

YOUR FAVORITE SURF MAG

# water

DATE: 05  
ISSUE: 10  
\$10.00  
Magazine Water

THE BEST SURF TRIP EVER / JOEL TUDOR INTERVIEW / PHOTO  
CHRIS KLOPF PORTFOLIO / THOU SHALT NOT JUDGE / MORE GERRY GE



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# Full Haole Welcome

## the curse of cool

Story and images by Mr. Will Henry



HAOLE VISION.

**W**ith skinny, hairy knees so pale that all the black hairs stand out, tender pink feet and fair complexion, I am truly out of my element here. The tropics are like a foreign planet to me, as though the atmosphere were barely breathable. My skin is in a constant state of sweat and agitation as if I have some horrid tropical fever, breaking out in hives from the heat, and even before I have left the airport parking lot I have sweated through my clothing. Not even the ocean is refreshing here, like some massive bathtub with tepid water, hollow waves, and coral reefs like a set of jagged teeth below each undulating swell. First session I paddle out and duck dive, only to be thrown on the reef, ass backwards; it's only three feet and I still haven't even caught a wave yet, but here I am scraping the reef clean with my back.

Joe Cool is in the 7-Eleven parking lot signing Triple Crown posters. "I'm too busy, kid," he says to me, even though I'm 38 years old and he's obviously not busy, standing in a convenience store parking lot trying to look tough. He signs one guy's arm and the guy looks at him funny; he hands me a poster as though it were too much effort for him to do so, but doesn't sign it, apparently too difficult for him to pick up a pen. He looks stressed, a pained expression on his face, as if he were being swarmed by a mob of sex-crazed girls instead of talking to three surfers in a 7-Eleven parking lot. Joe Cool, self-made hero of a bygone era, myth in a

land of legends, clinging desperately to glory days long since forgotten.

"Get me a Jet Ski and I'll do it!" Joe screams into the phone, while the guy next to me pokes me in the arm, "Do you know who this is?"

"Yeah, I've heard of him."

"This is Joe Cool and he rode the biggest wave ever." Joe Cool with bad skin and bleached hair, too busy to sign my poster.

In my rental car, the wax has already melted off my board and dripped onto my seat, and the car smells like the inside of a musty sock, a mix of tobacco smoke and mildew. The nearby beach is a mob scene, and I can tell why—it's a photographers dream: all frontlit with coral-pink sand and deep blue water, offshore winds pluming off grinding barrels. The sand is littered with tripods and chicks wearing skimpy cloth over waifish figures, and in between sets the giant metal lenses swivel like heads poking at the eye candy on the beach while the girls pretend not to notice. I think they sit here on purpose. Down near Pipeline the water is crowded, even though the swell is way too north, guys who probably paddled out just to say they did, and the beach is filled with Japanese tourists and some from middle America and they look around as though they made a wrong turn somewhere back near Honolulu; there's an Asian chick dragging a Boogie Board that says "extreme" on

it but by the way she is dragging it across the sand I can tell she's never gotten extreme and I hope she has the common sense not to even try it in these waters. The lifeguards are talking pidgin, even though some are *haoles*, and one of the fat people from middle America asks in a hickish accent, "Wayer's the surfin' con-test?" And one of the lifeguards answers, "It's down dere at Sunset. You gotta drive ahnudah mile for dat." But Kam Highway is so jammed full of cars, it'll take her half an hour to drive it. I arrive at the contest to hear another group of mainlanders say in disappointment that the contest is over for the day, but I'm glad because maybe I can sneak in a session at Sunset. I see my friend and he says, "No, man, I wouldn't go out there, all the pros are out there training and you'll never get a wave." But I tell him I don't care, I might as well go to the most crowded spot and just get it over with, might as well sit inside on purpose and take a set on the head and get dragged across the reef just so I know it can't get any worse.

Sunset is double overhead, but I hear one local *haole* call it 8-12' because they call it from the face over here now, not the back any longer. In the old days the locals used to prove their bravado by calling a quadruple-overhead monster 10 foot even though the face was clearly 25 feet. This newfangled system must be causing mass confusion, already there have been two fatal car crashes along Kam Highway in the last two days, no doubt an indirect result of this grave change, which may have caused planets to go out of alignment and is rendering tide charts ineffective. I paddle out through a deep, wide channel towards the reef at Sunset and as I get near, some pro surfer gets a wickedly deep barrel on a wave that clearly would have made me wet my pants and jump off out of pure desire for self-preservation. He kicks out behind me, but within seconds paddles past me, even though I try to keep up by quickening my pace. "Nice barrel," I tell him, and he says, "Thanks," like he's heard it a million times already that day, and I recognize his face but can't remember his name. I figure it doesn't really matter anyway, at some point I'll be eating his spray. As it turns out, the lineup is not full of pros, but full of *haole* kooks like

me acting like spray targets for the five or so pros in the water. I manage to actually catch a few waves to myself before an orange moon rises over the palm trees to my north and I ride the whitewater to shore. In the blue hues of dusk, I walk back to my glowing-red rental car and faces peer at me curiously in the near dark, tourist faces looking for Kelly Slater or Tom Curren or the ghost of Duke Kahanamoku.

After two days of surfing, my ear is infected and it feels as though a conch shell has attached itself to the side of my head. I pour in alcohol and peroxide but nothing seems to help, and my friend suggests tequila, so I figure what the hell, but that doesn't work

***"Fuck up here, and the whole surfing world is witness to it; fuck up here, and you might get your sorry ass crammed into an underwater cave that you'll never find your way out of until some poor snorkeler discovers your body come summer."***

either. I surf with a blocked ear and a developing case of nipple-rash, but the waves are good today and not too crowded because all the pros are having a mass Expression Session for the cameras back at Rocky Point. I slather on the sunscreen generously and try to spread it onto my back without help...where is the hot Brazilian chick when you need her? I drip it down the crease in my back and bend my elbows backwards like some sickly, molting pelican, but it's no use, the stream of white lotion just drips down and stains my trunks. I consider asking this fat *haole* guy in the car next to me, but then think twice about it lest he think I'm some homosezchuan from Hollywood, so I head out for a session and leave my absurdly red rental car on the highway. Dudes with tattoos and bright board shorts pass me on the overgrown trail, too cool to smile, I smile anyway and say, "Hey," but get no response, it's like I'm not even here. The waves are fun but the swell a bit too north. The locals are complaining about this sad fact and I feel like reminding them that it is overhead, warm

and offshore and shouldn't they be counting their blessings? I decide against it because one of them might see it as an excuse to do a *haole* face dance and play soccer with my skull. When I get back to my rental car, my key won't work in the door. I think for a second I've gone to the wrong car, which wouldn't be surprising, as there are about fifty other *haole* idiots driving exactly the same vehicle at this exact moment but no, that's my unsigned Joe Cool poster on the front seat, so what gives? The key won't turn at all. I lift the door handle and it opens and immediately I get this sick feeling that something has gone wrong. It's then that I realize my cell phone and wallet are nowhere to be found. The Joe Cool poster sits there, unharmed, untouched, as though mocking me. I'm starting to think it's some kind of curse.

By day three, my ear is blocked, my car vandalized, and the reef cuts on my back are sore and oozing. My nipples are so raw that it hurts to shower and there are dark scabs that crack and bleed a few times a day. I have a rash on my chest, in my armpits, and between my legs, all places where skin contacts fiberglass. On my back is a pattern of sunburn which resembles a map of Micronesia, indicating the places where I was unable to apply sunblock. I'm a big, white, gangly mess.

A huge swell is on the horizon. By tomorrow night it's meant to be 20 foot, but 20-foot faces or backs I'm not sure, either way it makes my ass pucker. I can't sleep; it's five o'clock in the morning, so I walk out onto the beach under a waning near-full moon to contemplate my existence. There is a lone figure zigzagging across the sand near the water's edge, stooping and looking closely at something every so often, maybe he's looking for *puka* shells, sneaking in a morning *puka* session before the crowd hits. A warm rain begins to fall and I listen to it hiss when it hits the coarse sand, with my one good ear, as the faint hues of dawn are beginning to light the thunderheads to the south and east. I can hear roosters crowing all around, testament to the rural nature of the North Shore and its shortage of shopping malls, high-rises and resort hotels.

The swell is California-size today, the boards shorter and the aerials more frequent. Everywhere I look is crowded and I think, okay, maybe it's time to see a doctor about this ear. Doctor says that I'll have to put these drops in every two hours and that surfing and swimming are out of the question. "Does that include bodyboarding?" I ask, but he doesn't think it's cute. Maybe his

wife is a bodyboarder or maybe he is, you never know these days, you've gotta watch who you say these things to. In the afternoon, the rain comes and by nightfall it's raining hard, flooding the roads and stranding tourists in the Foodland parking lot.

Next morning there is a deep rumble to be heard, like sonic booms hitting every 20 seconds. The air is cooler, as though the new swell dragged some cold air along with it on its way down from the Aleutians, a tame reminder of the furious weather that fuels these massive winter wonders. I lie in bed with a knotted sphincter, I toss and turn, knowing full damn well that I have no choice, ear infection or not, I'll have to surf today, but all I can think about is Tom Carroll at third reef Pipe and whether or not I could actually make that drop, let alone survive the wipe-out. It makes no difference that I've traveled the world and surfed oodles of waves that



NICE HAT.



NICE...

have been compared to the North Shore, waves like Sunset, just like Backdoor, the comparisons are always made, but nothing equates to the real thing. You can make all the comparisons you want, but what it boils down to is Pipe is Pipe, and it's a lot easier to surf a wave like it if you're in some Third World country with no crowds in the water, no cameras on the beach, and no pressure in your chest. Fuck up here, and the whole surfing world is witness to it; fuck up here, and you might get your sorry ass crammed into an underwater cave that you'll never find your way out of until some poor snorkeler discovers your body come summer. So I'm thinking all these things as I get out of bed

to brush my teeth and sit on the pot, all the while wondering if there is maybe some spot on the westside that's not so big, maybe some place I can go where I won't die if I go over the falls and hit the reef again.

Luckily, the contest is on at Sunset, so I have a damn good excuse for not surfing. Have to sit on the beach with all the other lame tourists "oohing" and "aahing" at every barrel and wipeout, listen to the announcer with the fake voice in a loud-speaker at ear-piercing decibels talk about the radical cover-up that guy got, watch the chicks on the beach strut around arching their backs to show off the results of that expensive operation and all the crunches and squats they do, just like the pro surfers, they train all year to be here, on the beach at Sunset with a thousand guys drooling on the sand as they adjust their towels to get the perfect angle towards the sun. The sets stack up on the horizon, deep blue lines rippled with offshore winds, and the competitors gouge deep turns in the open faces, while the silicone implants on the beach heave in synchronization with the pulsating swells. The porn is everywhere and after a few hours of it I'm spent, like I had just watched five dirty movies in a row with no satisfaction and it no longer has any affect on me at all. Time to go surfing, goddamnit. I go down to Haleiwa which, due to the contest, is uncrowded but with lots of current, and I relish the opportunity to carve a few turns of my own. I leave the car unlocked and the Joe Cool poster on the seat hoping that some poor fool will steal it from me, that someone will remove this curse that has been placed on me by angry Hawaiian gods, a curse no doubt invoked in a 7-Eleven parking lot by a crazy *haole* with bad skin and a big ego. I should never have accepted that goddamn poster.

After two hours of surfing, the poster is still there and I realize that the curse is mine to bear, I'll have to shoulder it like a man, suck it up and make the best of my situation. I had a good session despite myself and for that I should be grateful. On my way home, I check Pipe. It's big and scary. I talk to a guy on the beach who laments the swell direction, "Too north," he says, "look how only one in every three waves are makeable." "Yeah, shame," I say, "otherwise I'd be out there," and I run back to the rental car holding my stomach.

Next day, the trades are up strong and the swell smaller, offshore winds whipping huge plumes of spray off the tops of the waves. I check Sunset to discover in amazement that there are only six guys in the water, even

though the contest is not on, and I wonder if there is something I don't know, a shark attack just up the beach or a sewage spill or a terrorist threat that is keeping all the other assholes away. I have a great session until some arrogant *haole* drops in on me on the best wave and almost knocks me off my board so that I have to straighten out of a great barrel. I come up through the whitewater, seething at him. "What the fuck was that for?" I ask. "Did you learn your etiquette here or in Brasil?"

"Just deal with it," he replies.

"Deal with it? You don't want me to deal with it, pal."

***"...the competitors gouge deep turns in the open faces, while the silicone implants on the beach heave in synchronization with the pulsating swells."***

"I'm from here," he says. "I live right here at Sunset across the highway," as though this gives him the right to do whatever he pleases, and I think, I'm from Santa Cruz where localism was invented and I shouldn't have to take this shit, especially from some pumped-up *haole* who can't seem to get his own waves in a session at uncrowded Sunset. I tell him so, and also tell him that a simple apology would suffice, but no, he's got to be some tough guy and act like the king of Sunset, may the curse of Lono come down hard on you, you *haole* idiot. My mood spoiled, I head in after my next wave. Back at the car, the Joe Cool poster stares at me from the backseat as though laughing and sneering at my foolishness.

Five days and three swells later, it's time for me to head homeward. I never surfed Pipe, lucky for me it was always the wrong swell direction or wind direction when I happened to check it, a pity really, because I could have used the help in loosening my bowels. Pipeline seems a fitting name but if I had named it, I would have called it brown tracks, because when they picked my body up off the reef, that's what they would have seen inside my trunks. Nonetheless, I had a good trip, if you don't count the sunburn, infected reef cuts, rip-offs, snakes and ear infections, man, I had a fucking blast, soiled



LOCALS RULE.



WEEKDAY COMPACT SPECIAL.

all of my underwear but nothing a washing machine couldn't fix. As I drop off my sickly rental car at the airport, I once again steal a hard look at the Joe Cool poster on the backseat. Angrily, I reach in the car and grab the poster, wanting to tear it into pieces but fearing the consequences of such a desperate act.

I check in for my flight and leave the counter, still holding the Joe Cool poster in my hand. I have a plan. I head down to the baggage claim and begin to scan the area. I see a large group of people waiting for their baggage, and amongst them is a group of *haole* surfers collecting their board bags and looking around nervously as though some big local guy was going to jump them in the airport and make them all go right back home. I pick the one guy in the group who looks the most arrogant, the one who is trying to shield his fear behind a show of tough pretense, the guy sporting the tattoos and the scowl.

"Hey, man," I say to him, "are you going to the North Shore?"

"Yeah," he says, eyeing me suspiciously.

"Right on, man, it's going off. You're gonna love it," I say, trying to stay calm and hide my desperation. After a few moments, he starts to loosen up, telling me that he's a North Shore regular, been coming over for years. "Oh, that's great," I say, "then you must have heard of Joe Cool, he rode the biggest wave ever..." ♣