

The Principles of

Written by Russell Gay
Photography by Lynn Novakofski

You can do the flip, but how do you get to the point where you can string multiple flips together with ease, as if you are almost doing them on a trampoline? Here are the concepts or principles that will help you progress to the next level.

No matter what flip or trick you are doing, you will follow some basic principles. I've always tried to approach tricking with a few simple principles and then apply them to every trick. Each new trick should be built on the basics that you have learned and should be performed as similarly to your other tricks as possible. I don't believe that there is a "trick" to each trick, which implies that they are different and should be approached differently. Instead, as you progress and move to more difficult tricks, the same principles should apply. Performing the tricks similarly will help you keep the tricks more repetitive and therefore more consistent as you put them into a sequence.

The first principle is "stacking," the idea of the skeletal system carrying the load rather than the muscular system. By standing on the ski correctly, you will be able to ride the ski with a much "lighter" feeling, yet be able to create tremendous amounts of load and leverage.

Proper "stacking" is the positioning of your shoulders, hips and ankles so that they are all in alignment. Once your buttocks moves out of this alignment, you will feel the muscles of your back and arms take over rather than allowing the skeletal system to carry the load. This will cause you to feel heavier on your ski. Properly "stacking" your position will allow you to ride your ski more efficiently and make your flips feel much lighter. The second principle is leverage, learning to leverage the ski and body position to do the work for you. By developing an awareness of your weight distribution on the ski, you will be able to make slight shifts in weight that allow you to create leverage that no amount of strength from weight training can give you. I ride centered on the ski at the initial phase of the flips. As I begin to make my approach and my feet



swing through the bottom, I can allow the weight to shift back on the ski, leveraging my position to create load on the rope resulting in lift, not distance. If you are riding on the tail in the initiation phase and continue to rock back on the ski, you are going to travel a greater distance with less lift. You will also feel like you are slipping off of the wake instead of carving.

By maintaining the "stacked" position and utilizing my weight transfer, I remain light on the ski and have to work very little with the handle. If I were to drop my weight far away from the handle early in the trick, I would have to pull hard with my arms to get my position back. Instead, I prefer to maintain position and just "ski away" from the handle allowing me more control during the trick to make corrections.

The third principle is to always turn off of an edging ski. One tendency that gets many people into trouble is that they try and turn off of a flat ski. Making any pre-turns on the

water during take-off on a flat ski will cause you to lose leverage resulting in poor execution of the trick. Hold your edge through the wake; ride it up and away and your spins will come much easier. When I perform the Mobe 5 F for instance, I try to ski up and away longer than a lesser spinning flip. This allows me to turn quicker with more control later in the trick. If I try to cheat it a little earlier, my spin is slower, less controlled and I'll have more slack.

Here is my approach to all flips, utilizing the above principles of stacking and leverage. Let's break the stages of flips into phases: Ready Position, Initiation, Approach, Take Off, Rotation and Landing.

Ready Position

Ready Position is your set or beginning position. It's your established posi-



Flipping Landing



tion as you initiate the trick. It's also the position you are struggling to get to after each trick. This is a position of being properly "stacked," standing tall on the ski, centered over the front foot with elbows near the hips. The elbows should not be tight or straight out, but just near the hips.

Initiation Phase

The Initiation is the part of the trick where you are rolling the ski onto one edge, or carving, and beginning your approach to the wake. In this phase, you are trying to allow the ski to start by going slightly outward as your upper body stays in position allowing you to "roll" the ski onto the edge and creating angle. By making this type of turn you can establish great angle. In this phase you should be well over the front foot as you establish the carve to the wake.

The Approach

Through the Approach you should be rising tall as you allow your ski to swing through beneath your body. At the beginning of the approach you should be aggressively edging toward the wake leading with your upper body. As you get closer to the wake your feet should be moving under your upper body. This is in contrast to many

beginner flippers who are starting their approach to the wake with their feet in front of them and riding the tail resulting in a poor take off. As you progress to the more difficult flips, the angle of your approach will need to increase for the added rotation of a 180, 360, 540 or even 720. Your position will remain the same, just approach with more angle while skiing away from the boat more aggressively.

Take Off

The Take Off is the transition from the approach to the rotation in the air. This is the phase that you finish your upward push off the wake with your body centered tall over the ski. Many beginner flippers at the top of the wake have lost their body position and are already horizontal to the water well into their rotation. They have lost their upward movement because they didn't create the leverage during the approach phase. The transfer of the weight from front foot to tail creates the leverage against the boat to load the rope. This transfer should be finishing at the top of the wake during take off, not before the wake. During the take off, I try to feel as

if I'm skiing away from the handle. This allows me to pull on it for spinning tricks or make corrections in the amount of rotation for the basic flips. By not pulling here, I'm able to have better rope control and a tighter line at the landing.

Rotation

During the Rotation you are resisting with the handle. You should be able to pull on it to make spinning flips or to speed up rotation if you need it. Stay as straight as possible and start spotting the landing.

Landing

Land tall with hips up and elbows near your hips similar to the take-off position. Remain on your outward edge to tighten the line and quickly try to get centered over the front foot for your approach to the next flip.

As you can see in the photos, there is little difference in the approach to all of the flips. If you are having trouble progressing and learning new flips, then you are probably doing the basic flips incorrectly. Make the corrections to the basics and transform your flips into up and down movements and the more advanced flips will follow. ▲



Russell Gay's personal best score is 12,000 points. He is sponsored by Masterline, Intensity, Quantum Skis and MasterCraft Boats.

