

# SURFING

## Serenity

By Rob Logan

Forty-five years after catching his first wave, surf enthusiast **Bo Kennedy** still loves to hang ten on Central Florida's east coast.

On a busy day when the surf breaks right, hundreds of surfers gather for fun and sport at key spots along the Space Coast. Chances are one of them might be Azalea Park resident **Bo Kennedy**, who's been surfing that area of the Atlantic coast since the early 1960s—back when Ron Jon's Surf Shop was only a wee shack on Canaveral Pier.

"It's addicting, very addicting," Kennedy says, explaining the appeal surfing has had for him over the years. "The physical exercise makes me feel good. There's a physical and psychological element about riding a wave that's just special."

### THE ARMCHAIR CAN WAIT

Although Kennedy is 62 years old, the age where some men trade in the athletic pursuits of youth for more sedate sport (such as watching ESPN), he sees no reason to stop surfing now. "I play softball and golf," he says. "Softball is good for competition, and I play golf to improve my score. But I get the most enjoyment out of surfing. Surfing is a different thing altogether—I'm not competing against anybody."

Kennedy, who owns an auto dealership on Orange Blossom Trail, likes to surf on the weekends at New Smyrna Beach, Cocoa Beach and other spots along the coast. When there's a good swell brewing, such as after a

hurricane or tropical storm, he's been known to cut out early from work to get in on it.

"My ideal wave is anything that's shoulder to head high. That's a good fun wave," Kennedy explains. "The biggest wave I've surfed had 20 foot face—that was 1994 in Malibu."

On the eternal question—how does Florida compare to California surfing?—Kennedy answers, "Waves are all the same in California. Our waves change from day to day. If you can surf a Florida east coast wave, you can surf anywhere in the world."

When it comes to his board, Kennedy prefers a longboard—a 9 foot 2 inch tri-fin longboard, to be exact. He explains, "Shorter boards are more for radical kinds of moves, twists and turns. For me, it's a relaxing sport. On a longboard, it's relaxing."

### SURFING IN THE SIXTIES

Coming of age during the emerging surf culture of the early 1960s, Kennedy retains detailed memories of heading for Daytona each weekend: friends piled into a Ford Fairlane 500, surfboards cluttered on the roof, headed straight for the beach. Or, before he had a car, he hitchhiked, with surfboard under arm, from Orlando to wherever the surf was.

Kennedy bought a fiberglass Miller longboard for \$120 that year. "Custom boards today go for \$800 to \$2,000 dollars, but

\$120 was a lot of money at the time," he says. The rest was gravy, as Kennedy recalls: "Gasoline was 24 cents a gallon, McDonald's hamburgers were 19 cents a piece, a six pack of Old Milwaukee beer was 69 cents, and a room at the Ritz motel in Daytona was \$7 a night."

"We'd get seven, eight or nine of us to pile in to a room at the Ritz. We could stay the whole weekend, drink beer, smoke cigarettes and surf for less than 10 bucks," he says.

Kennedy chuckles, remembering the prevailing attitude about surfers among clean-living town folk. "Back then, you didn't see a lot of surfers, and they had a bad reputation," he says. "I guess they thought we were a bunch of pot smokers, lazy and didn't want to work—just wanted to surf."

When pressed if there might have been a kernel of truth behind the surf bum stereotype, he confesses: "Well yes, but they didn't have to tell us that."

Despite any anti-surfer prejudice, Kennedy had a blast and seems to be a bit nostalgic, too. "We probably had as many as eight surfboards on top of that car at one time," he says. "It was a different era. You never locked your car up, you left your keys in the ignition, you left your money in the car."

continued

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Photos by John Zawacki, www.jzstudios.com





Since the early '60s, Bo Kennedy has been surfing in Central Florida from New Smyrna to Cocoa Beach, where he says no two east coast waves are the same.



### THE BIRD IS THE WORD

Of course, these days, you don't have to wait for a post-hurricane swell and make a rush to the coast—not when a perfect artificial wave can be had any day of the week at a high-tech surf park. But, for a longtime enthusiast like Kennedy, artificial waves have no appeal. He loves the ritual, getting up in the morning, driving to the beach, reading the surf and then paddling out a few hundred yards to find the sweet spot. “You can't do those things at an artificial surf spot,” he insists.

Back in 1963, The Trashmen had a

hit with “Surfing Bird,” and beach movies like Gidget had currency at the drive-in. A young Kennedy never imagined he'd still be surfing in 2008. But today, he says if he can do it, guys past their 20s can do it. He reminds surfers young and old that age doesn't matter to the waves.

Sure, big-wave riding and Kelly Slater-like moves may be a thing of the past for older surfers, but there's still plenty of fun—not to mention serenity—to be had. “Surfing puts my mind someplace that I can't get to unless I'm on a board,” Kennedy says. ■



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