



Reshaping surfing

Thomas Meyerhoffer's design skill might change look of the sport

By **BILL HOFFMAN**

HE has designed everything from the Apple eMate to snow goggles, the Swedish brand soap and toilet paper dispensers that are used around the world.

But yesterday it was Thomas Meyerhoffer's skill as a surfboard designer that was on show at the GSI One Design Division of the Noosa Festival of Surfing.

And what a design it is.

The standard board shape since the inception of the sport has consisted of a single curved rail, a concept which has only ever been tampered with through the introduction of stepped in wings near the tail.

For a man who has in his design resume a soft computer whose screen can be angled to allow you to better read it in bed, the norm was never going to be enough.

Thomas describes the experience of surfing his longboard design, which has a pintail curving out to a bulbous back third before coming in to a narrow "middle" and then again round-

ing at the top third nose section, as akin to listening to remixed music or eating food you haven't tried before.

It takes some getting used to, but not much if the experience of competitors surfing the craft for the first time yesterday was anything to go by.

There were plenty of nine point rides as surfers quickly discovered the design benefits that allow tighter turns on a lighter board that still measure 9'2".

Thomas said the key to the development was an appreciation that longboards were only ridden from the rear for turns and at the front for nose riding.

A surfer himself for the past 10 years he began messing around with designing and building his own board about five years ago.

He pushed the envelope until he eventually found one that worked and began refining it until he arrived at the shape now being produced by Global Surf Industries

"It's a lot more nimble," Thomas said.

"I took away what you don't need."

Volume has been redistributed to the board's narrower waist making paddling easier and faster. The lighter nose makes it easier to swing the board around.

"It's a long board with short board qualities that you can surf like both," he said. "It turns more easily and is livelier and generates more speed."

It has definitely been a triumph of function over fashion and one that GSI will be hoping resonates with the market.

"It has always been a goal of mine to help create definite design differentiation in the retail surf industry," GSI managing director Mark Kelly said.

"As a whole, surfboards are very similar and I believe today it is shapes over construction that we need to develop further."

Surfing has always had a certain style and look that its devotees follow with fervour.

Meyerhoffer may be just the man to change the dominance of fashion. Based in San Francisco in California

he is engaged by the likes of Porsche, Sony Ericsson, Apple, Nike and snowboard manufacturers to keep them on the cutting edge.

In a sport where re-invention has been easier than innovation his "hour-glass" like design could become an historical footnote, a short-lived fad or a moment as defining as the introduction of the three-finned thruster in the early 1980s.

That will be for the market to decide.

Meyerhoffer is already working on different concepts for both short and long boards that may radicalise the way surfers think about their equipment.

"The boards look extreme but they're not that extreme in how they function," he said.

"It took a lot of surfers by surprise today by how well it worked. Many were surfing the board for the first time and every single person was stoked and wanted to try it again. It was a great day for me. Clearly the design has merit."



SHOWCASE: Alan Atkins, right, delivers a nine-point ride on Thomas Meyerhoffer designed board at Noosa yesterday. *PHOTO: STEVE ROBERTSON/SURFING AUSTRALIA*