

Mike Tabeling, Surfing Legend

Class of 1967



Below is an interview done with Mike Tabeling for Beachside Boardriders Hall of Fame by Pete Dooley.

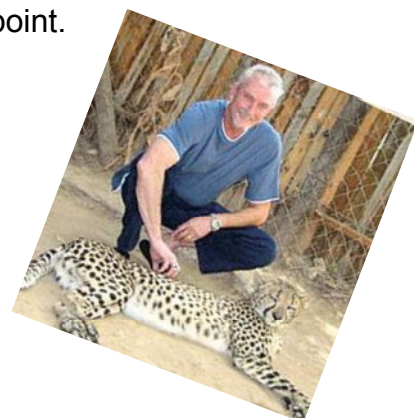
For the full interview, please visit: <http://www.thebeachsideresident.com/mike-tabeling.htm>.

Mike Tabeling is big strapping guy who powered right through the longboard era and dove headlong into shortboard performance surfing.

A hidden river of surfing talent courses through every surfer from Cocoa Beach. Every time some kid power turns off the bottom and projects down the line making some impossible section after springing forward and every time someone pushes for more speed in his or her cut-back, that surfing DNA strain goes back to one guy, weaving its way through the gene pool from Mike Tabeling.

His answers are just like his surfing and lifestyle: powerful and to the point.

Enjoy.



You were one of the original big time stars from Cocoa Beach and the East Coast during the '60s and '70s. Does it bother you that this young upstart Kelly Slater is stealing all your thunder?

Silly question. He's the man. I'm so proud of Kelly and what he, the 'Goods and the Lopez brothers are presently doing to uplift the image of East Coast surfers. I may have been the first Right Coast surfer to win contests in California and internationally, but I never expected to be the last, right?

When you won the U.S. Surfing Contest it was one of the biggest events of the day. Were you as stoked as all the other grommets at 16th Street in Cocoa Beach?

Well, er...I never did win the U.S. Surfing Contest. I got second behind David Nuuhiwa. It has a nice ring to it, though. I always say: don't let the truth get in the way of a good story. I don't mind if you repeat it. You're probably thinking of the East Coast Champs and yes, the 16th Street guys were stoked because most of the good surfers hung out at the pier and I was one of them.

You became a world traveler at an extremely young age. What do you think of all the pre-packaged surf trips available today?

They're hot! I spent months ferreting out good surf; most people don't have that kind of opportunity, so I believe the packaged surf trips are a good thing. They put you right on the good breaks so you're not wasting precious time.

Before you left the unreal waves of Cocoa Beach behind and moved to Jeffrey's Bay in South Africa, you helped push the short board performance revolution to the extreme. You were the first guy seen charging around on a 5'8" fish. Has it surprised you that the fish, since its rebirth, has been such a popular board?

Pete, more than anyone, you should remember that my original fish were either 5'2"s or 5'3"s. Yeah, you're right, it is a popular shape. It's one of the few shapes that are still being ridden from that era. It's been around longer than the thruster. The reason it's so popular is because it works well and gives the surfer a completely different ride than a normal board. Everyone should have one in their quiver. I'm selling true fish blown up to 8'0" now; they're called the "Super Fish XL."

In a Surfer Magazine article some years back Derek Hynd said that of all the surfers he had seen ride Jeffrey's Bay, the fastest was Mike Tabeling on a fish. How big a wave did you ever try a fish in and how long was your board?

I rode a 5'2" at Jeffrey's. I think Derek Hynd is the best fish rider at Jeffrey's today. As for wave size, fish are made for getting the most out of small waves. I took a small fish out on a 10 foot day once and it bloody scared the hell out of me. It was all I could do to keep it firmly planted in the face. It was disastrous.

You held the record for length of time in the air on a hang glider. Does that record still stand? Your dad Roy Tabeling had a flying record as well, didn't he?

I was cross country champ in the Eastern Province of South Africa one year. There is a new champ each year. My longest cross-country flight, no motor of course, was 64 km. My dad had a bigger record than me. He held the longest non-stop, non-refueling flight in a normally aspirated aircraft for 40 years. It was only broken when Dick Rutan flew around the world.

On a more painful note, you had a bad smash up on a hang glider and were told you'd probably never surf again. Tell us the story of how you got back in the water.

Ouch! I broke five bones in six places in one crack up. I didn't surf for five months. I was flat on my back with a broken pelvis for three of those. I'm one of those rare guys who got to learn how to surf more than once in their lives. I guess I'm blessed in that way. Oh yeah, it was after the big crash that I became an instructor and cross-country champ. I don't fly anymore, though. I don't have time to waste breaking more bones.

