



## Peanuts

Surfboards come in all shapes and sizes, but none quite so unusual as the Meyerhoffer Peanut. Is this revolutionary design born of genius or madness? Chris Stevens finds out. [Photos 1, 3 & 8 by Chris Stevens; 4 & 7 by Nick Allen]

It's the penultimate day of the Noosa festival, and a group of grown men are lying on the floor of GSI's HQ, curiously running their hands over rather an odd-looking surfboard.

One of these men is Thomas Meyerhoffer, creator of the Peanut - or The Meyerhoffer (TMH), as it is more formally known. And the board he's caressing is the soon-to-be-launched, more performance tweaked version of TMH - a thinner, more streamlined 9'1", which Thomas has been tackling the Noosa lines with.

### **So Thomas, TMH has taken the surf industry by storm - but when did you begin shaping boards?**

I grew up in Sweden, and for many years, windsurfing was my passion. I started shaping my own boards when I was about 16. When I left Apple I decided to leave the corporate world behind me - that's when I really got into surfing and travelled. I seriously started shaping surfboards within the last 10 years.





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### How long has TMH been in the making?

I started it as an art project back in 2004/2005. I made four boards with the 'waist'; from there I simply decided to refine it. When I realised the board worked and that it filled a gap in the market I went back into product-development mode again - I was back in my old role but with an added twist! I started getting more precise and produced more and more prototypes. There were an infinite amount of designs that it could've morphed into - the hardest thing was to decide what was working and what wasn't, what needed to be tweaked and what needed to be left.

### What was your vision for TMH?

I wanted to take the aesthetics and usability of a longboard, but make it perform and act more like a shortboard; that way the intermediate market could have the best of both worlds without having to shell out for a large quiver.





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### Talk us through the main elements...

In the end I found it was as much about adding as taking away. The 'waist' makes it really agile when dropping in - it lets you go deeper and steeper, which is something that I think appeals to a lot of longboarders.

There are big double-concaves in the back of the board, so it planes on the rear. This means the nose is more out of the water at the start.

Planing on the rear is a big part of how it handles too - it means the whole thing reacts faster, like a shortboard. We have some really good footage of it in action at Bells - the front of the board barely touches the water!

There's a lot of grip on the face too - it goes from a generous rounder rail at the front (like a traditional log) which makes it easier to ride, but this dramatically changes towards the last quarter-inch of the board, which is almost completely shortboard orientated. The tail itself is designed to help with the drive - it keeps the speed through the sections and the top speed is increased as a result.



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### Is the shortboard aspect the reason for the thin tail and tri-fin set-up then?

Definitely. You couldn't have the reactions of a shortboard any other way. I experimented with a single fin, but at the end of the day they're best suited to point breaks, and that isolated a lot of the potential market. Most people have access to beachies, so the tri fin worked better and gave GSI the selling point they needed.

With the performance side of things, the tri was the only real option too. The whole concept of the board was it's fast and allows you to tackle steeper waves; the tri keeps the control without losing that. Having a single fin on a board like this would be like having a top-of-the-range sports car and putting large thick wheels on it!

Also it's a new concept and design - to some extent it would feel like back-tracking if I went single fin.

### The nose looks pretty traditional though - why did you keep that?

I had to keep the nose. I set out to create a longboard that could act like a shortboard. For me, and most surfers, the main feature of a longboard is noseriding, so I kept the nose for both riding and aesthetic purposes.

### So TMH also acts as a noserider?

Much so. In fact the overall design actually helps make it a high-performance noserider. When getting on the nose, the waist makes the hip of the board dig into the face - which adds additional stability - and actually makes the board want to climb up the wave, allowing the rider to keep the trim.





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**It seems like the board is two separate entities that come together to create a whole new experience...**

Exactly. The front is traditional; the back is progressive. It gives the surfer the best of both worlds, which is exactly what I wanted. I wanted the ease of use of a longboard - like picking up waves earlier, ease of paddling and buoyancy, but without compromising the way you can attack a wave with shortboard style.

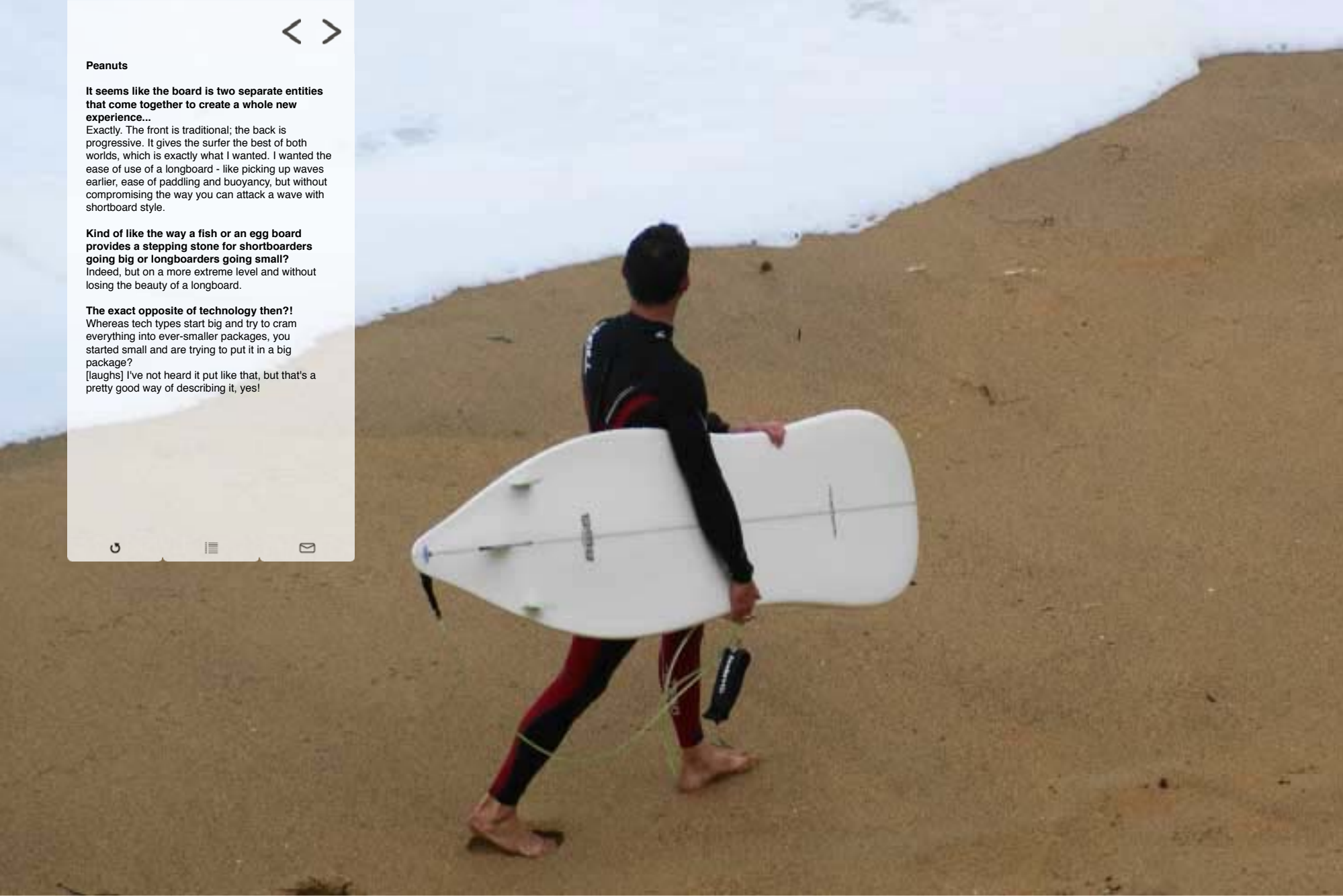
**Kind of like the way a fish or an egg board provides a stepping stone for shortboarders going big or longboarders going small?**

Indeed, but on a more extreme level and without losing the beauty of a longboard.

**The exact opposite of technology then?!**

Whereas tech types start big and try to cram everything into ever-smaller packages, you started small and are trying to put it in a big package?

[laughs] I've not heard it put like that, but that's a pretty good way of describing it, yes!





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### **A lot of shapers and designers turn to nature for inspiration; did it play any role in your plans?**

Surfing and surfers are close to nature. The medium in which the board lives is fluid, so the shape should be appropriately organic. But for it to perform there also needed to be parts that were precisely controlled and with harder edges. It's a good combo of organic and efficiency.

### **The shape itself is pretty unique - were you worried it might simply be viewed as gimmicky?**

I couldn't have comprehended how well the whole thing has panned out. I mean, I didn't anticipate how well the industry and surfers have taken to it. I didn't necessarily set out to make lots of money from it, I just wanted to create a board which could tackle both style of riding. Sure, there will be people who write it off as gimmicky - but that's the same with all things that are new and pushing the boundaries.

I've got shapers like Bob McTavish who want to ride it. That's an amazing feeling for me, when you have people of that calibre excited about a design it should be clear it's not simply a gimmick! GSI have stood behind the board and marketed it. I'm really grateful that they realised the potential of it and wanted it in their product line. To have it in a range of boards that includes McTavish and Walden is amazing and a testament to the design.





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### So what's the next evolution of TMH?

We have a 9'1" competition board being launched soon. It's specifically for high-performance riding - thinner, less volume, narrower and with a straighter and more refined outline. It's more lively and with less emphasis on the waist, but it's still an integral part of the design - its super-fast and with a pintail as well.

After seeing how well the original has done in the competition circuit, it was natural to push the limits performance-wise.

### You must be pretty stoked with the prospect of building on the success of the TMH, especially after it has thrust you straight into the realms of high-profile shapers?

Yeah I am! It's incredible how well it's gone down - one of the designs was even in the Surfing Heritage Museum's new designs exhibit!

Having GSI on board for the next projects is handy - it opens up so many more resources. But it has also handed me an incredible responsibility. I've been given a great opportunity thanks to Global taking a 'risk', but it's now my responsibility to continue evolving it and putting in the effort to make it the best it can be. I listened to [shaper] Greg Webber talking about it, and in his words "I've seen a lot of experimentation, but this is one of the few times someone has created a complete board with so many elements coming together as one". That was a peak in my development of the board!



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But, in the end, to find people surfing your board all over the world and being stoked at the end of the session because of the way it performed is really cool.

### Any last words for those more dubious surfers out there?

For me, creating new boards is a challenge to open people's minds - even with a big quiver, surfers can be reluctant to try a new shape. I think it's a slight insecurity in people's abilities to enjoy themselves, a reluctance to try new things.

It's not just about opening people's eyes to new shapes, though, it's opening their minds to surfing and life. Surfing is all about a personal challenge, the waves are ever-changing and so are the conditions - so try something new; have a new experience.



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