

## EXPLORING FLORIDA

# Stand UP & be COUNTED

WORDS: ANDY MOSSACK

*If the idea of surfing appeals but the idea of falling off and hurting yourself doesn't, then stand-up paddle boarding – or **YOLO Boarding** – may be the watersport for you. It's almost like walking on water...*

**I**T WAS, IT HAS TO BE SAID, THE PERFECT DAY FOR IT. I knew because Jeff Archer, the man partly responsible for Florida's current YOLO craze, said it was. The lake was glass still, the reflections of the swamp grass mirroring in the smooth water. A slight breeze wafted its way across us, and a curious pelican hovered, perhaps looking for a juicy morsel or two for lunch. All was well with the world and I was well and truly up for it.

Jeff hooked a pole across the flat white board floating close by and pulled it towards our pontoon, gesturing me forward. "This one'll be perfect for you" he said, taking in my six-foot frame and huge, rippling muscles (ok, that last part was made up). "It's a bit bigger than our faster boards, so it'll give you more stability as it's your first ride. But, I guarantee, you'll be up and YOLOing in minutes."


Yeah, right. Jeff was, of course, completely unaware of my watersports track record and ►



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Looking more like a crab than a budding boarder, I crawled sideways on to the floating board

the disastrous attempts I'd had at windsurfing and skiing; clear evidence that my ability to even balance is entirely questionable. Let's just say I was less confident about Jeff's guarantee than he was. Nevertheless, I wasn't to be put off, as I had already watched two ladies of a pensionable age take to it like ducks to, well, water, with their shrieking and cackling echoing around without even a hint of a nervous tremor. So, looking more like a crab than a budding boarder, I crawled sideways on my stomach off the pontoon into a kneeling position on the floating board as instructed. Maybe this was the perfect opportunity for a quick pre-YOLO prayer I thought to myself. Well, kneeling there it seemed more than appropriate, so a silent wish was sent. Then, still kneeling, (or hanging on for dear life depending on your perspective) I took the long paddle in a vice-like grip and pushed off into the lake to face my fate. Jeff followed behind, standing proudly astride his board like a Greek god as he cut through the water and, for that moment, I hated him more than anything else in the world. Envy can do that to you.

**A GOOD PADDLING** (above from left) YOLO Boarding is so simple you can be standing in a single lesson; Jeff Archer and Tom Losee, creators of YOLO Boarding, show how it's done on Florida's flat water lakes

PHOTO: © GETTY IMAGES

in circles, and it might not have been pretty to watch, but I was getting used to the feel of the board. But it seemed the moment had come and there was no going back now, so I did. I stood up. In that moment, two things happened. I stayed upright and, despite mentally planning to look as graceful as possible as I plunged headfirst into the water, I continued to stay upright. It was a defining moment and a gloriously triumphant one that will live with me forever. Now I was really standing up and gliding across the lake. Suddenly, I was taking in all the beautiful natural surroundings and not even thinking about my balance. And beautiful they were, a mix of everglade swamp, pampas grass and tropical fauna surrounded by crystal clear water and echoing birdsong. It seems I was YOLOing just as he said I would be, and I was loving every moment of it.

**SO THIS, THEN, IS YOLO BOARDING.** Something you can learn in minutes and have hours of fun with - no wonder it's become Florida's must do water sport. Young or old, thin or not so thin, YOLO fever is rampant. Standing for 'You Only Live Once', YOLO is the brainchild of two young entrepreneurs Jeff Archer and Tom Losee; two surfer dudes who saw the mass appeal of a stand up paddle board that was a cross between surfing and canoeing.



**SURF'S UP**  
(here and below)  
Tom Losee shows off YOLO Boarding's more advanced side in ocean surf while his students practice technique on calmer waters



Using a side to side canoe like paddle action, YOLO gives you an upper body work out at the same time as providing the thrill rush of gliding through the water amongst some of nature's finest scenery. It's a little tougher when you're paddling against the water's natural flow, having to get that paddle cutting deeper into the water, but there's no rush and you can take your time building up a head of steam. And with just a quick thrust in the opposite direction to your flow, the paddle doubles as a brake or to help you to turn in a tighter circle than you would normally.

"When we first discovered stand-up paddling, Jeff and I had been looking for a way to balance work, family and recreation," Tom explains. "From the very first moment I tried the board, I knew we had discovered something unique, especially when you consider how accessible stand-up paddling is with the

diverse bodies of water we have here."

And that's true. Florida is blessed with some stunning coastal waters and dune lakes, particularly on the Gulf coast and the Intracoastal Waterway, whilst inland around the Polk County area just next to Orlando, there are literally hundreds of large natural lakes and parks too.

"It offers a completely different way to experience the water, whether it's for a quick workout or an all day leisure adventure," Jeff adds. "It's exciting because the onset of the stand-up paddling movement is getting people out on the water that otherwise wouldn't venture out on a board. Beginner paddlers are often surprised at how easy it is."

The success of YOLO is due in no small part to the competitive nature of Americans when it comes to sport and water sports in particular. It didn't take long for the sport to get competitive, with

# WET, WET WET

Other weird and wonderful water sports in **Orlando**...



## WAKEBOARDING

Wakeboarding is a cross between water skiing and snowboarding. Hang on to a series of overhead cables running above a lake and scream along on your board at speeds of over 20 mph, jumping over ramps and obstacles as you go.

[www.orlandowatersports.com](http://www.orlandowatersports.com)

## WAKESKATING



Unlike wakeboarding, wakeskating has no foot bindings, just grip tape like

a skateboard and the board is a lot smaller! It's just like skateboarding but on water with plenty of opportunity to jump, spin and show off.

[www.orlandowatersports.com](http://www.orlandowatersports.com)

## JETSKI



Forget the relaxation of stand-up boarding and go for the white

knuckle thrill of a jetski. Around \$98 will get you an hour on the water and take a passenger for just an extra \$5. You must be over 17 though.

[www.bvwatersports.com](http://www.bvwatersports.com)

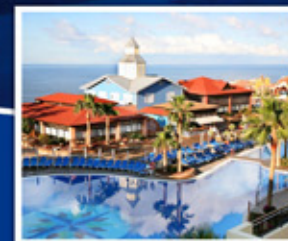


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STAND BY ME  
(here and below) YOLO  
Boarders take to the  
water all day long into a  
beautiful Florida sunset



Beginner paddlers are  
often surprised at  
how easy it is



a number of major competitions springing up and giving the now expert YOLOists more opportunity to show off their new found skills on the ocean surf or inland. And to support the growing numbers of skilful enthusiasts, YOLO has developed a range of boards specifically for various water sports and competitions. From the original YOLO which was 12-feet long and nearly 3-feet wide, there is now the shorter and lighter YOLO Express, the bamboo inlaid YOLO Explorer complete with bungee harness and air valve release system for fishing and boarding at the same time, the narrower YOLO Eco-trainer for maximum workouts and the ultimate competition-ready surfing flyer the YOLO Prowler, a 14-foot carbon fibre beauty designed by surf legend Steve Brom for lovers of the white foam wave.

There are boards that can be used for fishing, for cruising along the coast, diving and snorkelling and even tandem paddling. The list of possibilities is seemingly endless. As for me, I couldn't wait to get out on the water again, doing YOLO solo, confident and purposeful

astride my YOLO board with just the wind and the birds as company. Well, that and two old dears paddling past me...  
You can rent a YOLO board by the hour from just \$35 or \$75 for the day or get private tuition from \$50 for two hours at a number of YOLO distributors throughout central and north-west Florida. YOLO can be found at [www.yoloboard.com](http://www.yoloboard.com)  
The nearest YOLO experience to Orlando is in Tampa or Clearwater at Stand Up Fitness ([www.standupfitnessinc.com](http://www.standupfitnessinc.com), Tel: 727-902-4294 or contact Brody Welte at [brody@standupfitnessinc.com](mailto:brody@standupfitnessinc.com)). However there are other Stand Up Boarding experiences available directly in Orlando at Buena Vista Watersports (Tel: 407-239-6939, [abparadisecove@aol.com](mailto:abparadisecove@aol.com)) and Maui B's ([www.mauib.com](http://www.mauib.com), Tel: 1-800-671-9905)

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<http://sup.southadventures.com.pt>