

WELCOME TO NEWCASTLE AND WELCOME TO THE 25th ANNIVERSARY OF THE BURTON TOYOTA SURFEST!

SURFEST originated in 1985 when Newcastle's movers and shakers were desperately trying to banish the city's grime-ridden industrial image and showcase the unheralded beauty of Newcastle beaches and surf breaks,

Those visionaries developed the BHP Steel International – Surfest's first incarnation and the richest professional surfing event in the world at that time.

Yes, that's right – the richest professional surfing competition on the planet at that time.

Surfest has since become Australia's largest surfing festival.

With a population exceeding 500,000 people, Newcastle is New South Wales' second largest city and is situated just a two hour drive up the F3 or a train ride north of Sydney.

The premier surfing event at Surfest has always attracted the world's best surfers because of the city's unique hospitality and the distinct late March/early April possibility of north-easterly swells coming in from either storm activity in the Coral Sea or from low depressions sending southerly swells up through "pinball alley" - the oceanic area between Tasmania and New Zealand.

Ideal conditions at Merewether see southerly swells fanned by north-west winds barreling through from third reef, providing rides where a surfer's ability can be fully demonstrated to crowds gathered in the natural amphitheatre that is Merewether beach.

On final's day in 2006, (the event was moved to Merewether from Newcastle on several contest days during 2006 due to massive southerly swells smashing into the eastern seaboard) when Brazilian Neco Padaratz took the main trophy in three metre waves and set off on the path that saw him regain a spot on the 2007 Championship Tour after a year's suspension, more than 10,000 people rocked up to Merewether to check out all the action.

It was pure magic - all the elements fired and the planets aligned for a most memorable Newy day.

It is Merewether that saw Mark Richards, Luke Egan, Matt Hoy, Simon Law and Nicky Wood develop the abilities that enabled them to participate at the elite level of competition and mix it with the best in the world.

The jewels in the 2010 Surfest crown are two World Qualifying Series (WQS) events - the \$85,000 USD 4-Star Burton Toyota Pro for men and the \$8,000 USD 1-Star Newcastle Open for women.

This year, Surfest also offers the grade two international Chiko Pro for boys and grade one international Chiko Pro for girls.

And there's the Sanbah Cadet Cup. And heaps more.

In 2007, organisers took a massive gamble when they moved the event's traditional HQ from Newcastle Beach.

The decision to move five kilometres to the south - to Merewether - was confirmed by surf deity Huey as a righteous call and the contest was blessed with some cranking stand-up barrels throughout the contest period.

In 2010, Surfest will again run at the fabled right-handers that peel down the rock and sand bottom off Merewether beach.

It's at these breaks that local icon and the competition's patron learnt the skills that would see him win four world titles - more than any other male competitor in the world, except for the "Floridian Freak" and nine-time world champion Kelly Slater (who, incidentally, claimed a Surfest crown in 2004).

In 2010, Newcastle is the third of six stops (Gold Coast, Newcastle, Tasmania, Margaret River, Bells Beach) on the Australian leg of the international men's pro surfing tour calendar.

Surfest is Newcastle's only annual international sporting event. The Burton Toyota Pro often attracts around 160 surfers from Australia, the United States, Hawaii, Brazil, Japan, South Africa, New Zealand and France.

Back in 1986, the surfing competition - then worth \$US56 000 - was won by wonder kid Tom Curren, who racked up 33 wins while on the pro tour - a figure only recently surpassed by Slater.

Surfest and Newcastle were thrilled to have Tom and his family at the event in 2005 as guests of honour. Surfest is like that - it has a proud history and it honours its champions in a manner befitting their standing in the global surfing community.

2007 world champion Mick Fanning has won Surfest three times and Mark Occhilupo has twice climbed atop the podium.

Surfest has always acknowledged champions - none more than our own four-time world champion Mark Richards. But you can call him MR.

Dr MR (MR was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Newcastle for his contributions to the community), whose handcrafted surfboards remain in demand around the world, lives with his long time sweetheart and wife Jenny and his kids right across the road from his beloved Merewether, where he has seen the inside of more barrels than you've had baked dinners.

The "Mayor of Merewether" is the patron of the event and is highly regarded throughout the world and along with two of Newcastle's other great achievers on the world stage - Andrew 'Joey' Johns and silverchair - he is particularly revered in Newcastle.

Away from surfing, MR also plays an important role in the Hunter's organisation for parents and families who have lost children to SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome).

Mark and Jenny lost a child to SIDS and in that inimitable Richards way, he and Jenny have both given so much back to the community in trying to find answers that will one day see an end to this terrible affliction.

Surfest has long raised and donated funds for the SIDS organisation to assist families and further research. Some of surfing's best known names have put their hands in their pockets to help out.

Surfest has always been conscious of ensuring the involvement of today's kids who will be tomorrow's champions.

For that reason, the full gamut of contests run for 12 days and involve more than 750 surfers. Logistically this is a big challenge - but Newcastle, a city renowned for giving people a chance and encapsulating the Australian ethos of a fair go - would not have it any other way.

We think that the event is more than a great surf competition - it is a celebration of a city and its people and their special relationship with Australian beach culture. Most of all we are thrilled that we can provide the people of Newcastle - and now, through the webcast facilities being provided by coastalwatch.com, the rest of the world - with the opportunity to see how this former engine room for steel production has reinvented itself in the new millennium to host 13 days of non-stop surfing action in one of Australia's most beautiful cities.

The 25th Anniversary is going to be one hell of a party. See you there

SURFEST CHAMPIONS

MEN'S CHAMPIONS

1985	Tom Curren (USA)
1986	Mark Occhilupo (Aust)
1987	Tom Carrol (Aust)
1988	Damien Hardman (Aust)
1989	Tom Carrol (Aust)
1990	Mike Parsons (Aust)
1991	Event rescheduled due to new 2 tier system
1992	Damien Hardman (Aust)
1993	Barton Lynch (Aust)
1994	Shane Powell (Aust)
1995	Michael Rommelse (Aust)
1996	Guilherme Herdy (Brz)
1997	Shane Bevan (Aust)
1998	Mark Occhilupo (Aust)
1999	Taylor Knox (USA)
2000	Mick Fanning (Aust)
2001	Mick Campbell (Aust)
2002	Mick Fanning (Aust)
2003	Dayyan Neve (Aust)
2004	Kelly Slater (USA)
2005	Mick Fanning (Aust)
2006	Neco Padaratz (Brz)
2007	Jay Thompson (Aust)
2008	Adriano de Souza (Brz)
2009	Travis Logie (RSA)

WOMEN'S CHAMPIONS

1985	Wendy Botha
1986	Frieda Zamba
1987	Jodie Cooper
1988	Pam Burridge
1989	Pauline Menzer
1990	Michelle Donoghue
1991	Event rescheduled due to new 2 tier system
1992	Vanessa Osbourne
1993	Pam Burridge
1994	Pam Burridge
1995	Neridah Falconer
1996	Neridah Falconer
1997	Kylie Webb
1998	Hayley Tasker
1999 - 2002 Event not held	
2003	Rebecca Woods
2004	Rebecca Woods
2005	Lynette McKenzie
2006	Rebecca Woods
2007	Silvana Lima
2008	Stephanie Gilmore
2009	Philippa Anderson

Mark Richards Festival Patron

At every turn in his life he's shown us a gracious, humble character, competitive without spite, winning without greed, losing without bitterness.

There would be few people in Newcastle or the surfing world who have not heard of four-time world surfing champion, innovative surfboard designer and successful businessman, Mark Richards.

Known to friends and fans as "MR", Mark Richards was born in Newcastle on the 7th March 1957 and spent much of his childhood catching waves at Merewether Beach. By the age of six he had already mastered a surfboard and won his first trophy in the Newcastle "Under 14 years" school competition. By 15 years, Mark had placed and won at several school-based and national surfing championships and was also beginning to shape his own twin-fin boards to suit his loose, angular surfing style.

Throughout his junior surfing career, he received enormous support from his family and friends, and in 1961 his father transformed his used car dealership into a surf shop, becoming one of the first places in Australia to sell surfboards outside Sydney. MR has continued the Richards Surf Shop on Hunter Street and now exports about 250 handcrafted surfboards a year to countries throughout the world. He has remained true to his craft and shapes all the boards himself.

The rise of Mark as a world-class surfer paralleled the rise of professional surfing as an international sport. At 18 he came on to the surfing scene with a splash, winning the Smirnoff Pro-am at Waimea Bay and the World Cup at Sunset Beach in Hawaii. In 1979, Mark won his first world title and soon dominated the pro-surfing circuit, winning again in each of the next three years.

Suffering a back and ankle injury, in addition to mental and physical fatigue, Mark relaxed into semi-retirement but by 25 years of age had achieved legendary status in the surfing and sporting worlds. He later came out of retirement to win the Billabong Pro twice and the World Masters Championship Over 40 Division in 2001 and running second to Wayne Rabbit Bartholomew in 2003.

Throughout his career, Mark became known as the "wounded gull" in recognition of his peculiar surfing style: knees braced, hunched shoulders, arms extended and hands bent up at the wrists. Despite this seemingly awkward stance, he was smooth, balanced and flexible through the water and this matched his outward temperament, which surf writer Nick Carroll described in a tribute: "at every turn in his life he's shown us a gracious, humble character, competitive without spite, winning without greed, losing without bitterness."

It is these characteristics that have undoubtedly drawn Mark towards the various community-based roles that he now undertakes. He is the Honorary President of the Australian Surfrider Foundation, an environmental organisation dedicated to protecting the coastal environment and along with his wife Jenny, is patron of the Sids and Kids Hunter Region organisation. Together they have raised more than \$500,000 for research into sudden infant death syndrome after they tragically lost a child through cot death.

In addition, Mark has supported the John Hunter Children's Hospital, CanTeen and a NSW government campaign against violence towards women. He received an Order of Australia Medal in 1994 and the Centenary Medal in 2003. In another first, MR became the first world champion surfer to be recognised by the academic community when The University of Newcastle awarded him an Honorary Doctorate for his services to the community.

Mark Richards is a man whose passion and talent for surfing led him to become the world's best but it is a true reflection of his loyal character that he has remained in his hometown and contributes to Newcastle's future through sporting, business and community circles.

The list of MR's achievements include:

Surfing Magazine Surfer of the Year 1979, 1980 and 1982

Surfer Magazine Poll Winner 1979, 1980, 1981 and 1982

Sun-Caltex NSW Sportsman of the Year 1981. Finalist 1980 and 1982
ABC Sportsman of the Year Finalist 1982 and 1983
NSW Dept of Sport and Recreation Hall of Champions, inducted 1981
NBN 3 Sportsman of the Year 1979, 1980 and 1981, with a Special Award for Excellence in 1982
Confederation of Australian Sport, Sport Australia Awards, Male Athlete of the Year finalist, 1981 and 1983. Best single sporting performance finalist 1981 and 1983
Association of Surfing Professionals Services to the Sport Award 1988
Australian Surfriders Association Hall of Fame, inducted 1985
Newcastle Sporting Hall of Fame, inducted 1992
Medal of the Order of Australia, for Services to the Sport of Surfing, 1994
Surfing Walk of Fame, Huntington Beach, California, inducted 1995
Doctor of Letters, (honoris causa), University of Newcastle, October 2004

MR remains a rare beast in professional sport - a down-to-earth bloke unaffected by star-status and still maintaining widespread respect from both peers and upcoming surfers who weren't even thought of when he was carving his name into the history books. MR still lives at his beloved Merewether with wife Jenny and their kids. He still runs the surfboard shop that his father started. He still yaks with anyone in the area - from mad keen grommets to the old blokes that lap the Merewether Baths day in and day out, all weather, all year.

When the westerly winds are blowing, a southerly swell is cooking, and the blue pits are there for the taking somewhere between the third reef and the "ladies", there remains more than an off chance that the man nicknamed the "wounded gull" will emerge from one of those barrels with a smile as big as the one he peeled off when he was out there learning just what it takes to be the best in the world - over and over and over and over again.