COLLECTION OF PETER TOWNEND

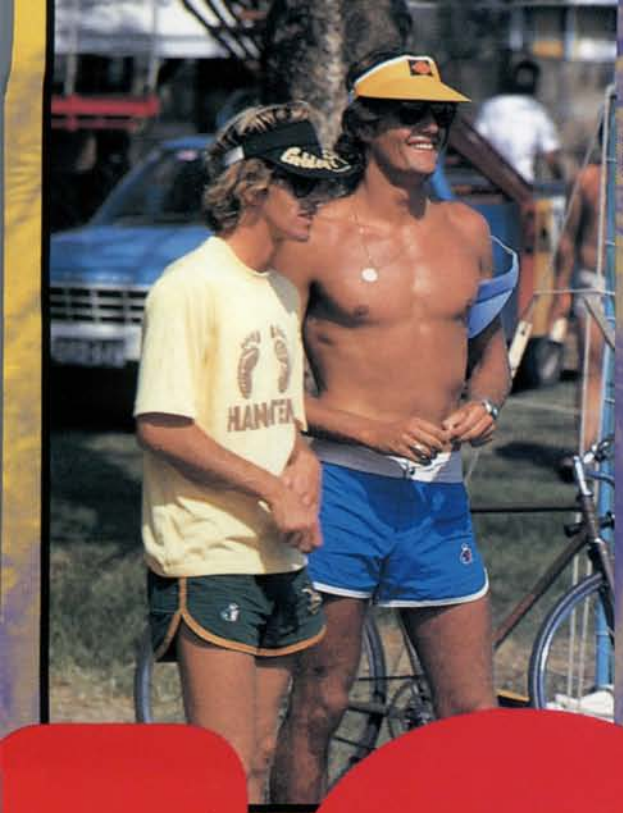
PAUL NEILSEN, BURLEIGH HEADS. BAKER/BRADY

SAM HAWK, BACKDOOR. WILKINGS

WILKINGS

SAM HAWK. WILKINGS

GERRY LOPEZ, PIPELINE. WILKINGS



MERKEL

WAYNE BARTHOLOMEW, BACKDOOR TROUT

1976

and the Birth of the World Professional Surfing Circuit

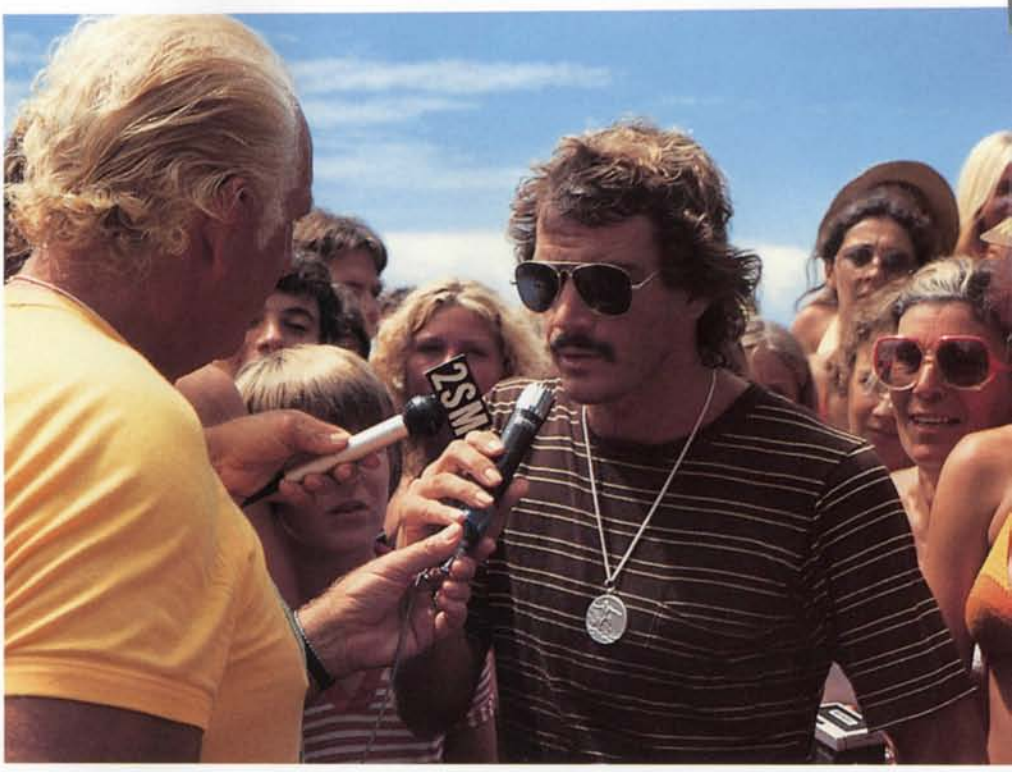
BAKER/BRADY

MICHAEL TOMSON, SUNSET, TROUT

BAKER/BRADY

STAYIN' ALIVE

by Matt Warshaw



The 1976 AMCO/Radio Hauraki Pro, professional surfing's first world tour event, held in New Zealand, January 3-10, at Piha Beach, disappeared like a Foghat B-side into the clutter of mid-seventies surf culture. No surviving programs or competitor's T-shirts. No Super-8 film. The American surf magazines ignored the contest completely, and the Australian magazines only noted it in passing as another win for Michael Peterson. World tour headquarters today can't even find the official AMCO Pro draw sheet.

Even as a virtual non-event—or maybe *because* it was a virtual non-event—the AMCO Pro serves as a prophetic opener to organized international pro surfing. For starters, that the contest even stands as the first world tour event is ridiculous: International Professional Surfers (IPS) didn't even exist when the AMCO Pro ran, and wouldn't take form for another 10 months. Only by the magic of retroactive scheduling would the New Zealand contest find its place at the front of the line.

More significantly, Michael Peterson's victory ran counter to everything the IPS would come to stand for. In the pious words of founder Fred Hemmings, the organization's objective was to present "clean and healthy athletes" to a mainstream audience, in order to "qualify surfing as a legitimate sport."

From there, Hemmings continued, it would be an easy jump to network coverage and corporate sponsorship. Yet there was Michael Peterson, AMCO Pro winner, accepting a first-place check for $1,200. With a little creative reconstruction, Peterson can be seen on the beach at Piha with his wild, long black hair, mirrored shades, jeans and leather jacket; personality already bent by heroin addiction and paranoia.

It would be Peterson's last year as a professional, and subsequent contest winners would be closer to Hemmings' clean and healthy ideal. But New Zealand showed that surfing wasn't about to grow out of its "adolescence" (Hemming's word) into respectable young-adulthood.

Because the IPS was born to a family that has always been uninterested, if not repulsed, by too much order and design, it's no surprise that the 14-contest world tour circuit in 1976 wasn't an across-the-board hit. Of course the IPS meant everything to Shaun Tomson, Peter Townend, Michael Ho, Ian Cairns, Wayne Bartholomew, Mark Richards and the rest of the top competitors of 1976 (and was hugely interesting to Cheyne Horan, Tom Carroll, Joey Buran and thousands of other grems around the world). But what did the IPS mean to

IAN CAIRNS, ROCKY POINT. PHOTO: LANCE TROUT

RENO ABELLIRA. PHOTO: WILKINGS

BOBBY OWENS, BACK DOOR. PHOTO: DAN MERKEL

1976
and the Birth of the World Professional Surfing Circuit

Talented, competitive, self-destructive, enigmatic: Queensland's Michael Peterson (far left and left) **was easily the dominate force in Australia surfing during the mid-'70s.**

George Greenough, test-piloting his hand-built 37' yacht through the South Pacific? What did it mean to Ventura's Russell Short, California's hottest young goofy-foot, who liked more than anything to surf by himself at Hollywood-by-the-Sea? What did it mean to Peter Cole on the North Shore? What did it mean to Kevin Naughton and Craig Peterson, camped somewhere along the coastal Sahara? Indifference was, and remains, the great unmentioned response to the world tour.

Among those who did feel strongly about the IPS, opinion was divided. Only a few thought pro surfing would find its own level without reordering the surf world completely. Partisan rhetoric carried the day, from Peter Townend's hope that "maybe we'll end up in the Jack Nicklaus class yet," to John Scott's poetic musing about "Classy, svelte contest pigs, (who) fornicate with our mother the Sea."

Such were the polemics of professional surfing in 1976. In ways that are a little difficult to nail down—except maybe to say that the world tour needed to attract talent from across the spectrum—it makes perfect sense that Fred Hemmings, salesman and surf-jock, and Michael Peterson, smacked-out freak of nature, both acted as midwives for the birth of the IPS.

Fred Hemmings, Randy Rarick, Peter Townend and Ian Cairns were professional surfing's key figures in 1976. Hemmings, from Hawaii, the '68 world champion, registered the name "International Professional Surfers" as pro surfing's first international governing body, and took the title of Executive Director. Hemmings was 30 at the time. Rarick, 25, also from Hawaii, shaped surfboards and was one of the first traveling pros. He became the Administrative Director. Cairns and Townend, 24 and 23 respectively, both from Australia, were disciples of the idea that surfers could make a living just by surfing.

That these four surfers did more than anybody else to take the world tour from concept to fact is beyond doubt. But an instant shit-fight is created in trying to go a step further and assign credit for the shape and structure of the IPS.

Cairns recalls organizers and surfers being "at war" from the very first meetings, mostly about contest formatting, the interference rule, seeding and judging, and says that virtually all suggestions he and Townend made were put into practice.

Hemmings responds: "There was a lot of friction, yes. Right from the beginning we battled with Ian and Peter, who obviously wanted to run the sport." Did the Australians have anything to do with creating the IPS? "No, nothing. Nothing at all."

HEMMINGS, P.T. AND "WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP" TROPHY.

LYN BOYER. PHOTO: MERKEL BOYER AT HALEIWA. PHOTO: BREWER

Townend: "Hemmings just can't give that idea up. The truth is, in 1976 the Aussies were leading what was going on with organized pro surfing."

Rarick: "PT and Ian have been on a mission for years to rewrite history. It bothers me sometimes. It really irks Fred."

Hemmings: "Look, Randy and I created the IPS, with help from Jack Shipley and Bernie Baker. Peter and Ian were good young surfers. That's it. They didn't have a thing to do with creating the IPS."

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As good as Mark Richards was in 1976, he wouldn't hit full stride as a competitor for two more years, after working and reworking the twin-fin–an idea he lifted from Reno Abellira, who probably lifted it from Steve Lis, who may have lifted it from Bob Simmons.

The rancor continues, interrupted now and then by a rough, manly admission of respect. (Hemmings: "I gotta say this; Ian never bullshitted me." Cairns: "Fred butts heads, and I admire him for that.") But in the end it's clear that while just about anyone can claim to have had the idea for an international professional surfing circuit, and while Cairns and Townend did, in fact, have a notable influence on rules and procedure, it was Hemmings who brought the IPS to life.

Fred Hemmings, probably the only surfer in the world to list Catholicism and football as major forces in his development, remains one of the sport's most curious figures. He says, with good humor, that he was the biggest rebel of late-'60s surfing, and he may be right. Hemmings walked into a banquet hall in Puerto Rico, the evening after he won the 1968 world titles, wearing a dark blue suit, matching tie, black socks and loafers, with his short hair neatly trimmed. Never before or since has a surfer stood in such marked contrast to his peers. Four years earlier Hemmings had been an All-League center at Punahou high school, and he'd stayed true to the Roger Staubach/Tom Seaver look, even as the world around him went psychedelic. He remembers the world contest scene in Puerto Rico: the love beads, peace symbols and ambient clouds of pot smoke. "The rest of the banquet room, every single other surfer in there—man, it was like a Cheech and Chong convention."

Sixteen years later, in 1986, Hemmings was elected to Hawaii's House of Representatives. His work since his world title victory had revolved around organized surfing and conservative politics. "I know," Hemmings says, "that the surfing elite, the in-crowd, doesn't consider me one of their own. But I've never been motivated by that group. I've been motivated by what the New York businessman thinks of surfing, or what the guy watching TV in Kansas City thinks, or what the corporate sponsor thinks."

Hemmings' provenance as the founder of professional surfing comes from an article he wrote for *Surfer* in 1969. Although the heart of the piece is a *Reefer Madness*-style sermon against drugs ("Another once-great big-wave rider's brain is like a dried prune because of dope. He now lives an unproductive existence on the slopes of Haleakala"), Hemmings also plants the seeds of the IPS. He correctly points out that top surfers of the day were already taking money from sponsors, that there should be a division between professionals and amateurs, and that the best surfers in the world ought to be paid a respectable wage to surf. Hemmings argued for a professionals-only ratings system. "Pro contests would be run in all types of surf all over the world...and at the end of the tour, like golf and grand prix tours, there would be a proclaimed world champion."

Two years later, in 1971, Hemmings was running the North Shore pro contests. By mid-1976, he was ready to launch the IPS.

Today Hemmings is acknowledged, but not exalted, as the world tour's founding father. He never had great finesse, tact or vision. He did have a lot of energy: the nickname "Dead-Ahead Fred" was perfect. As an IPS judge put it, "Fred could be a real asshole. But he got things done."

Surfing first produced an official world champion in 1964, 12 years before the creation of the IPS, when Midget Farrelly beat Mike Doyle and Joey Cabell for the title at the world contest in Manly Beach, Australia. Results of subsequent world contests were as follows: Filipe Pomar won in Peru in '65, Nat Young won in San Diego in '66, Hemmings won in Puerto Rico in '68, Rolf Aurness won in Australia in '70 and Jim Blears won in San Diego in '72. Nobody believed for a moment that Pomar, Hemmings or Blears had legitimate claim to being the best surfer in the world. Nobody was particularly happy with the championship being decided by a single contest. The '72 event, in fact, was so discouraging that the whole concept was shelved for six years, returning in 1978 as a largely inconsequential amateur event.


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Professional surfing, like the world championships, also pre-dated the IPS. The '62 Bells Beach Classic offered $28 for "best ride;" Mickey Muñoz and Corky Carroll won their divisions in Tom Morey's $1,500 noseriding contest in Ventura in '65; Terry Jones won Morey's '66 event and made $2,000; Corky Carroll took $300 for winning the first Santa Cruz Pro-Am, in '67 (Carroll won the same event the following year and made $400, and won again in '69, good for $1,500); Gavin *Rudolph* took $450 for winning the '69 Durban 500; Mike Doyle took $1,000 in the '68 Duke; Hemmings raised $6,000 for the '70 Smirnoff, held at Makaha, and Nat Young took $2,000 for first place; Jeff Hakman took $500 for winning the inaugural Pipeline Masters in '71; the '74 Coke Surfabout in Sydney had a $7,000 purse, and Michael Peterson took $3,000 for first place.

By 1975, a handful of surfers were already on a virtual world circuit—which was, in the words of one competitor, more extended holiday than business trip—stopping for pro events in Hawaii, Australia and South Africa. Mark Richards and Shaun Tomson, that year, both made just over $10,000 in prize money.

There was no way to reconfigure the ocean into a playing field, stick to a schedule, or turn surfers into sportsmen.

Randy Rarick was a journeyman pro in the early- and mid-seventies. He occasionally picked up a small check behind the better-known surfers, but for the most part was content to travel the world, looking for good waves. Rarick returned to the North Shore in late '75. "There was obviously this new interest in pro surfing," he says today, "and it seemed like a good idea to link the best contests together into a world circuit." It wasn't a completely original notion—Townend, Cairns and others had the same thought—but it was Rarick who took the necessary first step. He didn't want to take the entire world tour project on himself, so he brought the idea to George Downing. Downing declined. Rarick then went to Fred Hemmings.

Hemmings' idea was to create a ratings system based on prize money, despite the fact that purses were ridiculously top-loaded. (Mark Richards, for example, earned $4,000 for a win in the '76 World Cup, while Ian Cairn's got $100 for finishing 6th. Hemmings actually mocked up a ratings system in late '75, in which Shaun Tomson ranked first, with $10,875, and Eddie Aikau ranked 15th, with $25.) The following year, Rarick, Cairns and Townend pushed for a points system, instead of a money system, and Hemmings agreed.

Because the IPS wasn't officially created until October of 1976 (more on this later), pro contests remained provincial and greatly mismatched, arriving every few weeks throughout the year like neighborhood entrants in the soapbox derby.

MARK WARREN, OUTER ISLAND. PHOTO: BAKER/BRADY, ISLAND STYLE

Procedure was often made up on the spot. For the Hawaiian events, Bernie Baker remembers Leonard Brady calling out colors on the judging stand, "even though he was color blind—which, of course, nobody knew a thing about." Brady was so tuned in to everybody's style that it didn't matter. "He'd watch 'em drop in," Baker continues, "then he'd look down at the heat sheet to see what color the guy was, and call it out. And got the job done."

Throughout the competition year, the ridiculous often climbed well above the sublime:

- The Pro Class Trials, a championship-rated event in '76, had a $75 entry fee, while each surfer in the Duke contest got $100 just for showing up.
- A late-round heat in the World Cup featured nine surfers. (Six was the norm, with the occasional seven- and eight-man heat in Hawaii). Barry Kanaiaupuni, who finished 4th in an eight-man Duke final at Sunset that year, remembers "it didn't seem strange at all; we were used to it. Sunset's a big place, plus we weren't wearing leashes. One clean-up set, and the peak would be empty for ten minutes."
- Eighteen surfers in all competed in the Hang Ten event, while 48 got a start in the Smirnoff. The politics of invitation lists, which could make or break a pro career and were drawn up at the whim of each contest promoter, were an endless source of concern among surfers.
- Two completely different judging systems were used during the season. The 0-20 subjective judging system (forerunner to the ASP's 1-10 system) often featured repechage heats, semi-main heats and a series of loser's rounds. In the points-per-maneuver system (also known as the Hang Ten, or objective system), each competitor surfed the same number of heats and accumulated points for basic maneuvers like the bottom turn and cutback. Bigger points awaited those who could dig a little deeper into their bag of tricks and come up with a "ricochet," "helicopter 360," or even a properly-executed "hang ten."
- There were judging problems. Rory Russell comments: "I'd come out of a heat, look up and see guys I knew, guys I hung out with, friends of mine, sitting up there on the judging stand. So even if I stunk the place up, I'd win. Or I'd rip and not make it out, because the other guys had their friends up there."

Women weren't part of the '76 IPS tour, despite the fact that they had seven money events, in Hawaii, California, Brazil, South Africa and Australia. If an IPS points system had been in use, Jericho Poppler would have been the '76 world champion, by a slim margin, over Margo Oberg.

Rory Russell: "The idea that we could surf and make a living was not a bad idea at all. But surfing's so special that you can't really say 'This guy's the best.' Even if you could say it, the rest of the world just doesn't care."

1976 saw a minor schism in small-wave board design, with Buttons Kahaluiokalani and Mark Liddell heading up the stinger faction, and the Australian/South African pros staying with the basic winger round-pin, about 6'8" x 20" x 3". Outside of Hawaii, Townend, Cairns, Richards, Peterson and others shaped their own surfboards, and everybody had a free-board deal with their local surf shop. But while visiting the North Shore, the pros, all of them, would have a near-magical conversion to Lightning Bolt surfboards. The Bolt logo (still the best-designed emblem in surfing history), was the sport's hood ornament throughout the early- and mid-seventies; ubiquitous, year after year, on cover shots, tube-rides, trophy presentations, posters and film sequences.

Bolt was still peaking in '76, and the surf world was stacked high with Bolt T-shirts and trunks, Bolt jewelry, Bolt slaps and Bolt wax. Virtually every hot surfer in the Islands rode Bolt boards, mainly shaped by Tom Parrish, supported by Reno Abellira, Gerry Lopez and Barry Kanaiaupuni, and from '72 to '75, Bolt owner Jack Shipley passed out free boards like pieces of Halloween candy to visiting pros.

The second event of the '76 IPS season, following the AMCO Pro in New Zealand, was the Lightning Bolt Championships. It was the last Hawaiian event to use the points-per-maneuver judging system, where every move on every wave in every heat counted toward a surfer's final point total. Rory Russell had a simplified tactical approach: "More ass-wiggles, more zigzags, more points." Russell wiggled at Sunset in the early rounds, zigzagged at Makaha on the final day, January 16, and won the contest over Michael Tomson, Larry Bertlemann and Mark Richards, in that order.

Russell, who finished the year rated 8th, was the top-rated Hawaiian and the top-rated goofy foot for '76 (Wayne

Buttons Kahaluiokalani and Rory Russell take a break during a summer skate session in Town. If anybody had a better time during the first two years of world tour surfing, that person has yet to be found.

Lynch finished 11th, Jeff Crawford 16th). Russell recalls: "This was back when the surfers used to vote on where the contest was going to be held for the day, and I tell you, the regular foot lobby just *sucked*. Thirty out of 40 guys in any contest were regulars. Every time, they'd get us. Wayne and I didn't have a chance. It was like, 'Are we going to surf the fun-looking left down the beach, or are we heading over to the close-out crap up there, 'cause it's almost like a right?' Close-outs, every time.'"

Rory Russell, the Dog, sank his teeth into the nascent pro scene like it was a thick T-bone. His surfing influences were Jock Sutherland and Gerry Lopez. His personality influences ranged a little further, with traces of John Travolta, Dean Martin and maybe even Jimmy "Dy-no-mite" Walker—never so obvious as when the Dog strutted to a booth at the White Whale Lounge, Mai Tai in each hand, shouting greetings to friends across the room, hips moving in syncopated time to Bowie's *Fame*.

Russell was 23 in 1976. Born in West Germany, the son of a career military father, he spent the first 10 years of his life moving from base to base across the continental United States before the family settled in Hawaii. When Rory was 15, they moved next door to the Sutherlands, when oldest son Jock was possibly the best surfer in the world. Russell watched and learned. Three years later, he went from being Sutherland's protege to Lopez' Pipeline understudy, which is where his reputation, perhaps unfairly, crystallized. As Phil Jarratt wrote in 1980: "Gerry and Rory. That's the way it's been now for almost a decade. Never Rory and Gerry, always the other way around."

But Russell had a big win in the '76 Pipeline Masters, repeated in '77, and in between set a high standard as the original world tour Bacchus-sportsman. If anybody had a better time during the first two years of world tour surfing, that person has yet to be identified.

Russell's win in the Bolt was the only Hawaiian victory in what would soon be known as the *Free Ride* winter. The Australians, along with Shaun and Michael Tomson from South Africa, dominated the contests, and stole much of the North Shore thunder from the Hawaiians, who had, since the late sixties, walked the grounds like Roman senators.

Three members of the new group—Cairns, Townend and Bartholomew—were less than diplomatic about the changing of the guard. In his "We're Number One" interview in the April/May *Surfer*, Cairns made the following comparison between the Hawaiians and the Australians: "...our surfing has improved outrageously; whereas theirs, as a group, has stagnated slightly." The Hawaiians, at that particular moment, were about to fly over to Australia for three pro contests, and the media, eager for a "We're Tops Now" redux, began to amplify the growing rift. "Aussie surf guerillas had struck deep into Hawaiian waves and caught the opposition unawares," wrote *Tracks* Editor Paul Holmes in his Coke contest article. Holmes' tongue was partially in cheek, but he ignored two truths which, although contradictory at first look, nonetheless coexisted. First, the Hawaiians had been kicked in the head by the Australian's collective ego, and were pissed off with good reason. Second, the competing surfers, despite the insults, still got along pretty well. "The magazines really played the whole thing up," Shaun Tomson recalls. "There was tension that year, no question. But for the most part there was this tremendously good vibe among all of us."

Jeff Hakman was a popular and convincing winner in the Rip Curl Easter Classic, which finished April 19 in excellent overhead surf at Bells. Hawaii, right off the bat, had gotten back some of its own. Also, it was a classy last bow for Hakman, 28 years old and the winningest American surfer of the seventies. Cairns was runner-up at Bells, and the reclusive Wayne Lynch finished 3rd. (Drew Kampion probably had the Lynch in mind, later in the year, when he wrote, "Many who had sworn off contests for a variety of socio-politico-organo-spiritual reasons were rousted out of their laid-back dilemma by the green smell [of money] wafting up from the pro contests.")

Cairns came back and won the Alan Oke Memorial on May 2nd, in thick 6-8' surf at Philip Island, Victoria, followed by Peterson, Lynch and Townend. Cairns, never wanting for confidence, knew at that point he was going to have a big season.

Cairns' legacy as a power surfer for the ages has been undermined by his near-pathological attraction to organized surfing, first as a competitor in the APSA and IPS, then as an


Jan Cairns

administrator with the NSSA and the Op Pro. Cairns' hassles with Fred Hemmings continued until 1983, when Cairns put the IPS out of business by creating the Association of Surfing Professionals (ASP), which has served as international surfing's professional body ever since. Cairn's left the ASP in 1986. In 1992 he became the director of the Bud Pro Tour.

But he was a predator in the wilds of Western Australia long before he threw in with the bureaucracy, and the just-slightly-fictionalized image of his early years has him paddling out alone, with the sharks circling, to any one of a number of mysterious and super-gnarly outer reef breaks. Never mind that his father was a well-paid mechanical engineer in Perth, or that Ian was an eager competition surfer from the beginning. He walked, talked and surfed like a frontiersman, and the early stories, if played up a little, were based in fact.

Cairns was the straightest-talking pro of the mid-seventies, and he can still get to the point quickly. Asked to name the most progressive surfer of 1976, Cairns answers without hesitation: "Me." Then a moment of further thought. "Well, me or Shaun."

Cairns prize money earnings that year, $8,100 out of a world tour total of $77,650, were best for the season. He won the last contest of the circuit, the World Cup, in big, onshore surf at Haleiwa, by taking off deeper than anybody, power-trimming through the maul sections, and setting up his signature move: a brutal snap-back just under the lip. Michael Tomson comments: "Ian really was a monster in big, powerful surf, and for '76 I might actually put him in there, after Shaun. But he wasn't the total surfer. He couldn't go left and he couldn't do a full cutback." Also, Cairns, at 6'2", 185, often faltered in small surf. Such was the case during the Coca-Cola 2SM Surfabout in Sydney, in mid-May, when he finished 10th.

The $12,000 Coke was not only the richest and most complicated event of the year (seven rounds of Hang Ten-system judging, with the contest site moving from Dee Why, to South Avalon, to Cronulla, to Narrabeen), it also provided the clearest glimpse into pro surfing's future. Mark Richards and Wayne Bartholomew placed first and second, respectively, and both would be world champions over the course of the next three years. Simon Anderson, in 6th, made his world tour cash debut. Reno Abellira finished fourth riding a 5'7" twin-fin fish, with Richards taking close note of Abellira's zappy, blunt-nosed little board. In years to come, Richards would get credit for repopularizing the twin-fin, but it was Abellira's surfing in Australia that year that pointed him in the right direction.

At first glance, California's 1976 position in the surfing world looks bad. Maybe not quite "a stagnant bog of apathy" as Derek Hynd would later write, but certainly a bit introverted—even sullen. Creativity in the water was at a low ebb. Humor was out. While Australia, Hawaii and South Africa surfed, played, competed and fought among themselves—not without problems, but at least together—California stomped up to its room and slammed the door.

Or maybe that's oversimplified. California business, in fact, was humming along, with flexible skateboards, crochet bikinis, Morey Boogies (ready-made at the local shop, or in a do-it-yourself mail order kit) all being produced in the state at a great clip, along with surfboard blanks, T-shirts, wetsuits, surf-slaps, skimboards, car racks and other beach-culture essentials. The media was healthy: *Surfer* and *Surfing* were regularly putting out 100-plus page issues, while *Five Summer Stories* and *Going Surfing*, even in rerelease, played to full houses from Leucadia to Santa Cruz.

Yet the driving force, for most California surfers, was to get out of the state. Kevin Naughton and Craig Peterson were still on the road, filing reports from the western Sahara. George Greenough was sailing from island to island across the South Pacific. Woody Woodworth was camped on an empty point somewhere in central Baja.

TROUT

WILKINGS

Drew Kampion: "Ian Cairns and Peter Townend saw it coming, and they didn't just sit and watch it come, either. The two of them hit every major pro contest in the world in 1976, building up points for something that did not as yet exist." Cairns' celebrated snap-back.

Meanwhile, the vibe among those back home, particularly anyone over 20, was often moody and dark. Virulent localism had faded, but seclusion was still the vogue. Rolf Aurness had set the tone in 1970 by dropping completely out of sight after winning the world title, and the rest of the decade went by without a single Californian taking, or being given, a real leadership role. Veteran Mike Purpus was the most accomplished surfer in the state, but tastemakers gagged at his gymnastic style and cheesecake-airbrushed boards, as well as the leather

hat, puka-shell necklace, and Zapata moustache. Purpus was twice cursed in 1976: past his peak and ahead of his time.

The younger surfers, too, mainly through lack of opportunity, had limited prospects. Seventeen-year-old Chris O'Rourke was the hottest guy in California in '76, but was more or less boxed in at La Jolla. Russ Short was similarly positioned in Ventura, as was Mark Levy in Hermosa Beach.

The Western Surfing Association (WSA) had atrophied terribly. The AAAA contest circuit no longer existed, and cross-pollination was at an all-time low. "California just was not part of our thinking at all at that point," Shaun Tomson recalls. "Hawaii, Australia and South Africa were the three corners of our existence; California was off the map." Chris O'Rourke, asked during an interview for *Surfer* where California surfing stood in relation to the rest of the world, responded efficiently: "The lowest." (The East Coast wasn't on fire either, but Florida at least had an international presence *via* Jeff Crawford and the Wave Rider Pro contest.)

Mike Purpus' act would have gone over big in the '80s, but in 1976 he was too flashy for laid-back California, and a half-step behind the Hawaiian/Aussie/South African vanguard on the North Shore. He finished 39th.

West Coast teens and preteens, not surprisingly, were suffering a collective identity crisis—but corrective steps, by 1976, were already being taken. This was the group that would eventually bring new energy to the state. Joey Buran was 15, Tom Curren was 11, and they were exactly the kind of young California surfers who had recently changed alliance en masse from the Hawaiians to the Australians and South Africans. Soul surfing had never been a particularly attractive concept to kids, and didn't have a chance in hell against Mark Richards giant superman logo and "sex and tube rides" philosophy. Australia soon had a near-complete mind-control over California youth. Trunks were out. Quiksilver "boardshorts" were in. Burleigh Heads and Kirra became the new dream spots. *Surfer* thoughtfully translated some Australian slang, and the Southern California beach argot was soon cut with expressions like "spew," "grommet," "pissed," and "poofter."

The world tour didn't stop in California in 1976—and wouldn't do so until 1981, much to the organization's discredit—but the message got through anyway, and the energy of the IPS hit the younger generation like the second coming of rock and roll. In fact, it would be overstating the case by just the smallest of margins to say that California surfing was reborn in 1976 with world tour professional surfing.

Peter Townend not only won the world title in 1976, he put together, for better or worse, what may have been the strongest image/persona of the era. "I didn't think there was anything wrong with being larger than life," Townend says today. "Maybe it was, partly commercialism. But I was as soulful as anyone. Shit, I did the soul-arch; I brought it back; I stole it from a photo of Kemp Aaberg. And that was as soulful a thing as was being done in '76."

Portrait photographs of Townend from the mid-seventies do him justice: he looks bright, shrewd and serious. He was the great master of compensation, with the pink board and pink-and-black trunks set against a fundamentally conservative

DECEMBER 1976: POOR SURF IN HAWAII, BUT SUNSET TURNED ON. PHOTO: WILKINGS

THE ORIGINAL BRONZED AUSSIES: CAIRNS, WARREN AND TOWNEND.

COLLECTION OF PETER TOWNEND

La Jolla's Chris O'Rourke at Big Rock. First his career, then his life, was cut short by Hodgkin's disease–O'Rourke might otherwise have been the first Californian to have any real impact on the IPS.

style of surfing; the table-top dancing and the occasional double-scotch binges set against the most sober approach to competition ever devised; the soul arch (as strangely mechanical as it was) set against raw commercial ambition. Townend could be outrageously elitist. "A lot of people I hang out with aren't surfers," he said in Hawaii, just after winning the world title. "They're models and such. I've got such a wardrobe, I never wear the same thing twice."

It's a little bit difficult to pinpoint where Townend stood, in terms of pure talent, in a wide variety of conditions, compared to the best surfers of '76. Certainly well behind Tomson, Richards and Peterson. Probably behind Bartholomew, Ho and Cairns. Probably ahead of Warren and M. Tomson. Jack Shipley, head judge for North Shore world tour events since the beginning of the world tour, remembers Townend as a hard-working, almost fastidious, competitor. "He was never that great a surfer," Shipley says. "He was blue-collar. He brought his lunch box every day. But if you ever made a mistake, he'd beat you. And most people back then made lots of mistakes."

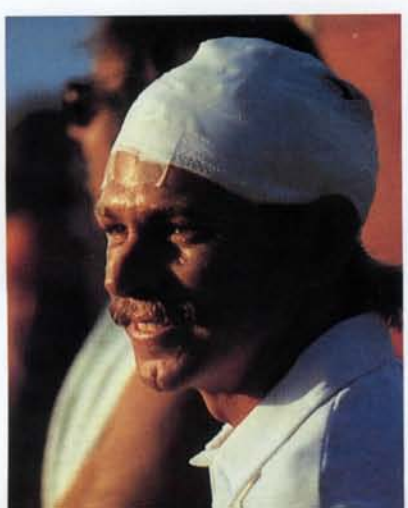
Shipley's judgment may be a little harsh. Townend's surfing was precise, polished and flowing. He photographed like a dream. He had a world champion's versatility, and with his compact frame (5'7", 138 lbs.), pink-and-black colors and white-blonde hair, he could make an impression from Kirra to Sunset to the Bay of Plenty. In a good moment, his surfing was both arrogant and elegant.

Townend grew up in a middle-class home on Queensland's Gold Coast, riding Kirra with Wayne Bartholomew and Michael Peterson. In '72 he gave up a college scholarship (he showed promise as an architect) and went to the world contest in San Diego, finishing 3rd behind Blears and Nuuhiwa.

Townend was 23 when he took the '76 world championship. He didn't win a single event during the season—a unique and somewhat dubious feat. Townend's victory was a model of consistency, which is curious, coming as it did in the middle of one of surfing's great periods of change. The '76 world tour was disorganized, even chaotic, but it produced a top 16 that reflected perfectly the shifting balance of power between the ascending *Free Ride* surfers, and the descending Hawaiian power school. In fact, it was the only time in the history of the world tour that Australia shared top honors with another geographic power for the greatest number of top 16 surfers: Australia and Hawaii each had six.

Townend and Cairns both surfed in 10 of the 14 IPS events in '76, more than any other surfer, in an era when every contest during the season counted toward the championship. Townend had his worst results early, with an 8th and an 11th in the first two events he entered, then hit stride with the following results: 4th, 3rd, 3rd, 2nd, 4th, 5th, 7th and 2nd. The last four numbers are from Hawaii, and Townend's aggregate North Shore results were best for the year. Had the Triple Crown existed, he would have won that as well as the world title—something that's never been done.

MIKE ARMSTRONG, ROCKY POINT. PHOTO: WILKINGS



JEFF CRAWFORD. PHOTO: BAKER

JAMES JONES, PIPELINE. PHOTO: BREWER

To the world outside of South Africa, Jonathan Paarman was the most obscure name in the 1976 top 16. "But he was a hell of a good surfer," Shaun Tomson recalls. "Powerful, fantastic bottom turn, a total hellman 20 years before the word was invented."

Although Paarman's runner-up finish in the Gunston 500 in good, 8' surf at Nahoon Reef would be his best showing of the year, and help lift him to 15th in the final ratings for '76, it was trivial in the face of Tomson's ongoing domination of South African surfing. "Shaun," says cousin Michael Tomson, "had a fucking death grip on the pro contests there. God, it almost drove me crazy. He wasn't nearly as impressive in free-surfs, or in the monthly events we'd have at the Bay of Plenty. He was beatable. I could beat him. But I swear, whenever it came down to the big ones, when the media was there and money was on the line, Shaun would walk away with it every time, and I'd end up 3rd or 4th. He was so good under pressure."

On July 11th, Shaun took the fourth of his six consecutive Gunston wins. Two weeks later he won the Hang Ten at Umhlanga Rocks. Cousin Michael, however, finished 5th in the year-end ratings, one place ahead of Shaun.

The South African contests were bookended by a pair of inconspicuous, sub-$5,000 events (actually, eight of the 14 IPS contests that year were sub-$5,000 events), largely ignored by the pros and the media. Florida's Greg Mungall won the Wave Rider Magazine Florida Pro in May at Sebastian Inlet, and Brazil's Pepe Lopez—easily the most obscure world tour event winner ever—won the Waimea 5000 in August in Rio de Janeiro.

It was a long flight to Hawaii, regardless of a surfer's point of origin. The Walkman hadn't been invented, and eight-track tapes of *Wings at the Speed of Sound*, *Physical Graffiti* and *Frampton Comes Alive* were left home, stacked next to the LPs. Still, the flight wasn't boring. Mark Richards is clear about what Hawaii meant to the better surfers of his generation. "Starting in June, being at home was like being a prisoner; we'd just be crossing the days off until it was time to get on the plane for the North Shore."

But good times were put on hold in October of '76, as the Hawaiians began their campaign of terror against the Australians.

By late Fall, Ian Cairns' "We're Number One" interview had been supplemented by two or three like-sounding articles by Peter Townend in the *Sydney Daily Mirror*, and by Wayne Bartholomew's "Bustin' Down the Door" piece for *Surfer*. Bartholomew, years later, after making the case that "Bustin'" was a greatly misunderstood article, nonetheless admitted that he and his cohorts had gone a step beyond. "I looked like a carnivorous, feral animal from Australia, come to rape and pillage. And it was overkill. The Aussies were coming on, for sure, but I was just too eager to tell the world all about it. I pushed the case too hard."

Now the Australians were coming back to Hawaii, and it was retaliation time. That said, the *perception* of violence in the early days of the '76-77 season was infinitely greater than the real thing. True, Bartholomew had his front teeth knocked out in front of Kammie's Market, but after that the heat was kept up mainly through rumors of guns and knives and impending pogroms by local organized crime. Which is not to underestimate the power of suggestion. Peter Drouyn got off the plane from Sydney, put a finger to the wind, and flew back home without even driving across to the North Shore. Rabbit went underground. Cairns bunkered down in a condo at the Kuilima and slept with a tennis racket at the ready.

Finally, the Aikau family stepped in as peacemakers. Talks were organized at the Kuilima, diplomacy won out and, as one writer put it, "the situation subsided into the usual winter free-for-all."

BAKER/BRADY, ISLAND STYLE

MERKEL

Shaun Tomson turned hard, pulled the deepest, most consistent tube rides, frontside and backside and drew some of the cleanest lines of the year. Peter Townend won the title, but Tomson was the consensus best surfer in the world in 1976.

Meanwhile, Hemmings and Rarick, working for the most part at Rarick's kitchen table, with input from Jack Shipley and Bernie Baker, were at last formalizing the organization of the IPS. On September 4th, Rarick signed a contract with Hemmings and took the title of Administrative Director. Rarick's official function was to bring the surfers and the pro contest organizers into the IPS fold at an agreed-upon rate of $1.50 for each surfer and $40 for each contest organizer. (Hemmings and Rarick ended up covering most IPS administrative costs that first year, nominal as they were, themselves. "I never made a penny from the IPS," says Hemmings today.)

Roles within the organization had already solidified. As

Drew Kampion wrote: "Fred faces out on the world of non-surfing, interfacing with sponsors, the media, business; Randy faces in on the surfing world, where he has established wide contacts and recognition." Shipley was put in charge of judging. Baker ran the Pro Class Trials.

On October 1st, "International Professional Surfers" was incorporated as a non-profit organization, and IPS letters went out to the best surfers in the world. Membership for the '76 season cost five dollars.

Meanwhile, Rarick reviewed all the money contests from the past ten months and decided which merited after-the-fact inclusion into the '76 ratings. Phone calls went out to organizers and directors, including Doug Warbrick, Geoff Luton and Graham Cassidy in Australia, and Peter Burness in South Africa. Shortly thereafter, a group of previously unrelated contests from around the world were neatly retrofitted into the first nine stops of the '76 season, with five events—all taking place on the North Shore—still to come. On November 26, after the completion of the Pro Class Trials, the first IPS ratings sheet was produced.

TROUT

WILKINGS

Peter Townend says he and Cairns blew nearly half of their World Cup prize money on drinks for the house at the Tiki Bar, the night after he won the championship. His best board in Hawaii was a 7'10" Parrish. Everywhere else he rode a 6'10" he shaped himself.

Even with this burst of organizational activity, it wasn't entirely clear that there would be a world champion. Townend and Cairns both say that, throughout 1976, it was obvious to anybody keeping an ear to the ground that there would be an ultimate winner. Nobody else remembers it that way.

Michael Tomson: "None of us really knew what the hell was going on. I was there. I didn't know."

Rory Russell, "All I remember is PT running up to me in Hawaii, all excited, saying, 'there's this new tour, mate, and you've already got thousands and thousands of points!'"

Shaun Tomson, late in '76, was in his 2nd year of college in Durban, working on an economics degree, and didn't complete his final exams until the end of November, after the Smirnoff. "So I didn't know anything about there being a world championship until the last three contests."

"Actually," Mark Richards recalls, "I don't really think I knew for sure until PT was announced as world champion."

Wayne Bartholomew didn't make the top 16 in 1976. Ian Cairns says he was simply overrated at that point. Bartholomew says he had no idea there was going to be a real circuit, and therefore hadn't put forth a comprehensive effort. He offers his runner-up placing in the Coke as proof that he could turn it on when he had to. A third reason for Bartholomew's poor showing overall might be that he was so cowed by his early-season North Shore thrashing that he more or less gave away the final four events. By any explanation, however, Bartholomew's 27th position overall belies the huge shot of enthusiasm he brought to the concept and creation of professional surfing. And, of course, his talent and focus were never in question over the next three seasons, as he finished 2nd, 1st and 3rd overall.

Two other conspicuously absent names from the '76 top 16 are Reno Abellira (20th) and Terry Fitzgerald (39th). Both came back and had strong seasons in '77, with Abellira finishing 4th and Fitzgerald 9th.

Those who *did* make it in '76 are just as interesting as those who didn't—perhaps more so.

Barry Kanaiaupuni, 31, and the father of three, won the Pro Class Trials on November 15. (The 36 surfers invited to the Smirnoff weren't allowed to compete in the Trials, but the event nonetheless counted toward the world title.) Kanaiaupuni also placed 4th in the Duke and a 5th in the World Cup, to finish the season rated 9th. The results amuse him today. "You know, I was never a contest surfer," he says, laughing. "I never had the mentality for it."

Kanaiaupuni, along with Eddie Aikau and Jeff Hakman (who finished 12th and 14th overall, respectively) were the only surfers from the first top 16 who had international reputations predating the '67-68 shortboard revolution. Of the three, Kanaiaupuni had gone the furthest in rewiring his approach on the new equipment. By 1970 he was riding a wafer-thin, 17" wide surfboard at Sunset, and throwing his kick-stall up into the hook from dead-center on 12' west peaks. The Kanaiaupuni bottom turn, along with Hakman's, set a mark that is still in use.

Hakman, meanwhile, had come on for the first time as a 17-year-old Sunset savant in 1966, stretch-fiveing through the inside section to win in the inaugural Duke contest.

Aikau's approach in '76 was fundamentally unchanged from what it had been in '66: deep positioning, big waves, big drops, big turns—straight-ahead, bully North Shore style.

Aikau, Hakman and Kanaiaupuni were all on the backside of their careers in 1976, and would drop out of the top 16 in 1977. But the contribution they made during the start-up phase of the world tour was hugely important. Along with Lopez, Abellira, Bertlemann and a few others, they had reshaped surfing over the previous seven years. The IPS needed the Hawaiians a lot more than the Hawaiians needed the IPS.

Terry Fitzgerald, possibly the fastest surfer alive in the '70s, was an international force in the years prior to the formation of the IPS. He was caught out of the Top 16 in1976, but came back the following year to finish 9th.

On November 30, Mark Warren won the Smirnoff, the 2nd richest event of the year at $10,400. He would finish the year in 4th. Peter Townend makes an assessment of his utilitarian friend without a touch of irony: "Mark was the ultimate tradesman. Not a great talent, but very, very consistent."

Earlier in the year Warren, Townend and Cairns, along with behind-the-scenes man Mike Hurst, a Sydney journalist, had organized themselves as the "Bronzed Aussies." The BAs would later manufacture, with spectacular failure, a line of clothes and soft surfboards, but initially they had no product to promote other than themselves. Their objective was nothing less than the re-refashioning of surfing—or at least professional surfing—in their image, and to sell it to the highest bidder.

The BAs, elitist and hyper-competitive, stressed the team above the individual—values that all fell under the banner of "professionalism," and values that, for the most part, were soundly rejected by the rest of the surf world. "I remember Ian and PT in South Africa that season, down at the beach in tennis gear, very clean and white," Shaun Tomson recalls, inadvertently giving an example of why the BAs were doomed. "And I remember my Dad saying, 'Now, *those* boys are neatly dressed.'"

Mark Richards, always diplomatic, says today that the BAs were ahead of their time. But the truth was that surfers didn't want the rough edges knocked off, didn't want to join—or look up to—any group, and definitely didn't want to step into a BA-style jumpsuit.

In contrast to the Bronzed Aussies, Richards' would almost immediately come to stand as the model professional. His method: surf better than God, but never come off as more than a step removed from being just one of the boys. "The BAs were a team," Richards says, "and I understood where they were coming from, but I always enjoyed traveling alone. Not just because I liked my freedom, but because I found acceptance that way." (Townend, asked what he thinks of the Bronzed Aussies now, looking back, laughs and says, "I think I learned how to lose a lot of money.")

The 3rd event in the North Shore season, the 12th annual Duke Kahanamoku Classic, held December 5 in near-perfect conditions at Sunset, was the Hawaiian's strongest answer to the Aussie/South African surge. James Jones won, followed, in order, by Michael Ho, Larry Bertlemann and Barry Kanaiaupuni.

One week later, with *ABC's Wide World of Sports* filming from the beach, Rory Russell won the Primo Pipeline Masters, snatching the pebble from the hand of Pipe guru Gerry Lopez, who finished 2nd. The Masters final was the most cosmopolitan grouping of the year, featuring a Brazilian, a Californian, a South African, an Australian and two Hawaiians. Russell won on consistency. Lopez, predictably, got the tube of the day.

Although Lopez, like Hakman and Kanaiaupuni, was at peak influence earlier in the decade, he remained a key figure in 1976. "Half of what he's doing is so subtle and advanced," Neil Stebbins wrote, "that you feel sorry that the contests are still too brash to judge finesse and grace and flow." Lopez' qualified endorsement of professional contests—he surfed in the North Shore events, and went to Australia for the Coke—was a boon to the young IPS. He was as professional as anyone in the game, careful with his image, and his multi-dimensional involvement at Lightning Bolt put him more squarely in the business of surfing than any surfer of the time. But he was also keeping the world at arm's length. He'd already given up year-round residence at Pipeline and moved to Maui, and was off each year for long visits to Indonesia.

Lopez, in other words, was keeping a number of balls in the air at the same time, only one of which involved competition. At age 28, he was at once of and above the IPS. He gave tacit approval to contest surfing, and at the same time showed its

Fitzgerald's 1975 quiver: probably not the kind of equipment Hemmings had in mind when he dreamed about surfing's "clean and healthy athletes."

limitations—a role Tom Curren would fill in years to come. Rory Russell says, "Lopez might have played it better than anybody. He was the first person to really kill it, professionally, but he was still the ultimate soul man."

Russell continues, expansive and talkative in a way Lopez could never be, but probably articulating Lopez' position as well as his own. "Pro surfing and contests—it was a chance for us to keep living the kind of life we wanted to live. So even if I thought the whole concept was flawed, the important thing was to keep it going, to build the IPS up, not just for us, but for the guys after us. The best surfers in the world should get paid to surf. I believe that wholeheartedly. I *don't* believe you can put the best five guys in the water at any given time and actually say who's better. Each guy's performance is like a painting. I like this one, you like that one, he likes somebody else. It all depends on where your head's at. I mean, think about Pipeline, 1976, Shaun and Gerry in the water. Could you really say who's better?"

Lopez tipped his hand in December of '76, when he wrote a short article just before the end of the contest season. He was obviously impressed with some of the performances, but signed off by saying, "With one contest left, the World Cup, it could be anybody's guess as to who will be 'on top' this winter. But then, are contests an indication of anything? Go surfing."

It was clear long before the last contest of the year, the Lancers World Cup, that Peter Townend and Ian Cairns were going to finish on top in the final ratings. Townend was in front, but not out of reach. Going into the six-man final heat in big, testing conditions at Haleiwa, on January 14, 1977, with both surfers still in the running, Cairn's needed a win, with Townend finishing 4th or worse, in order for Cairns to take the title. Cairns did his part. His performance was absolutely crushing and he won going away. ("Just for a little while," John Witzig wrote, "that arrogant bastard became my hero.") But PT surfed a steady final, placed 2nd, and thus became the first professional world champion.

1976 was a wash financially for Townend. He earned about $26,000 from prize money and sponsorship, a twice-weekly column for the *Sydney Daily News*, and as *Surfing* magazine's "Raging Journalist," but spent all of it on travel and "lifestyle expenses...just being who I was." He and Ian picked up their winnings after the World Cup and ran a tab at the Kuilima that night with all comers welcome.

Later in the week, Townend met Fred Hemmings and a photographer from the *Honolulu Advertiser* at the venerable Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki, to get a shot of Townend holding the world championship trophy—which, unfortunately, didn't exist. Hemmings thought fast, looked around, lifted an oversized gold cup out from the Outrigger's trophy case, and handed it to Townend. The Australian turned the inscription away from the camera, smiled and held the trophy up as if he owned it. "We made a lot of things up as we went," says Hemmings. "And had a pretty good time doing it."

Nostalgia has tinted the memories of the surfers who created the world tour; typical for any group of men in their early 40s looking back on the glory years. But, in general, the people and events and situations of '76 don't come off as overly-heroic, dramatic, or even particularly destined. "I don't know if we really felt as if we were part of anything that special at the time," Michael Tomson recalls. "We were too busy surfing, going to a few contests, being young."

Mark Richard's cheerful three-word assessment of the IPS in 1976: "It was chaos."

Rory Russell: "I remember borrowing a lot of money, all the time, like, 'Mom, could I have $600 to go to Australia?'"

Bernie Baker is probably right when he says 1975 had more impact on surfing than 1976. "The pace just seemed to double in '75, all of a sudden. Not just with the contests, but with surfing in general. We took it further in '76, but it wasn't anywhere near as big a jump as the year before."

Shaun Tomson, approaching from the other side, makes a distinction between '76 and '77. "I tell you when we knew things were really happening: standing *on the point at Burleigh* Heads, watching the man-on-man Stubbies, in perfection surf. That was really something. It felt like professional surf-

SHAUN TOMSON, PIPELINE. PHOTO WILKINGS

ing was being born right before our eyes." (Peter Drouyn's man-on-man concept, unveiled for the Stubbies, would become standard in '77, and Drouyn's contribution to pro surfing is not to be underestimated. "He's the unsung hero from that period," says Jack Shipley. "His mind worked on a higher level. Man-on-man heats put pro surfing on the map. In fact, Peter Drouyn and Michael Peterson, I'd say, were the two most impressive Australians of 1976.")

One way to gauge 1976 and any effect the IPS had on surfing is to recognize what didn't happen in subsequent years. It didn't kill surfing's soul. Neither did it catapult the sport to mainstream riches. All things considered, the world tour demands about the same amount of the surf world's collective attention in 1995 as it did in 1976.

Fred Hemmings, 19 years after forming the IPS: "It's a big ocean and it's a free world. You can be a surfing artist, or you can compete for money, glory and fame."

The promise and limitations of pro surfing, for those who could see, were marked out almost immediately. Yes, there would be enough interest to allow a few dozen top surfers to make a living by competing. But there was no way to reconfigure the ocean into a playing field, or stick to a schedule, or create a completely objective scoring system, or turn surfers into sportsmen. So even as the competitive desire of most young surfers, after years of denial, was at last being satisfied, the inherent square-peg-in-a-round-hole nature of surf contests was also being demonstrated—again and again.

The schism over "professionalism" would never be as wide as it was in 1976. Hemmings, sounding more conciliatory than he would have 15 or 20 years ago, says, "it's a big ocean and it's a free world. You can be a surfing artist if you want, or you can compete for money, glory and fame." Hemmings could make the point even stronger by saying that the greatest surfers of the professional era, from Jeff Hakman to Kelly Slater, have been artists and competitors. It would be a mistake to separate Tomson's tube aesthetic at Off the Wall from his six straight Gunston 500 wins. It would be a mistake to put any great distinction between Tom Curren's beautiful drive off the bottom at Jeffrey's Bay and his three world titles. Contests, in other words, can be a valuable part of the experience.

Neil Stebbins' description in 1976 of the new IPS surfer as "...part athlete, businessman and world traveler" astutely split the difference between the soul and pro extremists, and Stebbins' final analysis of pro surfing would stand up well over the years. "The spirit of Murphy, travel and adventure is still very much alive. The wildness is part of surfing, and nothing can change that. Not even money."