

Mastering The Front Deep



Written by Keith St. Onge
Photography by Lynn Novakofski

In all actuality with the front deep-water start, you're not deep within the water at all prior to the start. You want to float as straight and buoyant as possible before the boat takes off. Your body acts like a slalom ski or wakeboard taking off with ease to a smooth riding and gliding position. The barefoot suit has added padding on the gluteus for a comfortable ride until the boat gains enough speed to stand up. Many people think the barefooter is drowning or getting blasted with spray, but in fact the farther you put your head back the less water you get in your face. If you're experiencing water in the face, remember that the skier shouldn't put their head back until the boat is taking off. Many people say "Hit-it," throw their head under the water and wait a couple seconds until the command registers into the driver's head. That's how you get water in your face and up your nose, and experience a loss of breath.

As you can see in the first picture, my body is as straight as possible with my handle in and down. If you tend to rollover while trying to float, put your ears under the water for stability. This will get you out of the pike position and ready for take off. Your arches should be on the rope or boom cable with constant pressure pushing down. Never hook a heel because it won't allow you to put pressure on the line. It also will take away from stability while riding on your butt. Be sure to wait until the boat takes off

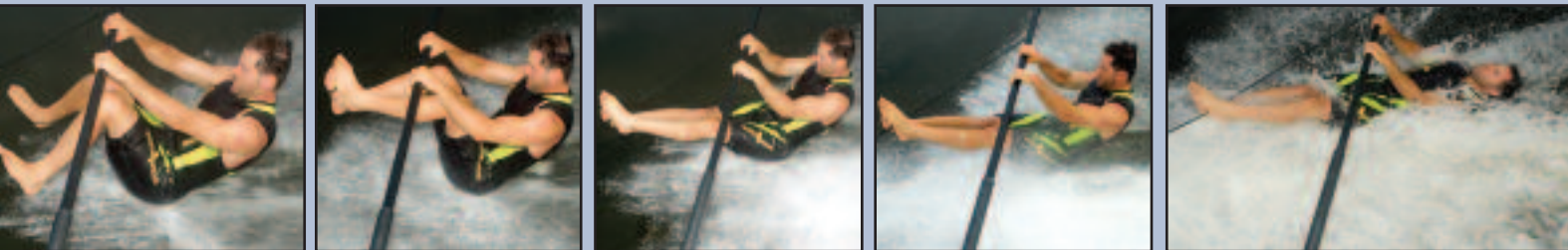
before putting your head back. This will eliminate a face full of water.

As soon as you feel your body surface, slowly start to sit up. I like to tell my students to count slowly to three and sit up while doing so. If you don't sit up fast enough, you'll most likely bounce on your back. If you sit up too fast, you'll bounce as well. Sitting up too early can also result in your butt plowing, which caused a lot of spray in your face and a tidal wave that can fill the boat with water. So, slowly sit up and try to plane off on your butt at the same time the boat planes.

Once riding on your bottom, don't feel rushed to stand. Your goal is to have a controlled butt glide while utilizing the padding in your suit. For a stable ride, keep the handle/knuckles pushed down onto your thighs. If the handle comes off your thighs and you begin to pull in on the handle you'll immediately tip over. Legs should still be straight with only the arches of your feet and pressure on the rope or boom cable.

When the water looks good and you are ready to take your feet off the rope, squeeze your knees together. As you take your feet off the rope, spread them while keeping the knees touching. This will enable you to make a triangle shape with your shins. Also, you'll have to lean slightly back so your feet don't slam into the water. This should be a controlled movement and





Water Start

only you should decide when your feet enter into the water; they should not drop from the rope to the water. Rely on your stomach muscles to control your efforts.

At this point you should be gliding on your tail bone. Imagine that your tail bone is a bicycle tire and your two feet are training wheels. The two training wheels must enter the water on the side of the bicycle tire. If the feet enter in front of your tail bone they will cause a trough that will hit your tail bone and send you out of control. The water line on your feet should be just beneath the balls of your feet. When the feet enter the water it's like a plane landing. The back wheels touch gently while the rest of the foot comes down and rides as flat as possible. You cannot have your heels entering the water with your feet cocked up. You must flex the ankle forward to allow your foot to enter the water as flat as possible.

The best way to help the movement of the feet into the water is simply by staying in a cannon ball position with your feet wide in the triangle position. Now, you can slowly rock forward to allow the feet into the water. Because your butt and two feet are points in the water, this is called the three-point stance. Do not straighten your legs, otherwise you will be playing tug of war with the boat and the boat doesn't play tug of war gently!

As your standing, you can pull your knees slightly apart and bring your feet together. The ultimate stance is with your shins perfectly parallel to each other. You want to stay in a low and safe position. Think of having three 90-degree angles. One in your knees, one in your waist and one in your

arm pits. Keep your eyes focused down the runway and never look down ("Look Down, Go Down"). If you experience lots of spray in the face, you are most likely straight-legged and plowing. Your ankles should stay directly under the knees for the ultimate glide.

Now that you've learned how to stand up, it's now time to learn how to sit back down. I make my students do this as soon as possible. This will help your start become second nature and allow for perfect starts and dismounts. When sitting back down, allow your feet to go wide while the knees come in making a triangle. You should be riding in a three-point stage at this point. Now, the next step is rocking back to your tailbone while taking your feet out of the water. You will need to pull the handle into your belly button, slide your feet off the water and keep your knees slightly bent. This is what I call the "Lazy Boy." You should now be riding on your tailbone with your knees and feet squeezed together. Your handle is in for balance and your eyes are focused forward. You now can go from this position to your three-point stance and then back to standing on your feet. Do this several times for an easy start and dismount.

To set up professional instruction with Keith St. Onge at BarefootCentral.com Ski & Training Center in Winter Haven, Fla., call (863) 877-0039 or visit glidingsoles.com. St. Onge, the world slalom record holder, is sponsored by BarefootCentral.com, Eagle Wetsuits, MasterCraft, US Gear, HeadZone, Nightscaping.com, SeaSpecs, Clincher Gloves and Gath Helmets. 🏆

