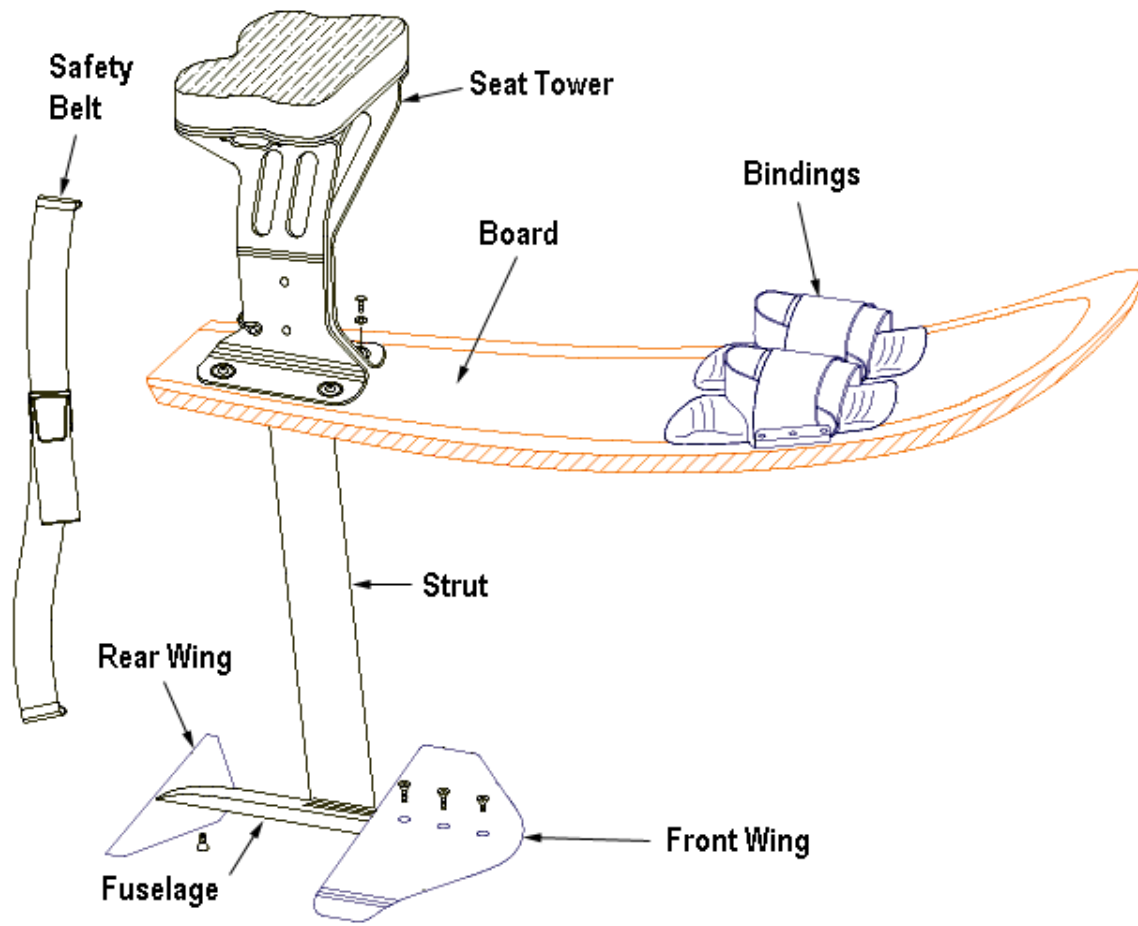


The Hydrofoiling Scene
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Hydrofoiling has seen an enormous increase in popularity over the past few years especially in the USA where events like tournaments and flyins attract more and more participants. Hydrofoiling is now recognized as an official water ski discipline, and has its own governing body known as the USHA (United States Hydrofoil Association).

This rise in popularity in the US is also happening here in Australia. This year marks the third annual Ozeflyin, which is a social event open to anyone interested in hydrofoiling regardless of your age or skill level. Participants can come and try out the different hydrofoil products available, improve their skills and also get a chance to see some of Australia's best strut their stuff. So what's it all about you ask? Let's take a look at the fundamentals of this sport.

The Hydrofoil – What is it?



(hydrofoilschematic.gif)

A hydrofoil is made up of 3 basic assemblies:

- The seat tower – typically made of aluminium, this is where the rider sits and wears a safety belt over the waist to remain connected to the seat at all times.
- The board – made from fibreglass or carbon fibre, the board consists of 2 bindings for your feet with safety straps. The seat tower bolts firmly to the board.
- The foil – made from cast or billet aluminium, the foil consists of 3 parts. The strut and fuselage (or t-bar) behaves like a rudder to help the rider go straight and turn. The front wing provides the lift needed to rise above the water and jump into the air while the rear wing provides a stabilising effect of the lift from the front wing allowing the rider to maintain control of the lift.

There are 2 main companies that produce complete hydrofoils, Air Chair and Sky Ski. Both offer different configurations such as the length of the strut, size and shape of the wings that affect the riding characteristics of the hydrofoil. Both these companies are US based, but many local ski shops around Australia will have hydrofoils available for both purchase and for hire. Prices start around \$2000 for a new base model and less for a used hydrofoil. A number of other companies produce aftermarket accessories, most notably Cinch Hydrofoil Products who specialise in safety belts, foot straps and other accessories and a company from Adelaide called Foiltech who specialise in high performance wings and t-bars.

The Appeal

There are two main features that set hydrofoiling apart from other types of skiing:

- No strength required: A hydrofoil has very little drag when moving through the water. Since you're actually riding on a wing that is under the water and not on the board, the resistance of the water is greatly reduced compared to a slalom ski or wakeboard. As a result of this very little effort is required to get up and cruise around.
- Bring on the rough water: On a hydrofoil you're not actually riding on the surface of the water, but on the underwater wings that lift you and the board above any rough water that may come your way. No need to go searching for glass water before the sun comes up, fly high above the waves anytime!

In addition to these, the real thrill is the feeling you get when you are truly flying the foil above the water. Once you master the basic riding position, you'll soon find that you can launch high into the air and land softly with little impact on your knees or back since the foil absorbs the landing. Boat speeds around 35km/h are common, even slower for beginners. Anyone can learn to hydrofoil and beginners

will find themselves flying the foil in only a few sets. For those who wish to progress, tricks range from jumps and grabs up to full twisting inverts, so there will always be a next level to progress to should that be your desire. For others just the thrill of going as big as they can on a jump, or cutting back and forth above the waters' surface is more than enough. Hydrofoiling is very much a family sport as one hydrofoil can be used by all members of a family for endless fun on the water... or rather above the water!

If you've seen a hydrofoil at your ski spot and thought about giving it a try, why not contact your local ski shop and hire one for a weekend. You may find that by the end of the weekend you've become addicted to the feeling of flying above the water!

Take it to the water – the basics

So you've hired a hydrofoil from your local ski shop, dropped the boat in and are suited up and ready to go... now what? Here's a few tips to get you up and flying.

One of the things you must realise about hydrofoiling is that you are not skiing. What I mean is that the basic rules you've learned from 2 skis about standing over the ski with your weight on the balls of your feet, turning by applying pressure to the outside leg do not apply to hydrofoiling, mostly because you are sitting down. So put those aside for now as you've got some new fundamentals to learn.

Required equipment

In addition to a hydrofoil, a high pole or tower on the tow boat is helpful as well as a wide handle with a deep V. As always a good life vest is essential as well as a non stretch rope.

Deepwater start

Secure yourself in the hydrofoil by placing your feet into the bindings, always using the foot straps. Keep the seat belt nice and loose while putting your feet in the bindings. Tighten the belt across your waist so it's snug, you should be sitting in the middle position on the seat so your butt is not hanging off the back of the seat. When not being pulled by the boat, the hydrofoil will float you in the exact position you want to be in to make the deepwater start, with your arms out straight and your handle over your knees.



(startFront1.jpg – initial start position before boat takes off)

Once the boat starts to go, your goal is to resist the boat enough to maintain this position until enough lift is generated to get you on top of the water.



(startSide1.jpg – resisting initial pull from boat.)



(startFront4.jpg – use knees to keep board tip under the rope and above water surface)

Move your knees right and left to keep them centred under your handle. Pressing on your feet will help you to control the tip of the board. It should be directly under the rope and always above the water's surface.



(startSide3.jpg – keep hands above knees and resist pull)



(startSide5.jpg – continue resisting as board begins to ride on top of the water)



(safetyPosition.jpg – lean forward with arms up once on top of water)

As soon as the board gets on top of the water, you'll need to control two things. The first is the lift which is controlled by leaning forward and keeping your arms high and straight to keep the board on the water. The second is steering. Keep your arms over your knees and keep looking at the observer in the boat. Focus on swinging your knees slowly from right to left to keep them under your handle. Don't worry if you tend to go to the right or left, just try to keep your hands and knees in line and keep looking at your observer. After a few sets you'll start to get the hang of steering the foil. This is your safety position as it will keep the board on the water and let you regain control.

Keep these points in mind for controlling lift:

- Leaning forward will reduce lift and lower the board onto the water.
- Keeping your arms straight and high will also reduce lift.
- This is the safety position, leaning forward with arms straight and high.
- Leaning back will increase lift and raise the board off the water.
- Keeping your arms straight and low will also increase lift.
- You will progress to this stage of leaning back slightly and pushing the handle down to rise up and jump the hydrofoil.



(ridingPosition.jpg – proper riding position)

Once you can consistently perform the deepwater start and can steer the foil in a straight line with the board on the water in the safety position, start to sit up and let your arms come down slightly. You'll find that the board will start to lift above the surface of the water. This is the correct riding position.



(turningPosition2.jpg – knees in direction you want to go, handle the opposite direction)

The next skills for you to master are to ride the foil in complete control keeping the board above the water at all times. Practice cutting back and forth between

the wakes and progress to crossing both wakes. To steer the foil, point your knees in the direction you want to go while pushing the handle in the opposite direction as shown above. Make small moves when adjusting your position, and at any time if you feel you're losing control, revert back to the safety position leaning forward with your arms up.

Note for your driver:

You want to keep the rope tight without dragging your rider through the water before they give you the go ahead. Once they tell you to go, accelerate smoothly and slowly up to 26km/h. No need to go any faster for the first few attempts. Once they can get up and ride in a straight line, increase the speed to around 32km/h.

Final Words

Remember to be patient, learning to foil is more about learning the FEELING of controlling lift and steering as opposed to muscling through. Stay focused on your safety position and feeling the lift and in no time you'll be up and flying!

For more information about hydrofoiling in Australia, be sure to check out the online Aussie community at www.ozeflyin.net. You'll find plenty of info there on hydrofoil products, links, discussion forums, flyins, videos and tips. You'll find that most foilers would be happy to take you out for the day and get you started, all you have to do is ask! Also take a look at the next flyin, they are a great way to meet other foilers and have a fun weekend while learning some new skills.