

## The All-New BCU Freestyle Star awards!

Former European Freestyle Champion, BCU Freestyle Technical Panel chair and BCU Level 5 coach Lowri Davies takes us through the new BCU Freestyle star awards...

### Intro & Overview

Freestyle kayaking is a fun, dynamic discipline of white water kayaking that involves surfing on waves and holes, making the kayak do a variety of tricks. These BCU awards aim help more paddlers progress from their first surfs up to throwing huge aerial moves. They provide coaches and paddlers with some structure to aid their development and promote core principles such as bilateral learning (doing things on both your left and right... yeah that's right guys, time to get rid off your "weaker side"! ). Through these "core elements" the awards promote good all-round paddling, rather than just providing you with a check-list of moves and is not about competitions. We believe working towards these awards can also greatly improve general white water paddlers' skills.

The awards follow a similar format to star awards in other disciplines such as White Water, Sea and Surf. They start with the 3 star<sup>1</sup> (which is already live and active) and will go up to 5 star. The 4 and 5 star awards include looking after your mates on the white water where we find our usual playspots and so class as "leadership" awards, but we'll look at that in more detail later...

All of the awards are available to be taken in K1 (a normal playboat) or C1 (a closed cockpit C1 playboat). It will say on the certificate which craft the award was taken in, so you could do two assessments at the same level (one in K1, one in C1) and get two certificates. The freestyle star awards have been written to fit in with the rest of the BCU qualification system – so you can use them as pre-requisites. Perhaps you are looking to do a "canoe-based" 3 star before going for Level 2 coach? BCU 3 Star Freestyle C1 is an option!

### BCU 3 Star Freestyle

This is the "entry level" of the BCU Freestyle star awards, so there are no formal pre-requisites but experience of around 10 freestyle sessions is a recommended minimum before assessment. There's no formal BCU endorsed training course, however many coaches will provide training courses or long-term development programs to help paddlers to prepare.

The assessment will take place in a friendly "park and play" venue with a simple wave or hole (ideally both) and eddylines on max grade 2(3). Venues could include Mile End Mill on the Dee in low to medium flow; the bottom of HPP; Hurley on one or two gates; Chertsey; Lee Valley Legacy course; Nene; Cardiff

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<sup>1</sup> 1 star is an intro award which can be done in any craft and 2 star is a "generic" award done in canoe and kayak on flatwater.

(on certain releases or using the bottom wave) but there are countless other local playspots around the country which are also suitable (e.g. Horstead, Howsham, Chester, Woodmill etc). The assessment can be carried out over a series of sessions at a variety of venues with the same coach, which is a great option for clubs.

The 3 star syllabus includes:

- entering and exiting play features
- controlled surfing of friendly holes & waves
- flat spins
- shuvits
- enders & pirouettes
- rolling & supporting (a swim on assessment doesn't mean a fail, but your roll should work most of the time)
- eddyline stern dips
- the beginnings of flatwater moves such as lean cleans and double pumps.

As previously mentioned, there are core elements that will be assessed throughout.

Perfect performance is not expected on every attempt, but some consistency would be. You'll also need to complete some basic safety & rescue scenarios that are relevant to the kind of grade 2 environment that 3 star freestyle normally takes place in.

It is worth remembering that the syllabus definition of each move is generally more relaxed than the formal definitions used for competitions. The syllabus and more detailed guidance notes are on the BCU website, please have a read of them for more information and full descriptions and definitions.

### **BCU 4 Star Leader Freestyle**

The BCU 4 star freestyle can be seen as a good intermediate level focusing on moves such as cartwheels, loops and blunts which lay the foundations on which all of the more advanced moves of freestyle build.

The assessment will take place in a friendly "park and play" venue with eddylines, a surf wave and hole suitable for doing vertical moves and on maximum grade 3. If a venue doesn't have both a suitable wave and a suitable hole, then two or more playspot venues can be used over the two days of a training or assessment course. Venues could include Mile End Mill on the Dee, HPP, Hurley, Tryweryn, Lee Valley Legacy course and Cardiff; there are other venues out there water level permitting.

The moves covered by 4 star freestyle include:

- cartwheels (3 consecutive ends)
- splitwheels
- loops
- front and back surfing / carving

- blunts

You will also be asked to complete a “routine” in which you plan and execute one run which includes 4 moves of your choice within 45 seconds.

Perfect performance is not expected on every attempt of every move, but some consistency would be. It is worth remembering that the syllabus definition of each move is generally more relaxed than the formal definitions used for competitions.

The 4 star is presented as a (minimum) 2-day training and a 2-day assessment – and the two days do not need to be consecutive.

This award is a “leadership” award, which means that upon passing you’ll be qualified to take a group of paddlers to a “park and play” spot which can be within a section of up to grade 3 and up to 500 metres long. Therefore the assessment will also look at your group skills, safety awareness and rescue skills. For example, you could be presented with a first aid scenario at a weir where your car is not parked directly along-side. This doesn’t mean you’re expected to paddle your playboat with a throwline and first aid kit in it for the whole session; but in some venues you’d want to have them with you so that they can be put on the side beside the wave or hole on which you’re playing for quick access when needed.

Please have a read of the syllabus and more detailed guidance notes for more information, full descriptions and definitions.

### **BCU 5 Star Leader Freestyle**

In summary, this award is not yet finished but will be a mark of distinction within the discipline. It is not anticipated that the venues will be any more difficult, just that the moves will require a top level of skill in freestyle. When we have this ready for release, we’ll let you know!

### **How do I book a course?**

The 3 star is live and course dates are starting to be advertised by providers across the country. 4 star will be going live imminently so expect to see course dates appearing soon. Have a google for courses and see what you can find, but a few places to try would be FlowFree, KJO, Love It Live It, Sweetwater, Plas Y Brenin, New Wave and CIWW or contact your home nation to find out about providers in your area.

### **How do I become a provider?**

If you’re a qualified white water coach and also are at 4 star freestyle standard then we’d love for you to get involved in providing these awards. Please see <http://www.canoe-england.co.uk/coaching/training-assessing-and-tutoring-bcu-awards/3-star-freestyle-assessor-requirements/> for full details of how.

### **Finally...**

Most importantly get out there and play!

Useful links:

3 star syllabus & guidance notes: <http://www.canoe-england.co.uk/tests-i-awards/personal-performance-awards/paddlesport-start-i-1-to-3-star/>