

Surf & Turf

By Sonny Williams

Though part of surfing's royal family, this California cowgirl gets good vibrations aboard horses.



RYAN REED



COURTESY THE PASKOWITZES



SONNY WILLIAMS

(Top left) Danielle aboard Smart Tom Tucker at the Valley Cow Horse Association NSHA show at the Fairlea Ranch in Exter, Calif. (Top right) Former professional surfer Izzy Paskowitz hanging ten (Left) Danielle Paskowitz

San Juan Capistrano is only 20 minutes from the deep blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, from swaying palms, sandy beaches and gentle surf ideal for longboarding. But Orange County's oldest city is better known as the Equestrian Capital of the West Coast.

Never far from the water, Danielle Paskowitz and her husband, former professional surfer Israel "Izzy" Paskowitz, have chosen this small Southern California community to call home. With the Spanish architecture of stucco archways and red roof tiles, working ranches in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains, and a short drive to the ocean, it's the perfect blend of surf and turf.

"We have a unique piece of property with a few acres, and we're not very far from the beach," Danielle said.

Their "few acres" are good enough to hold a few horses, and they need to stay within close proximity

The surfboards featured in this article were part of the Holiday Surfboard Auction held at The Ritz-Carlton, Laguna Niguel, Calif., to benefit Surfers Healing.

of the ocean to operate the Paskowitz Surf Camp, which is actually an hour and 15 minutes away in San Diego.

Danielle runs the Surf Camp and Surfers Healing: A Foundation for Autism. Since 1972, the Paskowitzes have managed the Paskowitz Surf Camp. Founded by Izzy's father, Dorian "Doc" Paskowitz, it is the longest-running surf camp in the United States and offers classes in California, Mexico and Montauk, N.Y.

"My husband lives down there [San Diego] all summer," Danielle said. "He stays there and I commute back and forth. I work in the office, which is here [San Juan Capistrano], and I'll go down a couple of times a week."

But Danielle's love for horses and competition has been rubbing Izzy the right way. She has encouraged him to put up the stick and boardshorts and grab the

cowboy hat and reins. At his first reined cow horse show, he entered the Greener Than Grass class (a Novice Non-Pro Limited class) at a National Stock Horse Association event at the Dilday Ranch in Porterville, Calif. He finished in the top 10.

"He just loves his horse. He trusts his horse," Danielle said.

However, Izzy didn't initially take to horses the way he took to water. Though this goofy-footer has hit some monster sets, scraping the faces of 20-foot waves, he found horses to be a bit intimidating.

"A few years back, he was afraid of horses," Danielle said. "But he's really come a long way with this horse. We've been married for 22 years. We had horses when we were first married. I was 20; he was 23, so we couldn't afford very nice horses. He had one that scared the crud out of him. So that was his very first experience. So we got rid of that one and got another that was a much better match for him.

"But then my son was born and diagnosed with autism, so we sold our four horses. We didn't have horses for 10 years," she said. "I couldn't ride and take care of my family at the same time. We finally decided to get back into horses. He said I needed some kind of outlet because I was going crazy. So we bought a couple of horses. We bought him a nice trail horse. When he outgrew the trail horse, he started ranch sorting. Now he does the cow horse thing."

Izzy and Danielle actually found a unique way to combine their two passions for surfing and horses. They held a Surf and Turf event last year and had such a good response, they are holding it again this year. It's the ideal match for the greenhorns and the gremmies.

"We had a clinic that was one day surfing with the Paskowitz Surf Camp, teaching surfing, and then Russell Dilday, Jake Gorrell and Mark Matson held a horse clinic," Danielle said.

This year's Surf and Turf clinic will be held in the summer. They haven't selected a date yet, but it will be on a weekend and will be held in the San Diego area. The cost is \$500 for both days or \$300 for one day and includes surfing equipment, lunch and a luau on Saturday night hosted by the Paskowitz Surf Camp. Accommodations Saturday night are camping at the surf camp. It's BYOH – bring your own horse. If you're interested in getting your toes in the water as well as the stirrups, call 949-728-1000, or e-mail danielle@paskowitz.com or visit www.paskowitz.com.

Surf to spurs

Of course, all of the Paskowitz children are water babies, and all surf. Daughter Israelah, "Elah," 20, is an instructor at the surf camp; Eli, 13, is a burgeoning surfer, and Isaiah, 18, loves the water.

"He [Isaiah] is in the water all day at surf camp," Danielle said. "He'll pick his instructor then go catch a couple of waves. Then he'll swim around the rest of the time. He's a fish."

Isaiah was born and diagnosed with autism at age 3. Izzy and Danielle came up with the idea of starting a surf camp, Surfers Healing, for autistic children

one afternoon after Isaiah was on the board with Izzy. Izzy and Danielle discovered that surfing was amazing therapy for Isaiah.

Danielle also spent much of her youth surfing, but she has been encouraging her children to ride horses instead of just waves.

"Elah used to ride a lot; she used to barrel race. I'm trying to get her into the cow horse," she said.

Danielle grew up riding and racing barrel horses, but she chose to go the cow horse route after traveling

Mark Matson.

"I've been riding my whole life, but the cow thing is still fairly new to me. And Russell is the king of fence work. He just puts me on and says, 'Go!'" she said laughing.

Russell will be going for a three-peat in the World's Greatest Horseman competition on Topsails Rien Maker this month in Texas, and he will ride Danielle's Smart Tom Tucker in the Magnificent 7 this summer in California.

The Paskowitz family: Elah, Eli, Izzy, Danielle and Isaiah



SUSAN CARPENTER



to see the National Reined Cow Horse Association Snaffle Bit Futurity in Reno, Nev.

"I was just so intrigued with the horses working the cows," she said. "I had some neighbors who would go every year, so I went one year and I was like, 'Wow, that's what I want to do.' It's very difficult. It's one of the hardest, I think, because you have to do so many different things. It's just the neatest sport."

Smart Tom Tucker (Smart Little Lena x Disco Tucker x Doc Tom Tucker) is Danielle's first cow horse, whom she purchased from Bob Avila six years ago, and she has been showing in cow horse classes for five years, all with the 13-year-old gelding. Smart Tom Tucker has career earnings of \$21,775.

A quick study, Danielle was an Amateur Cow Horse finalist in her first appearance at the 2009 AQHA World Show, finished third in the Novice Non-Pro Bridle at the 2009 NRCHA Celebration of Champions, eighth in the Non-Pro Bridle at the 2008 NRCHA Snaffle Bit Futurity, and she also won the NSHA Non-Pro end of the year saddle. She has \$7,170 in career earnings.

Danielle currently trains with Russell Dilday and

Surfing legends

Danielle was born and raised in San Clemente, Calif., which is also in Orange County. Her parents had horses, and they bought her first horse when she was 4 years old. She began by competing in barrel racing.

"I surfed as a kid, but then grew out of it," Danielle said. "I took the more turf part."

Once she was a teenager, however, she stopped competing. She went to college for a year, then got married at 20. Her meeting Izzy took a circuitous route.

Izzy, the fourth of nine children, and his family traveled in a small camper up and down the coast. Like ancient nomads, they wandered from place to place, searching for the perfect waves.

Izzy's father, Doc, is a great story unto himself. He graduated from Stanford Medical School in 1946, but unhappy with life as a doctor, he began his bohemian lifestyle devoted to health and surfing, rejecting money and material possessions. He has a reputation for his strong opinions and pursuing his ideals, and surfing is at the center of those ideals.

According to Doc, with a twist on a Jewish saying, "Our family motto was, 'As the Paskowitzes have kept surfing, so surfing has kept the Paskowitzes.'" He expected all nine kids to surf, renounced formal education and taught his kids his philosophy in their used camper long before the term "home schooling" existed. A controversial documentary film, *Surfwise*, was made about the Paskowitz family, and it premiered at the



Izzy has joined the horse fun and competed for the first time in the Greener Than Grass class (a Novice Non-Pro Limited class) at an NSHA show. He finished in the top 10. He is pictured here aboard Smokin Fast Colonel at the show at the Dilday Ranch in Porterville, Calif. (Right) This surfboard was signed by eight-time World Champion professional surfer Kelly Slater.



2007 Toronto Film Festival.

"They had lived in their camper in front of my dad's surfboard shop," Danielle said. "My dad made surfboards. They parked in the driveway."

Danielle's father, Danny Brawner, may have owned a surfboard shop, but he's a legend in the surfing community for another reason. He was also a drummer for a band called The Sandals, who created the surf-rock soundtrack for the iconic 1966 surfer movie *The Endless Summer*.

"My dad actually made Izzy's first surfboard when he was 13 as a bar mitzvah present," Danielle said. "He [Izzy] had been surfing since he was 6, but never had his own board. Up to that point, he had to share surfboards with his siblings."

But Danielle didn't actually meet Izzy until she was 18 at a mutual friend's birthday party, even though his family was parked in the surfboard shop's driveway.

"I knew of him and I knew of his family, and my parents knew his parents."

Once they married, Izzy traveled a lot as a pro surfer, and Danielle worked at *Surfer Magazine*. She traveled with him to Australia and Hawaii several times a year. After awhile, and several children later, Izzy gave up the life of a pro surfer to run the Paskowitz Surf Camp and Surfers Healing full time.

When Oprah calls

Surfers Healing: A Foundation for Autism has been featured in numerous newspaper and magazine articles and on TV. But one day, some producers came calling, interested in making a reality TV show.

"These producers saw Surfers Healing on ESPN and HBO and asked if they could follow us around. They pitched it to Oprah Winfrey, and they bought it," Danielle said.

The Oprah crews have been shooting since April 2009, and they aren't done yet. The show will be called *The Swell Life*, and it will kick off the Oprah Winfrey Network, which debuts in January 2011.

"The show is about our family, about the struggles of raising a child with autism. There will also be quite

a bit of horse-related material, since that's my outlet to help me deal with what I have to deal with," she said.

"It's been crazy. Everywhere I go, they're right there. During the summer, I had a full crew on me, and Izzy had a full camera crew on him, and there was one at the surf camp the whole time.

"They followed me to a horse show in Temecula, so anybody I talked to had to sign a release in case they use the footage. They filmed me and it was cool; I won! So that was really cool," Danielle laughed.

"We didn't hide anything. My son had a couple of major tantrums, and the cameras are right there. The fifth episode is heavy. When people start moaning and groaning about the small things in life, my words to them are, 'Now you need to watch the fifth episode. It will put things into perspective.'

"I'm so grateful that I'm even able to ride and to show. You have no idea. I make myself have the time because that's my outlet. After I ride, I'm in such a better mood. It's important to me and my family. My son is at a point now where we can have someone watch him. His behavior's gotten a lot better. So I have more freedom."

This freedom has allowed Danielle to move forward and set some goals for herself. It also allowed her to buy a new horse.

"He's a Shining Spark. His name's Shiners Rojo. He's a 4-year-old. He's a stallion, but only for three more days," she said laughing.

Danielle traveled to Gainesville, Texas, and bought the horse (Shining Spark x Little Lena Lady x Smart Little Lena) from Carol Rose. Shiners Rojo has \$12,045 in career earnings, all with Boyd Rice and Jay McLaughlin riding. Danielle wanted to buy a younger horse and compete in the derbies.

"I want to do the hackamore, the two-rein, she said. "I want to go through the steps. It's all about learning, having fun and learning. Every year I set goals for myself, and that's my next thing to accomplish." ■

The Magic of Surfing

Izzy and Danielle Paskowitz began the non-profit organization Surfers Healing: A Foundation for Autism as a way to share a therapeutic experience they had with their son, Isaiah. Since its inception, the foundation has helped thousands of autistic children through the magical experience of catching a wave.

The idea for Surfers Healing happened rather serendipitously. Isaiah was diagnosed with autism at age 3, and like many autistic children, he often suffered from sensory overload – simple sensations could overwhelm him.

One afternoon, former pro surfer Izzy had Isaiah on the front of his surfboard. With Izzy steering from the back, the two spent the day surfing together. Izzy saw that surfing had a profound impact on Isaiah; the ocean was the one place where he seemed to find calm. So Izzy and Danielle decided they wanted to share this unique therapy with other autistic children. They began to host day camps at the beach, where autistic children and their families could be exposed to a completely new experience of surfing. Best of all, the camp is free.

Last summer alone, Surfers Healing took more than 3,000 autistic children surfing, and the



Surfers Healing has many supporters, such as Flea (middle with hat) of the musical group Red Hot Chili Peppers. This Surfers Healing event was held on a beach in Malibu, Calif.: (left to right): Flea's brother, who is handicap, Izzy, Flea's wife, Isaiah and Danielle. (Lower) Izzy takes an autistic child on a ride he'll never forget.

camp has been featured by numerous media such as ESPN, CNN, Nightline, and Good Morning America. In January 2011, Surfers Healing and the struggles of raising an autistic child will be the center of a reality TV show, called *The Swell Life*, which will kick off the Oprah Winfrey Network. Danielle says there will be lots of horse stuff on the show, too. For more details, see www.surfershealing.org. —SW