

Kiteboarding

These shots, of Dutch world No.2 kiteboarder Ruben Lenten at Sunset Beach, South Africa, show why the sport is one of the fastest-growing in the country, as devotees from other watersports, such as wakeboarding and surfing, make the switch. Gavin Stevenson, president of the NSW Kiteboarding Association, reckons there are more than 8000 dedicated kiteboarders and kitesurfers in the country, with about 200,000 worldwide. And why the two names? Kitesurfers use surfboards and the waves more; boarders strap themselves to shorter boards so they can get more air and pull off more spectacular moves. Below, Stevenson talks us through what it takes to match 19-year-old Lenten. To get into it yourself, go to the Australian Kitesurfing Association: www.aksa.com.au



→ **THE MOVE** Boarders, if they're feeling especially brave, can unhook the control bar from the harness. Although this places greater strain on the arms, it gives you much greater movement to pull tricks like this one, the cool-looking 360 "mute grab" with a handle pass. "People are now trying to do a 360, but letting go of the control bar and grabbing it again on the way around."

→ **THE CONDITIONS** "I prefer a cross-shore or on-shore wind (although Lenten is using an off-shore wind here), otherwise I might end up too far out to sea. Even so, I've had some pretty long swims. Fifteen-30 knots is about ideal." The waves shouldn't be too big, maybe 0.5-3m. "Summer is the best season; when winter comes and the winds change, I move over to the lakes instead."

→ **THE KITES** This is a C-shape kite, which with bow kites are most common, because they contain plastic air bladders to make them more resilient, responsive and enable them to keep their shape if they hit the water. If something goes wrong, you can also "depower" them quickly so they fall to the ground. Boarders experiment with line length, but lines tend to be between 10-20m long.

→ **THE EQUIPMENT** "Lenten is using a flat, stiff board, which only top pros can use because it's not very forgiving." The waist harness is attached via a leash to the kite's control bar. A hard rubber "chicken loop" also connects the harness to the middle line via the control bar, but Lenten has unhooked his to make the move. It'll cost about \$3500 to equip yourself, including helmet and wet suit.

→ **THE STARS** Lenten is currently world No.2 and has been there, on and off, for about three years to No.1 Aaron Hadlow. Also just 19, Hadlow, from the UK, dominates a sport that, at the top end, is increasingly for the young: the female world champion, Gisela Pulido of Spain, is just 13. "It's because kiteboarding is so hard on the knees. You really need to be small and light."

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