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Longboard event stays true to roots

By Roy Harrell

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void and covered in water.

Then, God blew upon the face of the waters and created waves. And God saw that it was good.

Then, God created man to rule over the seas. And man began to make sport in the waves. Surfing was born. And it was good.

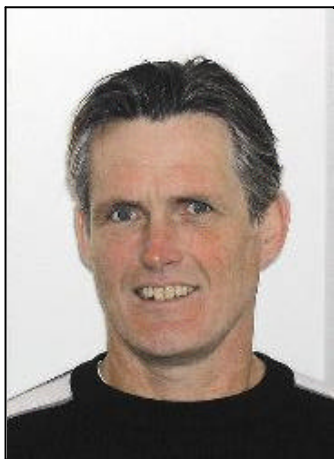
Then, Lance Carson was born. And man, was he good.

In the days when good surfing was defined by how well you could hang ten, Lance Carson set the standard with his casual pose on the nose, which looked as if he could stand there as long as he wanted.

Carson also developed a certain notoriety for his antics out of the water as well.

Eventually, though he never won any world contest or major surfing event, Carson's fame spread far beyond his home of Malibu, to epitomize the surfing standard of the 1960s.

When Malibu's famous point break beaches were under fire in the mid-1980s from the state parks system, a group of surfers joined forces together to fight city hall. The fledgling Surfrider Foundation was born. And one of the first guys they called to help them rally the troops was Lance Carson.



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Carson ran a comb through his unruly, bleached-out locks, borrowed a suit and tie, and read a speech prepared for him by Glen Hening to a packed room full of surfers and park officials. The room erupted in hoots and applause like they were at a surf movie.

Surfrider won its first case, hit the road running and never looked back.

Considering Surfrider's famous bloodline to classic longboarding, it seems fitting that the Ocean City chapter has instituted an annual fund-raiser called The Surfrider Longboard Team Challenge.

Now in its fifth year, the event just keeps getting better and better. Teams are comprised of five surfers each and come from as far away as northern New Jersey, Virginia, Annapolis and Washington, D.C., to compete for bragging rights.

With radio stations broadcasting live, play-by-play commentary, the whole contest takes on the flavor of an outdoor fair with each team bringing tents, coolers, families and some of the best looking, highest-priced longboards you will ever see at one beach.

June has never been known for being a good month for waves and this year has been no exception. A persistent Bermuda high kept the south winds blowing steadily, producing a 1- to 2-foot background swell, which became more sloppy as the day wore on.

But as contests go, that is usually par for the course, and with most of the entrants being seasoned competitors, there really wasn't that much complaining about the waves. After all, longboards are the perfect antidote for small waves.

Make no mistake though, to ride small waves well requires a heck of a lot of talent, whatever type of board you're riding.

But the Longboard Team Challenge has never been just about riding waves. It's almost more like an annual family reunion. On Friday evening there was the legends induction party and awards presentations. With lots of food and drink, the atmosphere is always a mixture of exuberant anticipation, as relationships are rekindled year after year with old rivals and seldom seen friends.

Saturday morning found all 16 teams warming up in the semi-clean, knee-to-waist-high waves. The contest format required the highest waves from each competitor to be added up to a total team score. This required a group effort to be sure that each person on your team got some good waves.

No one-star surfer could necessarily carry the entire team. As a result, the competition was stiff. Also, during every heat, the teams had to switch from north to south and vice versa, in order to make sure there wasn't an unfair advantage because of one side having a better break.

As each team member paddled over, it was common to see the competitors high-five each other and wish each other good luck. At the end of the day though, local knowledge prevailed with Team Ashton winning the event.

On Sunday morning, Surfrider reserved the beach for the competitors and their families to just be able to enjoy free surfing together. This was when the real hot-dogging started.

With the pressure of the competition off, everyone felt free to loosen up and strut their stuff.

Lance Carson wasn't really ever any good at competition surfing. But somehow I think ol' Lance would fit right in to the scene at the longboard challenge. Because if there was one thing he was good at besides surfing, it was having a good time.

And that's exactly what the Surfrider team challenge is all about.

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