

Mastering Wakeboard Driving

Written by **Gordy Bubolz**

Progression in wakeboarding is a team sport between the rider and driver. By using the right boat-driving techniques, you can drastically reduce the number of falls to learn a new trick. The elusive “perfect pull” will be the norm by keeping these tips in mind the next time you’re behind the wheel.

The Throttle Chop For Novice Riders

The throttle chop is the best way to decrease the number of hard falls for the novice wakeboarder. When beginners are learning to ride, there are typically a lot of face plants, which are generally caused from having the handle too far from the hips. As a driver, when you see the handle out, or when the rider looks unsteady, simply “chop” or pull back on the throttle stick. This will put slack in the line and in most cases keep the rider from falling. When your rider regains control, simply throttle up again. Even if your boarder does fall while you use this technique, it won’t be a head-jarring face plant.

The Throttle Chop For Advanced Riders

Excess line tension makes learning new spins and inverts difficult. When line tension is removed, the trick becomes much easier to land for the first time. The throttle chop removes line tension and is

especially useful for learning moves like frontside and backside handle pass spins, and inverts with a spin. To put this technique into practice, keep the throttle position constant as the rider edges off the top of the wake. When the rider is at the peak of the jump, pull back on the stick so that the boat is in the “in gear” position. If the rider lands the trick, start to throttle up again. After the move is landed a few times, have the rider do the trick again with out the throttle chop. Chances are they will have the confidence to land it.

Timing is the key here. Cut the throttle too early, and the rider won’t clear the wake and will land on mush. Cut it too late, and they won’t be able to notice that you did anything differently than holding the throttle stick steady.

Hold the Throttle Stick the Right Way

Grip the throttle stick with your forefingers and thumb and keep your right elbow gently rested on the driver’s pad. Avoid clinching the throttle stick in the palm of your hand. Keeping a tight, closed fist grip on the stick doesn’t allow for good control to react to speed changes. For those of you with out a speed control system, you should strive to hold the boat speed within a half-mile-per-hour of the target speed.

Concentrate on Driving Straight Lines

It is easy to get in the bad habit of following the shallow curves of the shoreline, but driving even a slight curve will cause one side of the wake to curl over and make it harder for your rider to have consistency on landing difficult moves.

Focus

Your eyes should continuously be checking three things – your rider, the boat speed, and what’s ahead of you. As a side note, I don’t think it’s good to have the radio blaring while driving; it generally hinders concentration toward your rider.

Weekend Driving

In heavy traffic, pull over to the side of the lake or river and drop your skier. I think you have to be proactive when someone is tailgating your skier, waving your arms and yelling usually doesn’t get the attention of your average weekend Wally. Also, use the boat to block a fallen rider in the water.

Gordy Bubolz operates the Gordy Bubolz Wakeboard Camps, which are sponsored by Correct Craft, Fort Fremont Marine, Hyperlite, Smith, Ten 80 and BIFly High.

