



# THE OREGON EXPERIENCE

## feature

Timo Mullen launches a back loop in front of Oregon's picture postcard scenery





# PISTOLS



# AT

# DAWN

WORDS & PHOTOS BY: JOHN CARTER

PISTOL RIVER, home to the wildest stretch of windsurfing coastline on the legendary Highway 101 and a wave sailing competition with an equally legendary reputation for big winds, big waves and big stars. After a ten year break organiser Sam Bitner decided it was time to bring the Pistol River wave bash back and back with a bang. With all the sport's big guns gathering for a mega shootout in the icy waves of Oregon - this was one contest Windsurf could not miss. Gathering our sharpshooters John Carter and Timo Mullen, we hit the road for an all American tale and how the West was nearly won!

## DUBIOUS CALL

John Carter...I'm hovering over the button to book two tickets on a United Airlines flight to San Francisco. It's now or never...no more procrastinating...the flight leaves in twenty four hours and the decision needs to be made right now! Myself and Timo Mullen have always talked about a trip to the Oregon Coast. It's one of those wave sailing destinations like Baja, Maui, Western Australia or the Canary Islands that you just have to tick the box and do it before you get too old and live to regret that you'd never lived that experience. So when we heard all the build up to the 2010 Pistol River Wave Bash and a line up that included Kevin Pritchard, Francisco Goya, Kai Katchadourian and even talk of a guest appearance from Robby Naish, there were no excuses...this was our golden chance to beg our wives for permission to embark on a boys road trip to the USA. Before I click and splash out £1300 pounds for two tickets, I suppose I'd better just check the forecast one last time. Timo has disappeared sailing and left me his credit card details...it's down to me to make the call...it all looks a bit sketchy and to be honest I don't really know what to look for...All was looking rosy yesterday, our local guru Kai Katchadourian was indicating green light for

the trip but then this morning I had received a late in the day e mail warning 'Things have taken a bit of a turn for Pistol...not sure what to make of it...should blow'...What the hell, it's only money...I press confirm...moments pass while my computer flickers and money is leaving our bank accounts...the page lights up as confirmed...we are on, Oregon here we come!

## NO CLUE

Fast forward thirty six hours and we are gunning towards San Francisco on a chaotic five lane highway, our adventure already well underway. Somehow we had managed to blag our way into business class on United, escape with no excess baggage fees and score a snazzy black Jeep rental car for our four day sojourn up the infamous Highway 101. I had also managed to guzzle a bottle of Sauvignon Blanc on the plane and then borrow two sets of business class blankets and pillows just in case we had to sleep rough. With the gear strapped down on the roof and Sat Nav dialled in for the Golden Gate Bridge, we head out of the airport with no real clue where we are headed, no accommodation booked and no worries whatsoever!

## ARE WE GOING TO SAN FRANCISCO...??

After being cooped up on a plane for ten hours we decide to stop off and check out the windsurfing scene at the infamous Crissy Fields beneath the rusty red pillars of the Golden Gate Bridge. San Francisco is famous for its strong winds and I knew Timo was gagging to squeeze in a quick sail before we hit the road for eight hours en route to Pistol River. A gusty wind line sixty metres offshore was not looking ideal for Timo's 5.3 and 80 litre wave board but right on cue with our arrival we spotted a local dude blasting around on the brand new Severne Reflex and a 2010 Starboard Isonic.



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This was too good to be true surely but surely Timo didn't have the nerve to ask this total stranger to lend out his brand new kit....Wrong! Within ten minutes Timo had managed to persuade our new best buddy 'Lee' to do the honourable thing for a fellow Starboard team rider. I am not quite sure if Lee really wanted to part with his brand new gear but how could he deny Timo's Irish charm. Out on the water Timo was totally overpowered on the 7m and at one point I thought he was going to catapult and wreck the lot! Somehow he managed to blast out of control up towards the Bridge, dodge various tankers and return the kit back to Lee in one piece. Within an hour we were done with sailing and back on the road escaping the city across the Golden Gate Bridge, headed North on Highway 101. With jet lag setting in, we were already fading fast and according to our GPS; still faced over 360 miles of highway between us and our final destination. Using every trick in the book to stay awake (Red Bulls, windows wide open, Girls aloud versus Spice Girls debate, and amping the stereo up full blast) we managed to cover about 200 miles before deciding to quit driving. Just off the highway we pulled into a Wild West town and stumbled across a sketchy Motel with internet and two beds for \$60...not too bad.

## TIMO MULLEN

"Considering we only booked the flights less than 24 hours ago I thought we had done ourselves proud, no excess charges, Business class seats and a pimp Jeep truck. Kai had advised us to take the Highway 101 as it was more scenic than the main inland highway but took a little bit longer, myself and JC agreed we would rather take the scenic route, 1 hour into our drive we realised that the majority of the scenic route would be in the dark, not exactly epic for photos!! For this reason we decided to break the journey up by crashing in one of the many Motels along the 101. The one we managed to pick however was straight out of

the Psycho Axe Murderers Handbook! I think both of us slept with one eye open that night and both of us were glad to hear the alarm go off at 0400 waking us for the rest of the drive to Pistol River. Kai did not lie when he said the scenery was stunning, neither myself or JC would admit to be the most cultured people on this planet but even we were stopping at every bend in the road checking out plunging gorges, perfect beaches and wild rock formations, this coastline really does take your breath away."

## HIGHWAY 101

The 101 actually runs the whole length of the west coast stretching from Mexico all the way up to Canada. As it weaves up along the Pacific shoreline north of San Francisco the scenery is truly awe inspiring. We were back on the road at daybreak as the first shadows of the 300 feet tall redwoods forests kissed the highway. The area know as the Avenue of the Giants in the Humbolt Redwoods state park boasts some of the tallest and oldest trees in the world and is well worth the 30 mile detour off the 101 to check it out. By the time we hit the Oregon border at Brookings we'd stopped so many times for scenic photos my camera was running low on batteries. We had pulled over to shoot wild Elks, sheer cliffs, pine forested headlands, rugged coves and majestic islands, this was scenery to die for and surely one of the most beautiful drives anywhere on the planet. We heard the landscapes are even more dramatic to the North of Oregon past Florence but the amazing vistas we were seeing were fine by me. The pleasant aspect about this whole area is that it's all well away from the hustle and bustle of any major cities and the bohemian coastal towns that break up the drive all help add some extra flavour and charm to the experience.

## PISTOL RIVER

Twenty miles into Oregon we shoot past a sign reading Pistol River and about 1km later we spot

a bunch of vans at the edge of the highway and a sign for the 'Pistol River Wave Bash'...We've made it. Casting our gaze over the dunes to the ocean there are already whitecaps, there is hardly a cloud in the sky and the surf is rolling in.... Some places you just know it's brewing up for a windy day and today the writing was on the wall that it was all set to nuke! On the left side of the beach is a huge rock where the contest headquarters was being set up and also by the looks of things the only place to shelter from the onslaught of wind. With an hour to kill until registration we drive further up the highway to the coastal town Golden Beach to grab some lunch. En route to town we pass another decent looking beach with cross offshore winds called Cape Sebastian. Here there are another set of colourful vans at the ready, guarded by windsurfers weighing up the conditions...this set up actually looks like the spot to sail especially in a bigger swell. Our thoughts are confirmed by local sailor Dana Miller, who gladly spills the beans on how good this place can be on the right combo of south swell and north winds. If you ever make the journey to Oregon you'll be sure to come across Dana and his infamous van coated from top to bottom with sponsor stickers and words of wisdom from himself and other fellow philosophers.

## TIMO MULLEN

"We had no accommodation booked as we thought we would find something once we actually arrived in Gold Beach. There are literally dozens of motels and B&B's in this small town, the prices range between \$50-\$90 per night for a room with 2 massive double beds and a buffet breakfast, pretty good value in my book. Clearly JC was on a budget or just being tight, we had the choice between the mega pimp super duper Motel for \$65 a night or the mega basic for \$50, a simple decision in my book, pay the extra for luxury of course!! A good call as the non stop wind and waves savaged our bodies and the extra luxury was a much needed pampering we needed."

## WAVE BASH

It's been ten years since the last US mainland event and the return of the Wave Bash came about largely due to the determined efforts of Maui resident Sam Bittner. Sam has been hustling around in Maui to bring back a US event and somehow managed to rake in enough sponsorship from the industry to pull off this amazing set up at Pistol. We had heard through the grapevine that even Robby Naish was going to throw some weight at this event and make the effort to come along and show his support. Sure enough one of the greatest legends in windsurfing waltzed in on the second day in typical Naish style with the biggest baddest RV (Recreational Vehicle) known to mankind.

Whit Poor flies over a solitary house on the hill...a pretty decent view from both perspectives





Francisco Goya flying high  
above the Oregon Coast



*“ Francisco Goya - Oregon was amazing, I sailed everyday I was there, from 4.2 side on over powered to 5.3 front side riding ”*



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Robby even stepped in at the prize giving ceremony to personally thank Sam for all her efforts, a few wise words of thanks and encouragement from the king of windsurfing were enough to make it all worthwhile for Sam and I am sure this won't be the last time her name is associated with rocking events in the future.

### TIMO MULLEN

"Myself and JC have been gagging to go to Pistol River for years, we have just been waiting on the right opportunity, and the Pistol River Wave Bash gave us the perfect excuse. I have often been accused of being 'shiny' by my mates but I have to say the entry list for the Wave Bash was as 'shiny' as it gets, Goya, Pritchard, Taboul, Kai K and last but not least Robby Naish!! The contest was only supposed to be a low key event yet somehow Sam the organiser had managed to attract 3 Wave World Champions, hardly low key!!"

### THE BIG GUNS GO OFF

On the first day down at Pistol the wind is cross shore with a touch of 'on' and already 4.5 weather by 9.30am and building fast. Timo has entered the contest and is preparing for battle with some of the best sailors in the United States. Pritchard, Goya and Katchadourian are the heavy hitters on the entry list but there are also the likes of Whit Poor, Jesse Brown, Zane Schweitzer, Nat Gill and Nathan Mershon in the line up. The judges panel was no bunch to shun away either with Matt Pritchard at the helm as head judge and Quatro shaping Guru Keith Taboul as his right hand man. By noon its blowing over 30 knots and the sailors are scurrying round for their smallest sails. The wind is cold and the water is icy and verging on ridiculous. As the tide surged in, the whole arena in front of the rock turned into a cauldron of waves and ramps. These conditions were perfect for throwing down rocker airs and over the four day window a heavy duty battle ensued with this world class fleet fighting tooth and nail for the honour of victory.

After a thrilling double elimination it all boiled down to a Pritchard versus Goya Super Final, after Pritchard had won the single elimination and Goya had fended off the challenge from Kai Katchadourian to become the double elimination challenger. On the final afternoon the two sailors were thrown into the arena head to head for the ultimate twenty minute showdown. The two ex world champions did not disappoint. Pritchard the master of consistency versus the fluid soulful style of Goya, who would win this one, was anyone's guess! In the end it was KP who pulled all his tricks out of the bag and slam dunked Goya into second place. Pritchard's perfect one hand, one legged back loop, a surprise double and two wave takas were enough to quash Cisco's sky back loop and double loop retorts. There was no prize money...



Mullen on the road



Carrying the rigs  
Oregon Style



Timo lost somewhere  
in Oregon



Francisco Goya back loop



Off the lip at Cape Sebastian



Stunning scenery, wind and waves...Timo Mullen Back loops at Myers Creek



just the honour of winning but boy did these guys put on a radical show for the crowd.

## TIMO MULLEN

"I managed to win both my opening heats until I came up against Goya and Kai in the 3rd round. Kai won the heat easily but it was really close between myself and Goya, he had in his world a 'bad heat' in fact probably my only ever chance to beat him. To beat Goya in a heat you not only have to beat him but literally kick his ass back across the Pacific to Maui, Goya's version of a bad heat would still win any UK contest so I was left packing my kit up wondering what if!! In the double elimination I managed to win my first heat but then had a shocker when my mast broke after only 3 minutes of the heat. I was gutted as I was pretty psyched for the event as the conditions were what could only be described as PERFECT! Needless to say the usual suspects of Kai, Goya and KP made it to the podium, with KP showing everyone on the beach that he is still one of the world's most radical wave sailors by taking the overall Wave Bash title. My luck changed on the last day when I managed to be placed 2nd Overall

in the Shadowbox Jump Contest, I was pretty stoked to this time finish ahead of Cisco and KP, congratulations to Gorge ripper Tyson Poor for boosting a huge 31 foot back loop to take the win.

## THE SAILING

Don't leave home without your 5.3 wetsuit and also pack a hood and booties which will save the day if you really feel the pinch of the icy waters. Off the water a jacket and beanie are definitely required when standing out in the wind but find a sheltered spot and you can easily be in shorts and a t shirt. Don't forget to slap on the sunscreen, the sun is stronger than you think...we can vouch for that! The cold water is all down to the way the wind works here in Oregon. An icy sea creates a morning fog (The marine layer) which is sucked south as the hot air rises inland as the land heats up. This giant sea breeze affects the whole Oregon coast and is most consistent during the months of June and July. The winds at Pistol can regularly blow 4m weather in the height of summer and pretty much stay cross to cross onshore. If you have ever sailed at Guincho or Kimmeridge on an epic day the sailing is that kind of style; lots of ramps,

wave riding galore and a solid steady wind which picks up most of the day and then calms down a little for the evening session. Up at Cape Sebastian they reckon the winds are usually a force stronger but more gusty and blow cross to cross offshore depending how far down the bay you sail. The scenery in both spots is outstanding and when there is a decent swell the waves can be heavy and challenging.

On the second day of the contest after Timo was knocked out of the double we decided to do a quick hit and run session up at Cape Sebastian with Kai Katchadourian and Francisco Goya who both had a few hours to spare before their next heats. The three foot swell seemed to be setting up nicely on the low tide sand bar and the boys charged hard for an hour or so before sailing off downwind back to Pistol. En route back to Pistol Timo pulled into a few waves right in front of the giant sea stacks at Myers Creek, the wind was kind of gusty but the back drop for the photographs was insane.



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Francisco Goya hits the lip at Cape Sebastian



## TIMO MULLEN

"The sailing at Pistol River blew me away! Every day was like the best ever day on the South Coast of England, I could choose between perfect side offshore beach break at Cape Sebastian to full power side/side on shore jumping and wave riding Pistol. Generally the wind would first build at Cape Sebastian in the morning then as the land warms up the wind would get strong enough to move down the coast to Pistol River. If there is a swell running then I'd say Cape Sebastian is the best spot to base yourself, the wind can be a little bit gusty but the down the line wave riding more than makes up for that. The wave packs a punch but more like a sucker punch, just enough to let you know who is boss but not enough to destroy all your kit. The inside bowl is perfect for aerials, goitas and tweaked airs, it was a joy to watch Cisco and Kai rip the place to shreds, their fluid style honed in the much warmer Pacific waters in Maui. When the wind gets too strong at the Cape (which it often can!) or when the waves are pretty marginal it is time to move downwind to Pistol River or as the locals call it 'the Rock'. This spot is probably one of the best starboard tack jumping spots in the world, steep ramps and nuking winds means rocket air!! Best spot to launch is just upwind of 'the Rock', in fact the best waves also come through here, the further downwind you go the stronger the rip current and the waves become a little bit messy (unless your name is Robby Naish who ripped it to pieces downwind!) The last day I sailed was a

classic day for Pistol River, wind blown swell (flat at the Cape), howling 4.5m weather and side shore wind. Every stunt was possible on this day as the waves were a playful 3-4ft. I managed to double my total amount of goitas I have landed on the wave on starboard tack to 4; I wish I could have sailed like that against Goya! The biggest downside however is the COLD!! Now I love sailing in cold water, Ireland gets pretty cold in the winter but this place was an extra notch on the cold water charts, I mean the water is freezing; I was in a 5/3mm winter suit and still could have done with my hood. Basically when it gets windy (like every day in the summer) the wind causes an up welling of the colder water, a bit like it does in Cape Town but much much colder! The wind is also pretty cold so hanging around talking crap in a wet wetsuit is kept to a minimum, good excuse to not have to listen to JC's endless excuses to why he lost at golf! Even though the air temp is pretty chilly the sun is mega strong, both myself and JC got fried on the last day when we forgot to put on sun block!

## EXTRA ACTIVITIES

We managed to sneak a brisk 9 holes of golf at the Cedar Bend Golf course just north of Gold beach although I'd prefer not to mention the incident with my T shot on the 6th and a certain stream just in front. There are also plenty of opportunities to take boat touring trips up the Pistol River and fishing trips if you fancy pulling in some local game. Gold Beach is the perfect base to explore

the unlimited activities available on the Southern Oregon Coast such as kayaking, hiking and mountain biking. It is probably one of the best places in the world to do nothing at all...just take a walk along one of the amazing beaches, clear your head and escape from the stresses of everyday life. This is a place to soak up the scenery, relax and enjoy, believe us, there are not many places in the world that can match what Mother Nature has to offer in this amazing state.

## THE EXPERIENCE

Oregon boasts some of the most stunning unspoilt coastline in the United States as well as amazing windsurfing conditions. When you drive up though this neck of the woods there is that real feeling of adventure and that you are breaking away from the pack. If you like small towns, a laid back vibe and friendly people then this place is for you. Just driving back along the coast we spotted numerous beaches winds cross offshore winds as the road meandered through the stunning scenery. Although the water seems to get colder the harder the wind blows, at least that wind is consistent and you know it's going to howl pretty much everyday it is sunny. This might not be the most exotic windsurfing destination on the planet but the adventure, scenery, conditions and lack of crowds were more than enough to make up for its shortcomings. If you are simply after hours on the water in quality conditions then Oregon is a box well worth ticking and could be the place for you!

Kevin Pritchard on fire...



Nathan Mershon maxed on 4m goes one large









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## ROBBY NAIASH

"It was my first time to Pistol River, and I was stoked to be going. I had heard about the spot for years, and being the only windsurfing event in the States for quite some time, I decided to fly over and be part of it. The southern Oregon Coast is amazingly beautiful. Raw. Cold. The event was awesome, with a vibe that reminded me of windsurfing events from the eighties. Everyone was stoked just to be there. The conditions provided sick action, and although I missed the first day of competition with the 30 knot winds, I had a blast sailing the steady 5.0 wind and head high surf the next day. The water was so cold that my feet would go numb after about ten minutes and I would have to go in and jump around on the beach for a few minutes to get them warmed up before going back out. I only had a 2mm short sleeve wetsuit. My body, legs, and arms were ok... but the feet and head were punished (can you say ice cream headache?) There is a real incentive to land EVERYTHING when getting your head wet hurts like hell when you get it wet. That aside, I had a blast. On the water and off the water, it was great to see so many top pros made their way to the event. It went a long way stoking people out, and I think that everyone had a blast. On the last day (father's day) I drove an hour south to the Redwood forest with Katie and Christina. If you make it as far as Pistol River you have to check out the Redwoods. They are absolutely amazing. Standing at the base of a four hundred foot tree that is as wide as a truck is like standing in front of a wave at Jaws... nature in its full glory"

## KEVIN PRITCHARD

"Pistol River was amazing. It was great to come back from Costa Brava Spain and score some insane wave sailing. It was super fun to get out in some fun wave riding conditions. The big green trees and the beautiful rocks sticking out around the beach area, were just amazing. We had a great contest, 4 days of wind and waves. Tons of fun, great to see lots of old friends and made some new ones. This was a great trip for me"

## KAI KATCHADOURIAN

"Oregon Coast 2010 was a trip back in time to when the tribe first started gathering out in the "Lower 40" on Clay Feeter's land back in the late 90's. Many moments of powered up jumping and riding, particularly at "the Rock", come to mind. Cape Sebastian comes to mind as well with the unmistakable Oregon feeling of being deep in the woods and sailing in environments that are generally unfit for humans to be out there without a serious wetsuit. It's a notch colder up here than my home spot at Waddell. This year there were some rare moments at the Rock that actually were super fun for down the line shredding. I tagged some under the lip snaps in the Singles Final that I was really happy with. The riders all ripped and smiles were everywhere. Pistol River in 2010 didn't run dry!"

Another perfect day comes to an end in Oregon



Robby Naish endorses the Pistol River Wave bash



Stunning backdrops at Cape Sebastian

## FRANCISCO GOYA

"Oregon was amazing, I sailed everyday I was there, from 4.2 side on over powered to 5.3 front side riding. The waves were really fun, they have enough pit that you could easily do all the moves you imagine and on the way out you can easily line up some of the best jumps of your life. Yes, the water is cold but like anything, you just get used to it and after the first minutes you are in full enjoyment mode. The town is small but you have everything you need and more, my family loved it too!"

## TIMO MULLEN

"Oregon has to be the best Northern Hemisphere summer wave sailing location I have ever been too. I literally sailed non stop for five days there and it nearly killed me! I met loads of cool guys from the Gorge, Oregon and California who absolutely rip but with a good attitude to match their prowess on the water. Having Robby Naish there for the week always adds that extra special feeling to any location, it was great to see such a legend in 'holiday' mode truly enjoying himself and taking windsurfing back down to grass roots level. Oregon was a fantastic experience and I will be taking my family with me next year to enjoy."

Mullen tweaks out his new Quad



" Robby Naish "The water was so cold that my feet would go numb after about ten minutes and I would have to go in and jump around on the beach for a few minutes to get them warmed up before going back out "