little restaurant on the Bukit, a great small-run shaping label, and a sick guitar collection. What a life!



**ANDREW SHIELD**

In the '80s, before I even started surfing, I used to see the lone house out on Old Woman Island, off Mudjimba on the Sunshine Coast and think, *How lucky the people were to live out there, alone on their own island.* I later found out the house belonged to local surf shop owner Peter Troy, and he used a tinny to commute to the mainland each day from "his" island. This enviable lifestyle was nothing, though, compared to the twenty years previous that Peter Troy spent on a non-stop travel odyssey. He was the first to discover and surf dozens of world class waves: Nias, Tamarin Bay, etc., and was credited with introducing surfing to Brazil. I've devoted more than half of my life to surf travel. Twenty years too late, though, to do very much "pioneering". My travel has been merely following the paths forged by fortunate people like Peter Troy.

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**ON THE COVER:**

Stephanie Gilmore—there's not many times anyone would like to be called a GOAT, but in this case, no one would mind. Yep, Steph is the greatest of all time (GOAT) and she's still proving it. We reckon the orange board makes her faster. COVER SHOT BY TRAVIS JOHNSON



**FANTASY SURFER**

It's almost time to fire up your Fantasy Surf Team again and *Surfing Life* have teamed up with FANTASY SURF SESSIONS. We'll keep you informed when WSL's first event is on, so you can get your team in ... heaps of prizes to be won.



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 CONTRIBUTING EDITOR: Jed Smith

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**DISCLAIMER**

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# FOR THE LONG RUN

Isabella Nichols is poised, ready to pounce on her rookie year

WORDS BY KATE MCMAHON

**W**e've got the golden arches to thank for gifting us the surfing talent of WCT rookie Isabella Nichols. Well, that and her father's cunning tactics. On a camping trip to Double Island Point, Mr. Nichols pushed an eight-year-old "Bella" into her first wave. Speaking to us today from her home near the Gold Coast border, where she eagerly awaits WSL's 2021 Tour commencement updates, Bella vividly recalls the moment of that debut ride. "It was in the flags," she says. "There must've been a thousand people and I'm standing up dodging them while they clap me on."

Her doting ocean-loving dad, Ross Nichols, couldn't have been happier. After all, the journey to get to this point had been a long one. As a young Aussie surf adventurer, Ross fell in love with Lisbeth—a Danish woman who convinced him to relocate to her homeland of Denmark. There they brought twin sisters into the world—Isabella and Helena. When the girls turned three, Ross's ocean obsession lured the family back to Australia and they settled in Coolumb on Queensland's Sunshine Coast, a world away from the short, dark days of Denmark. Five years later, here was his little Bella riding a wave all the way to the shore. He was living every surf dad's dream: this would be the start of his daughter's froth. Only, it wasn't.

Come age 12, while Bella had started to surf a little more, she was far from hooked. So Mr. Nichols had to think smart. It was time to up the stakes. "My dad had to bribe me with a bacon and egg McMuffin in the mornings before school," Bella says, noting the salty, gooey goodness was definitely worth getting wet for. "I did a few primary school contests and the only reason I liked doing them was because I was hanging out with my mates," she says. But then, something clicked. Ross could finally ditch the drive-through McBribbery. "I was about 15 and was like, 'Dad, you don't need to buy me these anymore because I'm actually loving [surfing] now,'" she says.

Compared to her competitors, Bella was a late bloomer to the sport. But while her rise to the surfing spotlight was rapid, it wasn't seamless. In her first contest, a primary school event, Bella made it all the way to the final. This was it, her moment to shine and surely the catalyst to her competitive career. Except for one minor hitch—a complete disregard for the rules. "I literally dropped in on every single person on every single wave. I got dead last," she laughs. "I was like, 'I don't understand what happened!' Everyone was shaking their head at me."





It wasn't until Bella set her mind to surfing as being her "thing" that success soon followed. "I had to choose between soccer and boardriders and surfing contests," she says, and confesses she's the "clumsiest person in the world"—a possible hindrance for ball skills, which ultimately made for an easy decision.

So surfing it was. The Nicholls packed the car and turned Bella's grom comp campaign into family vacations. Bella wasn't only returning with beautiful memories, but with first-place results—the 2012 Skullcandy Oz while running amok at Ballina's BIG4, and the 2013 Occy Grom while in kid-heaven at the Kirra caravan park. It was around this time, at the age of 16, that Bella's surfing flipped from being fun to being a serious stab at turning pro, and she remembers that pivotal moment. "I was lying in bed and Dad came in. We were having a good ol' chat and he said, 'So do you wanna do this for a living, and put in a lot of effort?' and I said, 'Yeah.' That was the moment I started to take things seriously; now I've gotta train, look at boards, try and find a sponsor who can help me ..."

For many young athletes, they're already on a professional path before hitting the coming-of-age phase, so are braced that their teen years might look a little differently and more disciplined to their school peers. But for Bella, arriving at that point at 16 could've swung either way. Friends were getting their driver's licence, which often means more freedom and

a desire to let loose. "At 15, my twin sister was partying like a wild woman," Bella laughs. "I looked at it and thought, I'm actually not into all that kind of stuff. While I'll hang out with mates and have a drink, I've never really been into partying; I'll never go out and get blind. So that probably influenced my decision too."

Before we launch into the next stage of Bella's story, a succession of big highs and career-crushing lows, there's one thing we'd first love to know: any trippy twin tales? Bella generously opens up about the moment in Grade One that her and Helena fell sick on the same day with the same condition. "We ended up in hospital, diagnosed with a hereditary blood disorder called spherocytosis—where our blood cells are a spherical shape instead of a normal concave disc shape. My spleen completely shut down because it had to work overtime to filter the red blood cells, and my sister's was badly damaged. I got mine removed and she still has hers," Bella says. "This means, if I get sick I can get a little sicker than a fully healthy person. Not easier to get sick, but just more severe once I get something. I have to be super careful with bacterial infections, cuts, etc. Those are the ones that can really make me ill." This certainly makes for an extra level of caution for a professional surfer travelling to remote locations, and now being in the middle of a global pandemic. But that's not her only challenge. "I can get tired a lot quicker so recovery for me is crucial and looking after the body. I've also had my gallbladder removed as a result of the blood disorder. I was in and out of hospital quite regularly as a kid."

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"People found my weaknesses and took advantage of them."

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Anyone swiping through Bella's Instagram will be witness to her dedication to training and taking ultimate care of her body. Which, unsurprisingly, women's mainstream media took a particular interest in when Isabella was cast as Blake Lively's stunt surfer in the 2016 shark-fearing flick, *The Shallows*. Bella describes that filming experience as "the time of her life", and would definitely be up for it again. But first, she had even bigger fish to fry.

In Portugal January 2016, Bella was crowned the WSL World Junior Champion. This result was reassurance that she had what it took to qualify for the WCT, so for the remainder of that year Bella blazed with her head down into the WQS. Her results fluctuated between 3rds and 25ths, and her chance of a 'CT start came down to the final event at Cronulla. Entering the water for the semi-final against Silvana Lima, Bella needed to win the heat to clinch the qualification. But despite posting an eight-point ride, the highest

score of the heat, Bella was defeated by the Brazilian.

In 2017, Bella was frothing for her second shot. Her metaphorical Sharpie was poised ready to make her mark on the WQS. But she exited the year with barely a scribble, let alone a qualification. Throughout the 2018 season, the same thing happened. So where did things go wrong? "I wasn't consistent," Bella expresses. "On the 'QS, consistency is key. People found my weaknesses and took advantage of them. If someone put a score on the board in the first five minutes, I'd crumble. If I wasn't dominating the whole heat, I would crumble." Her crumbly shortfalls may not be obvious to onlookers, so Bella explains, "My emotions would get overwhelmed. I'd make silly decisions—wouldn't surf as well. I had a lot of interferences, too."

A shift came in 2019. It had nothing to do with Bella's surfing ability—that's often compared to an ultimate combination of Stephanie Gilmore

and Carissa Moore—it was all in her head. She began training with Mark Richardson and with that came a merging of the analytical minds. "I reckon [surfing] is 40% ability and 60% mental," Bella says. "Even the best surfer can crumble if you put the right amount of pressure on them." Mark introduced strategy into Bella's game plan and encouraged her to liken a heat to the tactics of chess. "Instead of going into [a contest] like 'I need to win', it was like, 'Oh, let's have some fun. If they do this, then I can do this.' Try to do counter moves that fit the different parts of the heat," she says. When asked how she thinks she's perceived as a competitor, she laughs. "When we were doing a mock heat, someone said to me that I'm known for my 'cat and mouse', which I didn't know. At the start of a heat, I love to jostle for the inside no matter what. I'll paddle you 100 metres down the beach, I don't care," Bella says, then confesses she'll sacrifice 20 minutes to only surf a five-minute heat if it means she'll nab the inside.



But having a coach she could connect with wasn't the only contributing factor for Bella's most successful year in surfing. There was another force at play that was a step aside from the usual suspects of hardware, fitness, and money. It was learning. Bella enrolled to study a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering at Deakin University and found that while it was definitely challenging time-wise, it sharpened her mind. "I was so stale, my attention span was super small," Bella says, acknowledging that this feeling left her out of sorts both on land and in the ocean. "When I started studying it was

like pouring oil into a rusted metal part and the cogs started turning." By the end of 2019, Bella had not only found comfort in knowing she has a Plan B career path, but she qualified for the 2020 WCT. Except, then came COVID-19.

When we speak, Bella is waiting patiently for an announcement on the next season's Tour and when she can begin her rookie campaign. Has she been taking advantage of time off and surfing her brains out? Not really. "I've kinda been avoiding the ocean here at the moment. We've had heaps of shark encounters, there's at least one or two

sightings a day," Bella says, understandably spooked after the fatal attack at Greenmount, and the horrifying one at Cabarita, both in the same month as our interview. Bella's fascination with wave pool technology, something she hopes to use her mechanical engineering degree to be involved with, is looking like an attractive predator-free option right now.

Being a first-time 'CT surfer with no preconceived expectations about the way things were, you could argue that Bella has an advantage over other competitors who're confronted by change. With the recent



disruption to the World Champion-crowning framework, what would Bella propose if she were in a position to shake up the WSL format? She takes a moment to consider, and then jumps in excitedly. "You know how they have a two-week waiting period and sometimes it's not always in the best season, because it's better for the viewers? I reckon having a full open year, and then give you two week's notice," Bella says. "No set destination. Like, we're going to have the Europe leg open to have it anywhere there in a two month period ..." she says, trailing away to then rattle off a bunch of pros and

cons for this format. Conversation pivots to the other point of discussion regarding the 2021 Tour, and something that's been occupying Bella's mind: Teahupo'o. It's the first time since 2006 that the wave makes a comeback to the Women's WCT and the world can't wait to see this era of female surfers take it on. "I'm pumped [but] I'm definitely nervous about it. I've surfed it once before when I was 15," Bella says, explaining she was in Tahiti for an event held at a nearby beach break. "We did a day trip to Teahupo'o; it was only about three foot, and I was sitting on the shoulder

thinking, *This is the scariest place in the whole world!*" So how do you prepare for such a challenge when you can't even leave the country to practise? "I'll have a TV on with GoPro footage of 'Chopes' just to get comfortable," Bella says, noting it's difficult to find left-handers on the Gold Coast to hone her skills, so visualisation is the next best thing. "I've also been going to Straddie heaps and working on my backhand barrel riding," Bella says, which paid off in more ways than one when Bella recently won the Boost Mobile Gold Coast Pro specialty event in a chunky South Straddie swell.



Bella attacks every section with a battle rage, in or out of a

Winning the Boost Mobile Pro Gold Coast, gave Bella the overall win on the Australian Grand Slam of Surfing.  
PHOTO: SHIELD



The privilege of qualifying for the WCT extends far beyond an impressive LinkedIn profile entry. So, as well as being one of the world's best surfers, what legacy does Bella hope to leave? "I don't want to be safe, I want to perform out of my skin, consistently, instead of letting my nerves take over," she says. "And, I really believe in being a good person and giving everyone time, and helping the next generation." Bella voices extreme gratitude for the women who did it tough to get the Tour to where it is today including, most recently, Stephanie, Sally, Tyler and Carissa. Bella is blown away. These are the women she would hunt autographs from as a grom. Dressed in oversized boardies and a little fedora, she'd hold her pen and poster in the air. Now she has an opportunity to surf against them. So, what nugget of wisdom will Bella be taking along on her debut ride? She smiles towards the laptop camera. "My favourite saying of all—that's so relevant to how I progressed in surfing—is: life's not a sprint, it's a marathon." 🐾