

Learning to hang ten

By Kate Tapping

Last time I went surfing I ended up in emergency care getting five stitches in the bottom of my foot. My brother-in-law was on the stretcher next to me getting forty stitches in his face. Not the family's finest surfing hour. What did I learn from the experience? Safety is one of the most important aspects for those learning to surf. Which is why lessons, with a reputable surfing school, are a great idea.

This weekend I went and had a surfing lesson at Anglesea with Wes Smith, one of the founders of Go Ride A Wave, Australia's first surfing school. Established in 1987, the company now provides lessons to over 50,000 students a year, through their surfing schools in Anglesea, Torquay, Ocean Grove, Lorne and, since 2004, Surfers Paradise in Queensland. Safety is a priority for the company.

"At Go Ride A Wave, we take pride in teaching surf-

ing the safest possible way. All of our instructors are fully qualified surf instructors, and trained surf lifesavers. We use the best equipment available, soft foam Gboards, and we give students a wetsuit or rash vest to protect them from the elements. We always have a first aid kit and mobile phone on the beach for every lesson." So what does a beginner surfing lesson involve?

When you get to your designated meeting spot – either the shopfront of a surf shop or a predetermined beach – you will be fitted for a wetsuit. Once suited up you, your fellow students, and your teachers then carry your boards down to the beach.

A lesson to cover the basics is then conducted on the sand. First up is safety. Any potential hazards are pointed out. Anglesea is a great beginners surf beach; in our case, our instructor Wes advised, "There are rocks up the far end of the



No sharks here!

beach, we won't go near there. The river mouth is up that end, we won't go near there. Tasmania is 370 kilometres out to sea... I'll come and grab you if you start heading that way." You will then practise paddling your board out into the ocean, looking for a wave, paddling madly to catch the wave, lifting your upper body of the board, and then jumping to your feet. All on the safety of the sand. Then it's time to hit the waves for real.

Beginner lessons are held in the white water near the shore. Often you will be catching

waves that have already broken. Go Ride A Wave teachers say 90 per cent of their students manage to stand on the board in their first lesson. "By the time I was standing on the board, I was in about a foot of water," says beginner surfer Susan. "I was no Kelly Slater, but it was great fun."

As the lessons are held in waist to chest deep water close to the shore, you don't even have to be a great swimmer to take beginner surfing lessons. "Many of our customers are not very strong swimmers; if you let us know you are not



Nice work!

Surf school basics

Who?
Go Ride A Wave
gorideawave.com.au
1300 132 441

What?
Beginner surf lessons
Group lessons sold individually or in packages of 3 or 5 lessons.

When? All year round

Where?
Anglesea, Torquay, Ocean Grove and Lorne (or Surfers Paradise)

What to bring?
Bathers, towel, sunscreen

And it's good for you!
Surfing provides many health benefits including:

- Cardiovascular fitness
- Shoulder and back strength
- Leg and core strength
- A great way to spend time outdoors and to enjoy the natural environment
- Effective outlet for stress and tension
- Fantastically good fun

that confident then we will give keep a close eye on you."

And what's the perfect age to learn to surf? "As a general rule we suggest anyone over eight years old, we find younger children don't have the attention span to last two hours. The eldest person we have had is 81 years old, and yes they stood up!"

So if you're aged between eight and eighty, you've really got no excuse. This could be your summer to learn how to hang five.

Kate Tapping is a Melbourne writer. Follow Kate at www.simplicityandthecity.com.



Is that Layne Beachley?!