



Alastair Mennie surfs a giant wave off the Irish coast. Below: with teammate Andrew Cotton (right) AARON PIERCE



Britannia rides the waves

For the first time, two Britons have been asked to take part in Hawaii's fearsome surfing contest

By Emily Dugan

It is known in surfing folklore as "Jaws": a merciless wall of water that can reach heights of more than 20 metres as it thunders across reefs off the Hawaiian island of Maui. It is home to the most fearsome surfing contest in the world: an invitation-only battle for the elite. And this year, for the first time, two Britons are joining the fray.

Until now, no European has been asked - or considered worthy - to enter the Mornai Pe'ahi World Cup Tow-In Surfing Championship.

But this year that has all changed, thanks to a plumber from Devon and a builder from Portrush, Northern Ireland.

Andrew Cotton, 29, and Alastair Mennie, 28, made headlines in 2007 when they discovered and surfed 15m waves off the west coast of Ireland by using a jet ski. Now their discovery has put them in the running against the best tow-surfers (so named because of the use of jet skis to tow a surfer out into the swell) that Hawaii, California and Australia have to offer.

The Britons will compete against 24 teams of two. But all the other competitors come from famous big-wave destinations, including Australia, California, Hawaii and

Brazil. They are also paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to be there.

Entrants must now wait for the event, which will be held any time from now until 31 March, on the day when the conditions are most favourable to create the biggest and most perfectly formed wave. Cotton has already flown to Hawaii and begun intensive training, but Mennie has had to stay behind taking care of his business in Portrush.

They may not be the favourites, but Mennie is quietly confident about their chances. "We're as good as anyone else in the world," he said. "They're just more famous."

Speaking from the relative warmth of Hawaii, Cotton said: "Being from England and Ireland you're the underdog because most people don't think Britain has waves, let alone waves of any size or quality."



Way of Life!