

COWES WEEK EXTREME 40'S CHALLENGE

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Some years ago running an INTuition windsurfing coaching course in Poole Harbour, during lunch on Brownsea Island I mentioned to my guests that I held the record circumnavigation of the island at just under 24 minutes. I went on to proudly mention I formally held the legendary Round Hayling Island record too, at just under an hour. During dinner that night one of my INTuition guests, an Australian called Nick Moloney, casually mentioned he too had some sailing records for circumnavigations. He'd won the Jules Verne Trophy for the fastest time around the world finishing in only 64 days! To this day I have never bragged again!

Nick has a massive list of other sailing successes including two Admiral's Cup campaigns; loads of round the world single handed and crewed challenges and countless regatta and crossings victories. In sailing Nick Moloney is a living legend. You couldn't meet a nicer bloke either, and he's a total Aussie over-flowing with pranks and banter. He rips on a surf board and he flies on a windsurfer, but give him a multi-hull and he's one of THE very best in the world. He's cart wheeled a 100 foot catamaran and is in the Guinness Book of Records for windsurfing across the Bass Strait in 22 hours, dodging sharks all the way.

Nick joins my INTuition windsurfing courses around the world including the UK, Red Sea, Sicily and Hawaii (so far) and has become a very accomplished wave sailor. Needless to say we have always joked about who'd be the fastest- a windsurfer or his Extreme 40- 180 square metres of sail on a 12 metre long catamaran- approximately five times as long as a windsurfer but with twenty-five times the sail area, (and for the record, literally 100 times the price!) An X40, on paper, should be impossible to beat.





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We had a trial competition two years ago but it was too windy for the X40s to go downwind in the 30+ knot storm, but we lined up windsurfer versus X40 for the first time ever and were blown away by how fast it was. Although I clocked the fastest top speed that day, the X40 sent shivers down windsurfing's spine for its upwind and all round performance, even in the insane conditions. Extreme 40's can do nearly 40 knots, but unlike a windsurfer, they can maintain that speed over large distances. We needed a rematch and Nick and I organised it to take place within the Extreme Sailing Series, during Cowes Week- the world's largest sailing regatta, with over 100,000 spectators and over 1000 boats in competition. Showtime!

Extreme Sailing Series

In a sentence, the world's very best sailors compete in the Extreme Sailing Series on X40s. Franck Cammus, for example skippered Groupama 3 to recently win the Jules Verne Trophy setting the fastest lap around the world in only 48 days. Team Red Bull have ten Olympic Gold medals between the four crew. We were at the epicentre of the sailing world and WE were ready to take them on (Skyeboy, Ross and myself). Well, that's what I thought, but on the first day at Cowes, with 3000 sailing fans lining the beach and a Formula One styled VIP and press centre, I was the only windsurfer who ventured out. The wind was light, but it was just enough to plane. John and Ross stayed on the beach and were able to tell me I wasn't as fast as

the cats- something I'd already noticed on the water. But the applause from the shores when I made a carve gybe, highlighted we were gladiators in the ring, and with wind forecast for the rest of the week the stage was set!

Team GAC Pindar

Nick Moloney skipper GAC Pindar and of all the teams, these guys were most up for the challenge in true Aussie style. Both Mr Andrew Pindar (long time sailing sponsor/ supporter) and GAC management were on the beach (on the beach all week I should add, with very high spirits!) The commentator gave frequent announcements building up to our racing, the crowds gathered and the BBC cameras were rolling. A series of 1000 metre 'ish drag races were to be held with the finish line right off the beach at the Extreme Sailing Series base/ VIP area/ public bar/ 3000 fans. Ross, John and I were on 8m ish sails. The course was super broad, almost straight downwind as the X40 would loose control on a normal windsurfer's path- they are more comfortable pointing high upwind or sailing super deep downwind, whereas we're much more comfortable reaching.

The chop was immeasurable. A thousand boats create a lot of chop, add to that the notorious wind against tide in the Solent and the sea is a five dimensional agitated mess of barbed wire and trenches. If there's one thing that slows a windsurfer down, it's chop! And this was potentially the Somme of windsurfing.

“The lake was cut in two by a motorway and I had to launch close to a massive bridge which was quite scary at first.”





Drag Racing

The start was simple; Ross, John and I would hover around together somewhere upwind. Nick would charge at us in his cat, then gybe right in front of us. That would be our signal to go, passing upwind of him not for clean air, but to ensure we didn't get mowed down. We charged towards the finish. Strangely, I can honestly say I did not look at the crowds on the beach once from the water all day, it simply wasn't possible as the chop was so horrific one had to focus entirely on what the sea in front would do next. As such in the racing I never really saw anyone, only sensed them- I could sense this enormous presence full of giant groans and splutters, that was GAC Pindar on the limit, and occasionally I sensed Ross either over taking me or pulling away, but I'd be lying if I said I actually watched them- there was no opportunity for that, I was intensely trying to avoid nose diving.

The Result

After four races Ross had won three- officially making windsurfers kings of the high seas! The crowd were extremely supportive, the commentator very excited, the BBC and press all vying for the first interviews, the event was a tremendous success! For the record, I finished 2-2 with GAC Pindar, so Nick and I will need a rematch! Skyeboy, more famed for his wave and freestyle lost 4-0 to the X40s, but was actually sailing very fast- it was his wipe-outs that scuppered his chances.



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After such a success this summer, if you can get to Cowes Week next year, get on down. There's a bar, a huge atmosphere, awesome Extreme 40 racing right by the beach geared to entertain the crowds and if it's windy, which it usually is at Cowes,

then expect to see windsurfers performing too. First week of August, see you there!

On being introduced to Eddie Jordan-

Guy "Hi, I'm one of the windsurfers racing out there."

Eddie "Are you the one that crashed into the windward mark of the Americas Cup race?"

Guy "No, that would be Skyeboy" Muppet.

With many thanks to ExtremeSailingSeries.com and Nick Moloney (www.CoreBoardsports.com.au) / GAC Pindar (www.teampindar.com) for making this wonderful event happen, windsurfing salutes you!

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Timo drops in at the Beach



JOHN SKYE

“The first day we had wind and went head to head with Pindar boat, the plan was for the boat to sail down wind, gybe and then we would pass behind it and race to the beach. I hadn't quite got it clear what was going to happen, so as Pindar approached at full speed I was stood stationary. They gybed about 2 metres ahead of me and vanished! I just stood there in awe of the machine as Ross flew past, full speed in pursuit. By the time I realised what was going on it was too late. 2 quick pumps and bearing away onto the incredibly broad course and I went straight over the front in a spectacular catapult. I arrived to the beach to hear the commentator taking the piss, asking how my swim was. Luckily the following 3 races I managed to do better, still not a touch on Ross however. It was pretty impressive actually to see and sail with Ross so closely. I have been watching him race for the last 3 or 4 years at events around the world and its only now, sailing head to head with him, that I appreciate just how quick he is! At times I would be keeping up with him for a few metres, and then he would switch into top gear and add another 2 or 3 knots to his speed leaving me in his wake!

One of the craziest things for me was the level of chop. I have sailed in the Solent a lot in the past, having studied in Southampton. It is always choppy, but add over 1000 boats to the equation and it's another league of bumpy. Bow waves crossing, from ribs, tankers, yachts, and a million other crafts, all reflecting off the sea walls, bouncing back into the confusion. I had 2 or 3 full power catapults and a number of very scary moments going flat out through full double up wake, whilst surrounded by some very big boats!

The highlight of calamity for me was crashing into the upwind mark of the Americas cup race. Blasting out to sea, I watched a rib drop a mark in the water in the perfect position for me to crank a gybe and show off the windsurfers skills. Unfortunately I had failed to take into account the 10 knot tide in the middle of the Solent. Approaching a long way upwind I laid the sail down full speed into the turn..... and crashed straight into the mark. I literally could not have done it worse, sailing full speed into the mark and ejecting myself off the gear! As I came to the surface I could see the bemused rib driver scratching his head in confusion! Realising I probably shouldn't hang around too long, I desperately tried to water start my 8.2, but the current had sucked it straight under and it was now pointing vertically downward, in the absolutely worst position possible. After fighting for a couple of minutes I eventually got back on board and out of the way, only to see the two America cup boats fighting upwind towards the mark I had just crashed into!

Guy Cribb deep in the pocket



Overall the whole week was an amazing experience. I had never been to Cowes week before, so seeing the whole show was incredible. I have never seen so many boats on the water at the same time, and watching the constant stream of yachts coming back at the end of the day was quite a spectacle. Plus pimping it all week in the VIP lounge was pretty cool too. Took advantage of the free drinks and mixed with some proper celebrities, including F1 man Eddie Jordan. Cribby was in full network mode, so expect a high profile windsurfing sponsorship announcement soon, hopefully he will split his millions with us!”

www.johnskye.com

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It doesn't get much better than this...
wind, waves and sun at K bay



ROSS WILLIAMS

"The conditions off of Cowes can be a handful even for the most experienced sailors, weather that is on a windsurfer or a sailing craft. On the days we raced they were challenging to say the least. The racing duel between the windsurfers and the X40's took place in the afternoons with wind against tide, which made standing waves with deep trenches and troughs even in relatively light wind. I was a little worried that this might give the X40 a bit of an advantage, as up close they were so big and impressive.

I took an 8.4m and my 79 manta for the racing, it was a pretty big sail and board for the conditions but wanted to make sure I had more than enough power as we were racing broad off the wind. The standing waves and chop made it really hard work on the legs I was having to concentrate overtime not to dip the nose of my board into the wave in front, every now and then I remember coming so close to crashing into my equipment. I knew it had been a hard battle after sailing when I tried to climb a big step on the beach and my back leg cramped up. It was one of the worst cramps of my life and it still hurt 3 days afterwards! I wasn't sure what to expect at the beginning of the week, I didn't know anything about the other sailors on the X40's, whether they would be cool or just look down on us. As it turned out I had a great time, all the guys on the boats were true sailing legends, funny, super cool and down to earth, I really enjoyed the whole thing and watching X40's racing out on the water was a real treat. Full respect to them all. Maybe next time I can get a ride on one of them too!"

Target Audience

One of the big attractions being invited to join the Extreme Sailing Series during Cowes Week was the fact there'd be 100,000 sailing fans watching. That's 100,000 people who already have 'water confidence' ie- can probably swim, and love the sea or sailing- our ideal target audience to attract new participants into windsurfing.

There are all sorts of ideas to raise windsurfing's profile- National Windsurfing Week, RYA taster sessions etc, but in my opinion; there are a few non-starters in these schemes. Only the most determined people get into windsurfing. There are no monkeys in our sport- we're all persevering, determined, go-for-it types. Pat yourself on your back, you've survived a list of humiliations learning to windsurf and have come far. Most people give up at the first hurdle, many at the second, but if you are so mentally determined and have the capacity to comprehend and calculate so many variables and options in the world of windsurfing, and you're still in it, then you are a God, congratulations. Such are the requirements to enter the best sport on

earth/ ocean. It pisses me off that some schools run 20 minute windsurfing taster sessions. Come on, what could someone possibly learn in those 20 minutes? The most frustrating and possibly embarrassing 20 minutes of their life. Wearing a skin tight rubber outfit, trying to pull themselves onto a board, uphauling with their ass in the air, then falling in and looking like a drowned rat. I've seen some awful sights in my time and am a firm believer in providing the necessary skills, time, environment and gear to really get people into windsurfing. If any one of these aspects is ignored, potential participants will quickly give up. Wake up windsurfing schools, ban the taster sessions! If someone wants to try windsurfing, give them a fair try- which in my book is going to be about 3-4 sessions, in the region of at least an hour each time, then they can feel achievement and get into it. If they've only got twenty minutes, show them The Windsurfing Movie, that should inspire them.

And what of targeting our audience? Who is windsurfing's target audience? I'd say it is people with water-confidence- ie, you can swim, you like the sea, but ideally, you already have sailing, surfing, kayaking, kiting, wakeboarding or even jet-skiing skills. Maybe even fishing. But they've got to have an affinity with the water already. "Got to?" You might cry, well for sure some people get into windsurfing having had no prior sailing or even water experiences, agreed, but statistically not many. So when I saw the opportunity to stage a windsurfing promotional event during Cowes Week, I jumped at the chance, and brought in key performers John Skye and Ross Williams to demonstrate windsurfing to the masses. Skyeboy was busting forward loops to the 2000 strong audience, within a stones throw from the beach. Ross was breaking speed records on the water, metres from the crowds. You couldn't keep me off the water, I was out there in the slightest gust and between every X40 race, even if it was for one reach, it had to be worth it. I was not only trying to impress the crowd, but demonstrate to the X40 organisers that between races, we could keep the crowds entertained. After all, if we want to develop windsurf racing; we simply must take a leaf out of these guys book- they know how to put on a show! There were two to three thousand sailing fans watching us sail circles around the Extreme 40's on the water on the last day in 25 knots. We were rubbing shoulders with VIPs and long term sailing sponsors. We were trying our hardest to get windsurfing recognised as an extreme sailing sport, rather than an oddball surfing pastime. So where better to target our show- at the Extreme Sailing Series, right in the heart of the sailing world. What will it come to? Let's hope some of those fans take up windsurfing, reacquaint themselves with it, or at least recognise it as a sailing sport. Clearly, an extreme one at that.