

GUY CRIBB TECHNIQUE



EXTREME 40

WITH GUY CRIBB AND NIK BAKER

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO DURING ONE of my UK Intuition Coaching Clinics in Poole Harbour an Aussie bloke joined the weekend course. He was clearly a talented sportsman and I learned that he was a pro sailor.

Winds were light so we all sailed to Brownsea Island for a picnic lunch, where in conversation I told the group that I'd previously held the 'round Brownsea Island record', which then led to me saying I also held the 'Round Hayling Island record'. That night in the curry house after a few beers, the group chatter turned to records again and Nick Moloney, the Aussie skipper, far too casually mentioned "I've got the world record, around the world. I won the Vendee Globe on Orange a few years back, got the Jules Verne Trophy...." I was dwarfed. What a bleeding contrast!

Since then Nick has joined me in Dahab for a week where his windsurfing was fantastic, and he has since competed in a few slalom races in France. However his job and first passion is racing massive catamarans, and he is one of the world's best at it, winning countless trophies and international acclaim, and to us Brits largely famed as he's Ellen McArthur's team mate in the Offshore Challenges Group (and the bloke who was winched down by a chopper onto B&Q once she'd finished her triumphant solo round the world race.)

Being an Aussie, he's up for a challenge and a laugh too, so we arranged that we would race each other, windsurfer vs catamaran, and for the ultimate press stunt, we'd do a few races then swap kit and see how we fared racing each others (I mean, how different can an X40 be to sailing a Cadet?) My £2800 worth of kit against his £300,000 Extreme 40.

SHOWTIME!

Nik Baker was briefly in the UK, doing a shoot on the IOW with JC. Nick Moloney and the iShares championship fleet were in Cowes ready to race, and Friday 30th Aug was press day with some practise races to start Cowes Week. The forecast was windy, so we were on! Animal kindly sent their RIB for JC to shoot from, Nik grabbed some slalom kit from Pearchy, and the cream of the world's ultimate sailors, including the Admirals cup champion and challengers on Alinghi and BMW Oracle were all up for racing against us tiny windsurfers. It was going to be magic. The BBC even had a helicopter lined up: Nik and I were going to do windsurfing proud!

Moloney and Cribby up close and personal



THE SOLENT TURNS ON!

It's nuking as usual this summer in the Solent: 25-30knots, which is not good news for the cats. They can do about 25 knots in 8 knots of wind, but start maxing out in about 20 knots of wind, especially in the rough wind-against-tide conditions off Cowes.

Admiral's cup sailor Frank Cammas on the BMW Oracle is thinking about going afloat to challenge us, but no other X40 team is prepared to face the music in the rough water, except Nick Moloney. His Offshore Challenges offices are at the X40 yard and the boss is watching us rig up from his window. "There's no way you're taking the cat out there today Moloney" is the general view from OC Group, but Nick has other ideas. There's no way he'd let a challenge like this go by, so from the docks he slips, surrounded by about 5-10 RIBs which are, at times, full of thousands of pounds of camera kit, ready to shoot this spectacle.

Nik and myself rig a 6.8m and 5.8m sail respectively (Nik would've taken a 5.8 if he'd had one, but 6.8 was his smallest). I lent my 6.8m to Jonny Hutchcroft, ex-pro UK Windsurfer and top mate from years back in the good old UK racing days, now turned pro X40 racer, and a successful one at that- last year on the Round The Island Race (Round IOW) I got a text message from him saying "I've just been beaten by a chick!" Elen McArthur had pipped him to the finish by about 20 seconds. Still coming second in such a big event for an ex-pro windsurfer is all good!

Nick had already explained how he would be sailing BT "I'm going to stuff her upwind and fly a hull, but won't be able to free off at all or I'll bury the nose and cartwheel." Nick has cartwheeled a 100ft cat before now and it's not pretty (and unlike a windsurfing catapult, cartwheeling a 100 ft catamaran is extremely expensive. I think the rigging damage alone cost a quarter of a million quid.) He hoped to be able to sail very broad downwind too, but reaching was out of the question in the rough water and 30 knot gusts.



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I'd seen the youtube clips of windsurfers in marginal winds getting overtaken by mega yachts, and trimarans doing over 40 knots in rough water, but I'd never seen a sailing boat ever move faster than about ten knots with my own eyes, so was desperately keen to see this X40, capable of about 40knots, in action today.

The stage was set: BT and Nick Moloney, dare devil Aussie sailor and one of the best in the world, against Nik Baker, one of the best windsurfers of all time and clearly Britain's most successful. Plus me, with plenty of championships under my belt and decades of experience, all surrounded by more press than windsurfing has seen for about fifteen years. Unfortunately, we were also surrounded by low clouds, huge chop and 30 knot gusts: it was far from ideal. I can't imagine how many London based photographers were sea sick that day, but even one of the world's ultimate watersports photographers: JC, took a bruising, soaking over £10k's worth of kit and concerned he didn't get the shots he wanted in the rough water. It was carnage out there, but it was show time.

Nick tried getting the main up just off Cowes, whilst Nik, Jonny and I realised how stacked we were. It was nuking! No luck on the X40- it's way too rough, but Nick chooses not to give up, but to cruise downwind eastwards to the lee of the island to find calmer conditions.

We fang it downwind, clocking over 30knots on our boards, buzzing the press boats and skimming BT pushing for a competition and showing our opponents very close up what we can do.

I jump over their bows and look down underneath my sail at the crew all staring upwards. It's clearly going to be the windsurfers' day. Some miles downwind Nick hoists the almighty sails- albeit reefed big time. At full tilt they carry a staggering 185m sails on only a 12 metre hull: about 25-30 times more sail than us on a boat only 4 times longer and rammed with carbon, it's no wonder they're quick. We line up in a racing position upwind of them, Baker is grinning madly ear to ear, clearly loving the spectacle, Jonny is loving the windsurfing extreme but is complaining his arms are being pulled out of joint and the G&T's don't taste quite as good. BT sheets in, so do we.

The windsurfers accelerate much faster and quickly move in front of BT, but oh my god, BT is trucking. I'm going full speed upwind, and this incredible hulk seems to be gaining!

BT is hauling ass big time, it's very quick, but it's hard to see just how fast as she's cranking upwind, pointing incredibly high. Nik and I quickly find ourselves way downwind of BT, but still slightly ahead on speed.

It's clear BT can only go straight upwind, Nick will not risk sailing off the wind at all as it will almost undoubtedly trash the boat: full credit to him for coming out here at all! And we are not geared up to sail so close to the wind on our slalom boards. But I think even if we were on formula, or long boards, this crazy cat would be kicking our ass upwind, I've ever seen anything point quite that high!

So Nick slows down and waits for Baker and I to re-group upwind of him, and we go again. Same thing happens- they accelerate a little slower than us, but almost straight into the wind, whereas we have to free off to get going and can't point very high, a little underpowered now in big lulls in the lee of the island. It strikes me that their wind range is so much greater than ours.

BT waits for us again and Nik and I dive bomb them with big jumps into the wind. And this is how we progress- BT stopping and starting pointing incredibly high upwind, and Nik and I buzzing around her like nifty mosquitoes.

We have half a dozen blasts like this where we're only alongside BT for a few seconds each time and the cameras are desperate for a shard of sunlight, which never seems to arrive on time. I'm wearing a video camera on my head for the iShares TV shows and get right under the BT windward hull as it lifts out of the water. Through my sail I'm looking right at Moloney hanging overboard looking right at me. My sail is within inches of the hull and I'm slowing down as I'm stuffing it upwind to avoid being sliced by their rudder.

I literally slide off the back of the boat and the nose of my board just taps the windward edge of their rudder (could have been expensive!) The monster charges on.

Still game on, Moloney drops the sails and cruises straight downwind for a few miles again, doing around 15 knots just off the rigging! This is where Nik and I give all the surrounding press boats, corporate boats and other racing fleets a taste of windsurfing's speed potential, blasting full tilt passed everything in sight, as close to them as possible. We are agile, we are stealth and we are seriously fast: Nik and I both clocked over 32 knots putting millions of pounds of sailing boats into second place.

But the challenge we had embarked upon, to see who was king of the wind, was not completed. It was too rough for a fair contest so we're going for a rematch. Knowing each other's strong points now the racing will be very close. They'll almost definitely kill us upwind, but we'll catch them off the wind and on mark rounding.

They might be able to sail around the world, and they might be favourites to ultimately hold the world speed record, but they'll never be able to sail in waves, so we'll always be the winners in my book!

Watch this space.

Intuition. Taking the world by storm. Huge thanks to Animal, JC, Nick Moloney and the OC Group. Copyright Guy Cribb 2008

