

BOARDSPORT
Source.
EUROPEAN SURF/SKATE/SNOW BUSINESS

#108 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER
2021 €5



BIG WIG: JON PYZEL
INDUSTRY REACTION TO OLYMPICS

RETAIL BUYER'S GUIDES
SURF APPAREL, WETSUITS, SUNGLASSES, LONGBOARDS, SUP,
WAKEBOARD HARDGOODS, WATER HELMETS, KITESURFING,
SURFBOARDS, UNDERWEAR



Cobra's senior team including legendary shaper Kym Thompson



COBRA INTERNATIONAL

BoardSport Source talks to Bruce Wylie, Olympic Windsurfer and Chief Commercial Officer Watersports

Please give us a brief history of Cobra?

Cobra began operations in March 1978 as Windglider Thailand - founded by our current Chairman Vorapant Chotikapanich to manufacture sandwich construction windsurf boards. Over more than four decades later, the company has expanded its production of strong, light and beautiful products, taking a leading global role as a composite supplier to the watersports, automotive, marine and UAV markets. We entered the surf market in the 1990's, transferring our mass production techniques and innovative construction technologies to the epoxy surfboard market.

Who are the key management and ambassadors in the company?

Cobra is a large part of the "core" watersports board industry. Our founders and senior team, along with many of our employees, are "watermen" with decades of experience and long-standing relationships with shapers and surfers. From industry legends such as Gerry Lopez, Steve Walden, Carl Schaper, Darren Handley, Tully St. John and Cobra's own Kym Thompson, to current names such as Hayden Cox – Cobra is embedded in the heart of the industry.

Tell us about the boardsport brands you work with?

Cobra is proud to support a massive range of partners, providing manufacturing firepower for leading surf, windsurf, eFoil, Foil and SUP brands. Some of our most well-known surf customers include Gerry Lopez, DHD, Modom, Takayama, Stewart, Haydenshapes, Surftech, NSP and Aloha plus many more.

How do you ensure the quality of your production?

Our philosophy is to always push for the highest quality level possible, as an example we've held our ISO 9001 accreditation for more than 20 years.

We take up the challenge of meeting each brand and shaper's highest quality expectations and implement detailed specifications and control measures to ensure absolute quality and product consistency. The best software systems, quality management tools and a culture of continuous improvement are at the heart of

our mass production system. Many of our long term employees have single handedly shaped, laminated and sanded in excess of 30,000 boards in their career.

Manufacturing is always evolving, which innovations is Cobra most proud of?

Innovation is key to Cobra's success, and it is also a passion of ours. With standout innovations including in-house optimization of the EPS foam core process, new dual material board cores, the whitest epoxy boards, PVC foam sandwich construction technologies, novel recyclable resin systems and bio-composite boards, Cobra never stands still!

As well as developing our own innovative technologies, Cobra also acts as a productionisation partner for customers' own innovations, providing large scale manufacturing capacity whilst ensuring each brand's style and performance remains unique. Cobra has developed many unique material and visual finish combinations for its customers, such as wood veneer finishes and its distinctive unfinished paint effect where the outer paint layer is sanded away to reduce weight and reveal the board's laminate layers below.

How has Cobra made its production more environmentally friendly over the last decade?

Sustainability improvements are a huge part of the Cobra business strategy and values, with focus applied to three specific areas – products, processes and the workplace itself.

In terms of materials, Cobra has pioneered the use of bio-epoxies in volume board manufacturing, working with suppliers to integrate epoxy resins with the highest possible (around 50% at the time of writing) percentage of carbon content coming from sustainable plant-based sources.

Cobra has also introduced and productionised natural coconut fibre reinforcements, massively reduced raw material and consumable waste across our production, and last year we were also proud to win an industry award for our new work with a recyclable epoxy resin system that we hope will one day lead to fully recyclable boards!



Additional improvements include work to reduce energy consumption throughout the factory operations, stopping the use of single use plastics in catering, the reduction of plastics used in board packaging and the planting of thousands of new trees around the Cobra site. There is a tree planted for every single team member at Cobra – so over 2000!

We are also extremely active in a wider role, supporting environmental clean-up campaigns and working closely with customers to examine and incorporate every sustainability gain possible.

What can we expect to see from Cobra in the future?

Cobra is constantly striving to produce stronger, lighter and more durable boards and this journey will continue and will be combined with materials and processes that have less impact on our environment and oceans.

Another key market trend we see is around foiling. Cobra already manufactures carbon fibre hydrofoils for surf, SUP, wingfoil and windsurf boards, and the company expects to see continued further growth in this area in the future.

Cobra is also continuously working to expand the watersports community as a whole - getting more people afloat and helping to reignite the passion for watersports for those that have moved away from the sport. Recent Cobra projects such as the hugely successful Windsurfer LT and the new Shadow one-design racing SUP board developed with the Thai Surfing Federation are all designed to bring more people, from all levels of expertise, onto the water. ☺