

INSTRUCTION

Learning The Back Deep-Water Start

Written by Keith St. Onge
Photography by Lynn Novakofski

The back deep-water start (back deep) is one of the most technical starts in barefooting that takes time and patience. It's not that the start is difficult, but there are several steps involved. If all of the steps are performed in the perfect order at the correct time of the boat's acceleration, the start is effortless.

I like to have my students refer to it as a grocery list. If you forget the eggs, you can't bake the cake. So, remembering all of the steps will take time and practice on and off the water. You can lie down on your stomach in bed and go over all of these steps until it becomes second nature. The other difficult part is in the hands of the driver. Learning the back deep is a team effort and the driver has just as much to do with the start being successful as the skier. Once everyone is on the same page and the communication between the skier and driver are mutual, then all will go smoothly.

Before taking off, you must get into a position that will allow you to easily roll over. While floating on your back, take the handle and put it between your legs. Place the handle behind your back with your knuckles up against your wetsuit. Hook an ankle under the rope as you lie in the water. With the hooked ankle leg, lead with the knee over the rope for an easy roll over. Practice this a couple of times so the driver can witness what you're doing. And don't forget to take a deep breath of air!

The first thing the skier must get used to is taxiing. Taxiing is when the skier keeps one or both ankles on the rope and learns to become comfortable while riding on the stomach. View Photo No. 1 for example. While riding in the taxiing position, the skier must drive the chin into the water away from the chest. This will act like a keel or rudder on a boat. The other step is not pulling in on your arms. The arms can be slightly bent but don't start with them in. By keeping the arms out, it will allow your upper body to become heavy and plane like a slalom ski or wakeboard. Don't allow your body to become limp.

The body must stay stiff like a wakeboard for an effortless pull. If you begin to porpoise, three things could be happening. You might not be pushing on your chin hard enough, or you're pulling in on your arms, or the boat driver could be going too fast. If you can't breathe, then the boat driver is going too slow and you must alert the



Keith St. Onge

boat driver of the oxygen shortage by kicking a foot.

The Grocery List Begins:

- 1.) Arms out
- 2.) Drive chin into water
- 3.) Stiffen body to plane

The teamwork begins with the driver giving a perfect pull. The skier must give the driver time to lock onto a speed that will work for the skier. In Photo No. 1, the driver must look for a "gieser" coming out from between the legs of the footer. If there's an overflow of water coming through the legs, you're most likely drowning them. If there's not water at all coming through the legs, then the driver is going much too fast. The fast speed will make it extremely difficult for the skier to place one or two feet into the water.

The next step will be allowing the far outside foot to glide on the surface of the water. Keep the hooked foot on the rope and take the free foot off and stretch it out as far as it will go. As you bring your foot into the water, your toes should gently touch first with the rest of the foot/ankle coming down. The toes should be pointing toward the shoreline and the waterline will be going from your pinky toe to the arch of the foot, creating a diagonal line across the foot. The ankle must be relaxed as the foot enters the water so it can glide on the surface. If the ankle is tight and you're pointing your toes forward, which we call gas peddling, the foot will poke through or bounce off the water uncontrollably. The best thing to do is pull the foot off the water and start over and work toward always having relaxed ankles. Once the foot has the gliding feeling and you've allowed it to glide for several seconds, you can then put that foot on the rope and take the other off. The boat driver can accelerate 3 to 4 mph to help you feel the pressure of the water, but that's only when the foot is gliding perfectly. Once you're proficient with both feet gliding, it's time to take both feet off the rope and plant them simultaneously into the water. If one foot enters the water first, it could cause you to spin to the side or have unequal pressure on each foot.

Once both feet are gliding, it's time for the boat driver to slowly accelerate. As the boat speed increases, the skier must start to drive their butt into the air. You can think about trying to get your chin between your toes or arch your back and drive the chin into the water harder. Either way works, but the higher you get your hips and butt, the closer you'll get to standing. The boat driver shouldn't have to go any faster than 30 mph for beginners, and slower is always better in this situation. It's up to the skier to

have patience, so as long as the boat driver accelerates slowly, the team should be doing just fine.

Grocery List:

- 1.) Arms out
- 2.) Drive chin into water
- 3.) Stiffen body to plane
- 4.) Feet gliding equally
- 5.) Patience for boat speed
- 6.) Lift hips and butt

Just as you're coming to the peak of lifting your hips, you must turn your feet parallel to each other. Another way of thinking about the feet movement is to turn your toes down and point them to the bottom of the lake. Once this happens there will be a tremendous amount of water pressure pushing against your feet. This portion of the start can be the more difficult part. The reason being is because you have to let the boat do the work and not try to strain yourself on trying to stand on your own. As the boat increases its speed, this will help the final stage of the back deep. The position you should be in is what I call the water bug position. Your chin and chest are on the water as well as your two feet.

The final stage is the most important and there's a right way to stand and a wrong way. The first way that I'll explain is the correct way and this cannot be forced but allowed. The skier must allow his or her feet to wash underneath their hips. Most people push against the water with their toes and try to lift their shoulders to stand. You must picture your hips being the pivot point. So, if you let your feet wash underneath your hips the result will be your shoulders rising off the water on their own. This is very important to understand because you're allowing the boat to do the work. Don't try to stand, but go through the grocery list step-by-step and the acceleration of the boat will pick you up off of the water.

As you feel your chest and chin come off the water, keep your legs more than shoulder-width apart. Also, bend your knees and keep your head in the spray, which is shown in Photo No. 4. The reason for keeping the head in the spray is for safety. Since this will be your first time standing backward on your feet, you must stay in a number seven position until you feel more confident and comfortable. As you continue to gain more real estate on your feet, you'll be able to raise your head, shoulders and bring the feet to a closer position. The arms should remain out, but wrists will always be on the top part of your butt. If your wrists are away from your body, it will make you more vulnerable in falling out the back door. The eyes will remain looking up at the horizon, which will help your balance. If you're looking into the spray, the body doesn't have a sense of feeling balanced. The last portion of the back deep is where the water is breaking on your feet. The heels will never touch the water, so make sure three-fourths of your feet are always in the water and that the water line is just below the heels. You shouldn't curl your toes down, but some people do, so it's not overly important unless it's causing you to gas pedal.

Barefooting backward is an awesome feat and a big step, but make sure you trust your driver. Many obstacles like debris and rollers can cause falling for no reason. The best thing the boat driver can do is to slowly decelerate and the skier will notice one of two things — either feel the deceleration or hear the engine pitch changing. Everyone needs a boat driver, so never yell at them. Just try to explain exactly what you want. It will take a couple of pulls for the boat driver to dial everything in, so be patient and try to work together. Remember, this will take a team effort to see positive results, so don't get frustrated. Here's the last grocery list:

- 1.) Arms out
- 2.) Drive chin into water
- 3.) Stiffen body to plane
- 4.) Feet gliding equally
- 5.) Patience for boat speed
- 6.) Lift hips and butt
- 7.) Allow feet to wash underneath your hips
- 8.) Keep head in the spray until comfortable
- 9.) Waterline check
- 10.) Eyes up

To set up professional instruction with Keith St. Onge at Gliding Soles Barefoot Camp in Winter Haven, Fla., call (863) 969-3049 or visit glidingsoles.com.



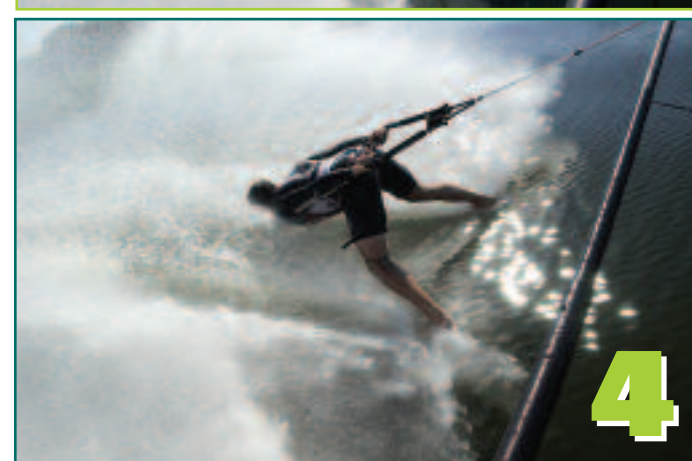
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