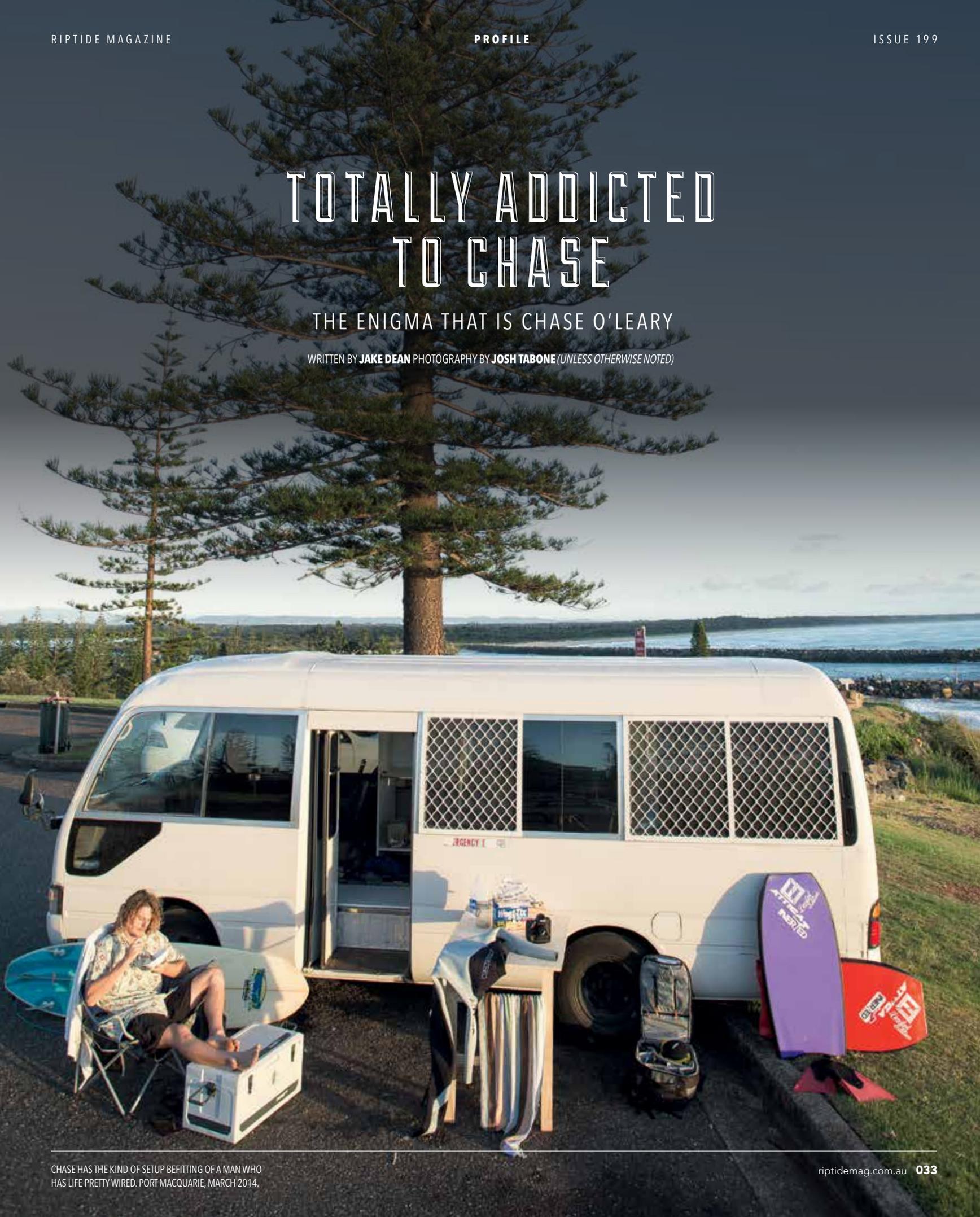


# TOTALLY ADDICTED TO CHASE

THE ENIGMA THAT IS CHASE O'LEARY

WRITTEN BY **JAKE DEAN** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **JOSH TABONE** (UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)





*When I answer the phone on a sunny Wednesday afternoon on the Gold Coast I'm not at all prepared for the voice on the other end of the line. It's Chase O'Leary, calling to organise our meet in two days' time. I wasn't expecting him to sound so... Australian. Port Macquarian. It makes sense – many of the Port Mac bodyboarders are blessed with a distinctive drawl – but for some reason I thought Chase's would be different.*

*If you've seen his blog ichasemyself you'd know he's one of the more creative bodyboarders getting around. James Kates, Josh Garner and Dallas Singer spring to mind as boogers excelling in their respective creative fields, but you'd be hard-pressed to find one who takes photos as well as Chase, 22. And while his creative nous is perhaps at odds with his Port Mac drawl, it's just the tip of the iceberg that is the enigma of Chase O'Leary.*

*He's never had a full part in highly anticipated blockbuster vid. No mag profiles dissecting his life. This is despite him making the IBA World Tour in 2012 and having his own board model (with Funkshen), both by age 20. That shit doesn't just happen for any ol' Joe Average – the guy simply shreds. Yet I'd wager most folks know nothing about him. And so I've committed to driving the six hours south to find out who the fuck Chase O'Leary actually is.*

*The following takes place on Chase's balcony at the apartment he shares with his mum, right in the heart of Port. From where we sit you can look out at Chickens – a waffling right-hander across the bay from Breakwall (just out of view). Chase wears faded black Reebok shorts and a busy Hawaiian shirt – a picture of comfort. The full conversation spans 74 minutes – the time it takes to eat a barbecue dinner and down three VBs.*

Chase: What are you thinking of doing? Is it like a... *This Is Your Life* thing or what?

**Riptide: Yeah, I suppose in a way – let's just chat it out and I'll record while we're eating and let it flow.** Just let it flow, yep, yep. Yeah, I've never had a proper one [interview] eh.

**I know – it's funny, but I suppose most people out there probably don't know a whole lot about you.** Yeah, people probably don't.

**Why do you think that is? We'll sometimes get riders hassling us to do stories. Do you think that's something you need to do more of?** I could never blow me own trumpet, it's hectic eh. I'm definitely not one for going gnarly on the trumpet. It's just what's in me genes, but I probably should maybe. I dunno. They're [sponsors] definitely happy with what I do and just cruising.

**When did you first get on a bodyboard?** I was about 10. Mum actually told me a story the other day out of nowhere. She goes, "I remember when we went to the secondhand shop and you never used to hound me for anything, but this day you just had eyes set on this bodyboard". It was this orange Viper VX6. I think it was a 40 [inch]. I can't remember why I wanted it, but she felt like spoiling me that arvo so she's like, "Do you want it?" And I'm like, "Oh, yeah, that'd be that hectic eh. Like, yeah, please". She got it for me out of the blue. So I'm out there carrying it to the car and dropping it 'cause it was so massive.

**How'd you get hooked up with all the other fellas – Jones Russell, Sam Bennett, Charlie Holt, etc.?** My first mate through bodyboarding would've been Benno because I used to see him down there a bit so we'd just hang out. Then it would've been Charlie. We'd hang out at Breakwall a fair bit, so yeah, we had our own little crew and as you get older the age gap doesn't really matter. Two years, three years, it doesn't matter. You just all start hanging out. Benno was more advanced for his age. Nothing crazy, just like... probably got ARSs and stuff before us. No Tanner McDaniel shit [laughs].

**How wild is that kid surfing!** He's crazy, man! Fourteen or 15 and he's going hard. If he keeps on the straight and narrow... that Thorpe [Waleuw] kid – he peaked too early when he was 14. He was pretty good, but now you never even see him. I've seen it happen heaps. There were guys here that used to kill it at State and National Titles... you'd be always trying to beat them and couldn't. Who knows what they're doing now?

**What is the next crop of Port groms like?** I swear there's no-one really outstanding, but it's hard to say. Kingy reckons they're not as good as our generation. We were going pretty

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hard. There's a couple of groms that are going all right, but they've got weird styles. I dunno. It has lost its standard a little bit. Benno and Charlie, when they were 16, were ripping, whereas these groms are 16 and 17 now and they're still struggling to draw a good line. You'll see them doing these crazy flips, unstylish, weird lines... but you'll often see it with heaps of young guys that grew up on the South Coast with perfect reefies like Blackrock. They throw themselves straight into perfect waves and it's like they don't know how to draw the best lines and utilise the wave – get drive out of it like Rawlins. He would've grown up surfing shit D'bah. Like Jake Stone on the Sunshine Coast. Then you'll see a guy who grew up with a perfect reef... they're doing the moves and stuff, but they can look a bit funny. It's because they've got their mind set on pumping Blackrock and never a one-foot beachie in Wollongong. Learn to do a spinner before you go and do an air reverse, you know? That's why so many good people have come out of Port. It's not pumping all the time, but there's always a consistent little wave so you're always hitting these one-foot, two-foot bowls and learning how to do your shit. »



**What do you think you need to improve on personally?** Probably my big-wave surfing. I'm not scared to go big waves, but I just want to do it more controlled. I'm not chasing Lunas every time it breaks or whatever, but I wanna show I can scoop into a big wave, controlled... not just surfing three-foot Breakwall, doing backflips all the time. I wanna be all-rounded, you know? Like Novy or Pierre. Pierre's crazy – doing flips off one-foot waves, but also one of the biggest chargers there is.

**How much of a mark did your year on the world tour make on you?** It was so fun, man. I'd travelled a bit before, but that was definitely the hectic-est. It was sick Benno got on that year too and we could both experience it. It would've been good hanging out with the Aussies and stuff [regardless], but it was mad having a good mate from home to do it with. We were doing our own thing and experiencing it. All the Aussies do one thing and get a place together and we still hung out with them heaps, but we'd go and stay with backpackers, meet random locals and go surfing with local dudes. Like, it's

no offence to them [other Aussies], but it's because Winny and all that, they've been doing it for 10 years, man. They've probably been to Sintra eight years in a row so they don't need to get out and explore it again, you know?

**You had a pretty gnarly year with the seeding and stuff, yeah?** Yeah, I swear I was copping Winny heaps and he had that year where he should've won the title. I was copping Pierre a bit too. I was getting so over it [laughs]. I felt like I was on the same level, but they're just... I dunno. Winny was on a roll, that's for sure. I've watched whole heats of him and seen him sit up the beach, while the other three guys are somewhere else and the wave will just come to Winny. I definitely would've liked to have gone better, but yeah... I didn't [laughs].

**What did you end up on the rankings?** I think I was second last? I'm not gonna chase it [the world tour] for a while, I'm gonna focus on freesurfing more. I'll probably give the tour a miss until it builds back up and give it another crack in a

couple of years. Surely one day it's gonna get up there with the ASP. It's a professional sport, man. If bodyboarding's in the right waves, like sick Fronton or something, it's like, wow. It's pretty psycho stuff.

**What do you see yourself doing in 10 years' time?** I'm pretty interested in photography. After bodyboarding I'm definitely keen to muck around with that. I just love the ocean. I could never go for a stint in the mines or anything because it's just not worth it. You're only here for a certain amount of time on this Earth so you might as well enjoy it, you know? The other day, those photo frames I showed you [Chase has been making frames out of old fence palings to house prints of his photos, selling them at a local market]... there's an underground garage here so that's where I make them. And the people that live here are rich as and have nothing better to do with their time. You're not allowed to make a commercial business in your apartment apparently so they've got together and complained to body corporate like, "Chase is doing this, Chase is doing that". It's like – I'm not

harming anyone. I'm mucking around in a garage with a few power tools an hour every couple of days. It's not a factory. So they've had this full meeting and whatever and it's just like, oi fellas, like, youse are retired. You're only here on this earth for 80 years, 90 max if you do really well, and you're wasting your time worrying about what I'm doing in my garage? Go play golf. There's a bowls club across the road... but instead they're writing emails about power tools... get a life and enjoy it. It's funny how some people think eh!

**So what else is currently going on in the life of Chase O'Leary?** I'm doing uni at the moment. I'm doing primary school teaching by correspondence online. At times it has been hard, but I just did my first semester last year and passed it all. I hadn't done anything for four years so I had to reactivate my brain and was wigglin' out a little bit [laughs]. It can be a bit hard to fit in with my surfing, like sometimes the surf will be pumping, but you'll have these assignments needing to be done and you're lagging... I just want something to fall back on. I don't wanna be 40 years old and concreting. Because...

it's just not good [laughs]. I don't wanna be 40 and have nothing, labouring in the sun just to make ends meet. I wanna travel and take photos and whatever.

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*And with that it's time to clear the table and go outside to check out Chase's recent purchase – a 22-seater school bus. He's ripped 18 of the seats out and will soon install a kitchen, beds and basically everything one would need to live in a bus for an extended period. He's planning on living in it soon – staying near the beach and exploring the mid-north coast for hidden gems. He wants to take it over to SA and WA later in the year. It's difficult to convey the essence of a person via a rambling 74-minute conversation, let alone when it must be condensed to fit into the confines of five pages (with images), but spending time with Chase you get the feeling he's a man supremely comfortable in his own skin, one that has life well and truly wired despite not raking in wads of cash or owning a house somewhere.*

*I'm following Chase through Port in my car on the way to Jones' and the boys' ranch now. I think about some of the things Chase said earlier, while keeping my eyes on the flowing Hawaiian shirt atop the postie bike that's chugging ahead. Under the veneer of the Port Macquarie drawl and the incessant slang is a passionate and creative mind that follows closely the works of his favourite photogs – Ray Collins, Trent Mitchell and Sacha Specker. Behind the shit-talking and laughs is a humble fella who's wise, probably without realising it – whose outlook on life should be bottled and fed to money-driven stress-heads everywhere. If I were to compare him to anyone it'd be The Dude in the Cohen Brothers' cult film The Big Lebowski. Are they heroes? Maybe not, because "what's a hero"? But they're not insignificant nobodies either – they both simply are. Both accept change, are not concerned with material "success" and appreciate the simple pleasures in life. "Sometimes there's a man, well, he's the man for his time and place. He fits right in there. And that's The Dude... The Dude abides. I don't know about you, but I take comfort in that. It's good knowin' he's out there. The Dude. Takin' 'er easy for all us sinners. Shoosh. I sure hope he wins the finals." ■*