



Oscar Chalupsky - The ChalupSki Design Philosophy

ChalupSki & Oscar Chalupsky

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Interviewer: Raju Bitter for [Bellevue Ocean Race](#)

The Bellevue Ocean Race stands as one of Scandinavia's premier surfski downwind events. Established in 2016 by the [Klampenborg Kajak & Kano Klub](#), located just north of Copenhagen, the race features a dynamic course selection spanning 80 kilometers of stunning coastline. By selecting from three distinct racing zones based on real-time wind conditions, organizers ensure that competitors can consistently experience the absolute best downwind conditions the region has to offer.

Oscar Chalupsky - The Interview

The Legacy of the ChalupSki Name: You built your first "ChalupSki" surfski in 1976 at the age of 14, based on the surfskis your father and Tony Scott had designed. The ChalupSki became the world's first mass-produced long-distance ocean ski.

Core Philosophy: The driving philosophy behind all your designs is "**Stability before ability**". You've often mentioned that a stable boat gives paddlers the necessary confidence to catch waves and effectively put the power down. **How exactly is this core belief engineered into the hull shape of the new ChalupSki models?**

Oscar: "Stability before ability" is engineered into every ChalupSki hull through wider usable stability, fuller waterlines and balanced volume distribution. The goal is to give paddlers confidence to apply power, catch runs earlier and paddle more efficiently in real ocean conditions. A stable ski allows you to put the blade in the water properly instead of just trying to stay upright.

The Beginner Experience: *You have pointed out that many beginners make the mistake of buying advanced, unstable boats, which ultimately slows their progress and makes them "go backwards". How does the new Tarifa model, specifically with its 5.3m length and 55cm width, address this issue and help accelerate a newcomer's learning curve?*

Oscar: We can take a leaf out of the SUP world where the boards are so stable almost anybody can paddle them from day one. The Tarifa follows that same philosophy. At 5.3m long and 55cm wide it gives beginners immediate confidence and stability, allowing them to focus on learning proper technique, catching runs and enjoying the ocean instead of constantly bracing or falling in. Stable paddlers improve faster because they can actually put power down correctly.

The legendary Epic Kayaks V8 and Nelo 510/520: *At Epic Kayaks, you pushed for a release of a beginner surfski with great stability, and the resulting V8 mode became the best selling ocean ski in history. At Nelo, the 510 and 520 became the beginner surfskis, both boats were much shorter than the V8. When comparing the Tarifa and Waikiki to the V8 and the 520, where and how did you improve upon the previous designs?*

Oscar: With the Tarifa and Waikiki I pushed the stability even further while still maintaining surprisingly good glide and speed. The big difference is that paddlers feel confident immediately, which means they can apply power properly and improve much faster. The shorter length also helps with acceleration, maneuverability and catching runs easier in real ocean conditions. Stability gives you speed because you spend more time paddling and less time bracing.

Model Progression: *The ChalupSki range offers a clear progression path with models like the entry-level Tarifa, the Waikiki, the Maui, and the Molokai. Can you walk us through the design differences between the intermediate Maui and the performance-oriented Molokai, and how a paddler knows when they are ready to step up?*

Oscar: The Maui and Molokai were designed to give paddlers a natural progression without suddenly losing stability. As the skis get faster, we made them slightly narrower and longer, but both still have the waterline lengths of some much longer traditional surfskis. That gives them excellent glide and speed while remaining very maneuverable and confidence inspiring. A paddler is ready to step up when they can consistently put power down in rough conditions without constantly bracing or losing rhythm.

The "Shorter Boat" Advantage: *You won 7 consecutive Molokai races in the initial ChalupSki, which was 5.6m or 18 feet long. During your time with Nelo, you championed the 5.6-meter length as optimal for ocean racing because shorter boats accelerate quicker and fit wave troughs better than traditional 6.5-meter skis. With the new Molokai model sitting at 5.6m and the Maui at 5.4m, why are these specific lengths the sweet spot for intermediate to advanced*

paddlers?

Oscar: Through decades of racing and testing I found this to be the sweet spot for real ocean paddling. Shorter skis accelerate quicker, fit into wave troughs better and are easier to maneuver when linking runs. In downwind conditions acceleration is often more important than pure flatwater top speed. With the full waterline designs we still achieved the glide of some much longer traditional surfskis while keeping the skis more responsive and stable.

Ergonomics and Power Transfer: The new range features full carbon footrests based on your original 2004 design, along with reinforced footstraps that stay upright for GPS devices. **How does your specific footrest design optimize the leg drive and core rotation required to rapidly accelerate the ski into a constructive wave gateway?**

Oscar: The footrest is one of the most important parts of power transfer in a surfski. My original 2004 full carbon design was created to maximize leg drive, core rotation and connection to the ski so paddlers can accelerate quickly onto runs. On the new ChalupSki range we refined it even further by making the adjustment increments very small, around 5mm apart, allowing paddlers to fine tune their position precisely. We also added a toggle system so you can adjust the footrest from your seated position while training. As your technique and leg drive improve, your footrest position should gradually come slightly closer towards you to allow greater rotation, better posture and more efficient power application.



Seating and Posture: You've emphasized that in surfskis, unlike flat-water K1s, a built-up, comfortable seat allows a paddler's core to become part of their balance technique, preventing lower back strain. **How did your past experiences of tweaking seats by mere millimetres inform the cockpit design of the ChalupSki range?**

Oscar: The first thing I design on any surfski is the seat because if the paddler is not comfortable and connected properly to the ski, nothing else matters. Over the years I learned that even a few millimetres in seat height, angle or support can completely change stability, posture and power transfer. In the ChalupSki range we designed the cockpit to allow the paddler's core to become part of the balance system, reducing lower back strain and making it easier to rotate efficiently in real ocean conditions.

Innovation in Comfort: All ChalupSki models feature the Swedish-designed deBrito bailer. You've noted this system removes water up to 10 times faster than traditional venturis, creates zero drag when closed, and keeps the footwell. **How crucial is this feature for maintaining comfort and performance, especially during downwinds in freezing temperatures?**

Oscar: The deBrito bailer is a massive improvement in both comfort and performance. In cold downwind conditions having litres of freezing water around your feet can be miserable and affect circulation, comfort and even performance. The deBrito removes water incredibly quickly while creating virtually no drag when closed. Another huge advantage is that when you are stationary no water comes into the cockpit, keeping the footwell far drier than traditional venturi systems. Staying dry allows paddlers to remain warmer, more comfortable and fully focused on paddling and catching runs instead of being distracted by cold water sloshing around inside the ski.

Manufacturing Excellence: The brand pulls from world-class manufacturing expertise, with mentions of Carbonology Sport in Port Elizabeth and PeiSheng Boat in China utilizing pre-impregnated composites and autoclave curing. **How do these manufacturing partnerships ensure that ChalupSki meets your rigorous standards for hydrodynamic efficiency and durability?**



Oscar: Manufacturing quality is critical because even the best design means nothing if it is not built accurately and consistently. By working with world-class partners like Carbonology Sport and PeiSheng using pre-preg composites and autoclave technology, we can achieve extremely light, stiff and durable skis with very precise hull shapes. Myself and my brother Walter visit the factories often to oversee the process, test prototypes and make sure every detail meets our standards for performance, finish and reliability in real ocean conditions.

Maximizing Acceleration: Downwind paddling requires sudden, explosive acceleration to match a wave's phase velocity. **How do the full waterline hulls across all ChalupSki models assist paddlers in instantly spiking their speed to catch the next wave?**

Oscar: The full waterline hull designs help the skis maintain glide and carry speed efficiently between runs, which is critical in downwind paddling where acceleration is everything. The shorter overall lengths make the skis more responsive and quicker to react when sprinting onto a wave. Weight also plays a huge role – the lighter the ski, the easier and faster it accelerates. That is why we focused heavily on lightweight autoclave construction combined

with efficient hull shapes to help paddlers spike their speed quickly and connect runs more easily.

Perfecting the Brace Stroke while Lowering Heart Rate: You constantly teach that the brace stroke is vital in downwind paddling, allowing you to rest your arms and paddle and bring your heart rate down while surfing a run. ***How does the inherent stability of ChalupSki boats make it easier for paddlers to master this relaxed bracing technique?***

Oscar: No matter which ski you paddle, the brace stroke is the most important stroke in surfski paddling. It allows you to relax, surf the run, lower your heart rate and recover while still maintaining control and speed. The inherent stability of the ChalupSki range makes it much easier for paddlers to learn and trust the brace stroke because they are not constantly fighting to stay upright. When you feel stable and confident you can relax properly, use the ocean more efficiently and paddle with far less tension and wasted energy.

When you brace correctly you should also lean slightly back, which is why we designed the seat back with a comfortable slope. This makes the brace position feel far more natural and comfortable, especially during long downwinds when you are constantly surfing and recovering between accelerations.

Choosing the Right Build: ChalupSki offers two constructions: Epoxy Vacuum Glass (durable and great value) at under 10kg / 22 pounds, and Vacuum Carbon (lightweight and race-ready) at under 8kg / 18 pounds. ***For clubs or individuals interested in buying a ChalupSki,, how should they decide between the durability of glass and the stiffness-to-weight ratio of carbon?***

Oscar: The core construction of the ski is actually more important than whether it is glass or carbon because that is what largely determines the stiffness, strength and overall feel of the ski. The choice between glass and carbon is mainly about price, weight and intended use. The Epoxy Vacuum Glass construction is incredibly durable, excellent value and still very light at under 10kg, making it ideal for clubs, training and everyday paddling. The Vacuum Carbon version is lighter, stiffer and accelerates slightly faster, which many competitive paddlers prefer for racing and downwind performance. The lighter boats also really suit the maturing paddler because they are far easier to carry, load onto cars and handle off the water while still delivering excellent performance on the ocean.

Practicality and Logistics: Practical features are a big part of your design, including front and rear carry handles designed to fit gloved hands, and wide side handles for easy solo carrying. ***How much of your 40 years of travelling, racing, and lugging boats across the world informed these highly practical additions?***

Oscar: A huge amount of these practical features comes directly from more than 40 years of travelling, racing and carrying surfskis all over the world. Small details make a massive

difference over time. I have carried skis in freezing conditions with gloves, loaded boats onto cars in strong winds and watched paddlers struggle with awkward handles for decades. That is why we designed proper front and rear handles that fit gloved hands comfortably, along with wide side handles that make solo carrying far easier and safer. Practicality is just as important as performance because paddlers interact with the ski long before they even get onto the water.

Molokai - A Tribute to the Kaiwi Channel: *The Molokai model is named after the legendary race you've won 12 times. What specific design characteristics in this surfski pay homage to the grueling, dynamic conditions of racing between the Hawaiian islands? And are you planning to do another Molokai race in this surfski?*

Oscar: The Molokai was designed specifically with real ocean racing in mind and pays tribute to the Kaiwi Channel where conditions are constantly changing with huge runs, side chop and powerful currents. The ski was built to accelerate quickly onto runs, link waves efficiently and remain stable enough for paddlers to keep applying power in difficult conditions. Its full waterline design gives it excellent glide while still being maneuverable and responsive in open ocean conditions.

Next year is the 50th anniversary of the Molokai race and I absolutely plan to be there. My dream is to paddle the new ChalupSki Molokai in the race that has meant so much to my life and career.

Shaping the Future: *You have been relentlessly promoting surfski paddling and ocean racing over the past 40 years. How do you see the ChalupSki brand shaping the future of international surfski paddling, and what is your ultimate goal for the paddling community with this new lineup?*

Oscar: The ChalupSki brand will keep evolving because surfski design should never stand still. We already have future projects planned including a double surfski called the M2M – Maui to Molokai – and an OC1 called the Gorge inspired by one of the world's great downwind races. We will keep improving and refining every model as we learn more from paddlers and ocean conditions around the world.

A major goal for us is also to make high quality surfskis more cost effective and accessible to more people. I want more paddlers to experience the joy of the ocean safely and confidently, whether they are beginners or elite racers. If we can grow participation worldwide while helping people improve faster and enjoy paddling more, then we have achieved our mission.

'Paddle a ChalupSki' Events: *Are you planning events in Europe and especially Scandinavia where paddlers can try the new ChalupSki boat range? And if so, when can we expect these events to happen?*

Oscar: Yes, absolutely. We are planning a number of "Paddle a ChalupSki" events across

Europe and especially Scandinavia once more skis arrive. One of the first planned events will be at Kanocentrum Amsterdam with Arjan Bloem once his ChalupSki shipment lands. We are also shipping a large number of surfskis to our European warehouse in Le Havre, France, which will make it much easier to supply demos and support events across Europe. The goal is to get as many paddlers as possible onto the water to experience the skis for themselves.

And lastly, please name the top 5 influential and iconic surfskis you have paddled over your career: Please name the five most influential and iconic ocean skis you have designed and/or paddled in your life! And the surfskis where you feel that the innovation in boat design contributed to making the sport of surfski more accessible.

Oscar:

My first ski was actually the original Chalupsky which we built in the early days and we had two famous models called the Oscar and the Paul models. Those skis were revolutionary for their time and helped shape modern ocean racing. The next hugely influential ski was the original Fenn, which changed the sport with its downwind ability and ocean handling.

Then came the Epic V10, which introduced the idea that performance skis could also have more stability and better ergonomics. The V10 was also the first surfski with a fully adjustable footrest system, which became a major innovation copied throughout the industry. After that the Epic V8 completely revolutionised surfski paddling by making the sport accessible to thousands more paddlers around the world because almost anybody could paddle it and enjoy the ocean safely.

And now I believe the new ChalupSki Molokai continues that evolution by combining stability, acceleration, glide and real world ocean performance into one package while making paddling even more enjoyable and accessible.

Thank you, Oscar, for taking the time to answer our questions! We are so grateful for everything you have done to support the sport, support our race, and help other cancer warriors to follow your motto of "No Retreat, No Surrender"! And we wish you all the best for your continuing battle against cancer, for your family and business! We hope to see you in Denmark paddling a ChalupSki, maybe at the 12th edition of our race in 2027. Although that might overlap with the 50 year anniversary of the Molokai race. Keeping fingers crossed!

