



# Seven styles for seven boats

How do the professionals successfully jump from boat to boat? **Neal Pawson** talks to some of the world's top match racers about adapting to seven different classes during the World Match Racing Tour.

**T**o quote the commentator at the Polo Gold Cup, 'Ponies, it's all about the ponies. We have plenty of players but it is the ponies that make the polo.' In the World Match Racing Tour (WMRT) it's all about the boats.

Taking place over nine different events, across four continents in seven different boats, it is one of the few forms of our sport that doesn't require the team to

own a boat. Each venue provides a fleet of 6-8 equal vessels, and the teams simply jump on board.

The WMRT has a preference for boats around the 40ft mark that are wheel-steered (so the action takes place with the skipper standing and it is easier for non-sailors to identify the helmsman) although they are understanding of local conditions and have even considered an event in catamarans.



PHOTO: CHARLES ANDERSON/WMRT\*



PHOTO: MAX RANCIH/BLU BOATS

WMRT director Craig Mitchell explained, 'I think the present situation with seven different boats adds an interesting element to the racing. Teams have to learn fast how to get the best out of the boats. This may favour some teams at their home events but when they are 'playing away' they are in the same situation as everyone else. It really makes for true world champions.'

Considerations have to be made as to how best film footage of the action, as the media return through television is key to the sponsorship deals that fund the Tour. Most of the Tour classes include a dedicated area in the stern for a cameraman on each boat with a stainless steel support hoop.

### Everyone equal

A key element to providing competitive racing is harmonising the boats. With many of the new designs this starts in the

factory with accurate template location points – e.g. the Foundation 36s encapsulate the lead keel in a fibreglass moulding that slots into a moulded recess in the hull to ensure alignment and identical keel sections. During preparation prior to an event all the boats have their basic setup checked, ensuring the rigs have their heels in the same place, forestay lengths are equal, shroud tensions are comparable along with mast pre-bend. The control systems are standardised and efforts are made to ensure that sails have the same hours on them. Teams are very quick to point out any differences and issues with maintenance to keep the event organisers on their toes! 'Whatever you do to a fleet of boats to try and make them even, sailors will assure you that one boat is quicker than another, one man's howler is

another man's rocket-ship,' says Tour director Craig Mitchell. To offset this mentality the boats are rotated throughout the event.

So, what are the characteristics of a good match race boat? Christian Scherrer, organiser of the St Moritz event who helped develop their new boat the Blu 26, lists: 'Good manoeuvrability, but not too much. Strong, but not too heavy. A simple, logical and ergonomic deck layout.' In developing the Blu26 they looked at making a rubber bow section, but dismissed it as serious crashes bow-on are few and far between with most contact coming during luffing matches. For this reason all match race boats sail without stanchions and guardrails to prevent the boats hooking up at close quarters. This results in some athletic hiking upwind as the teams attempt to squeeze the

**FAR LEFT** The lively DS 37s take off in a breeze.

**TOP** International One Design, showing classic Metre boat heritage and small cramped cockpit.

**ABOVE** Blu 26, a light Sportsboat and the new ride for the King of the Mountains in St Moritz.



PHOTO: PHOTO CHRIS CAMERON/WMRT



**ABOVE** Big wheels on the KM 36s - with cameramen in their traditional place in the stern.

**ABOVE RIGHT** Offering a profile reminiscent of the last America's Cup, the SM40s provide a challenge with a narrow foredeck and overlong pole.

maximum out of their boats. The spin-off (literally sometimes), is a higher than average number of crew end up swimming! All the boats run the headsails on hanks to simplify dropping the sails, and the spinnakers are launched and recovered from the forehatch with everyone staying on deck.

Ian Williams, Team Pindar skipper says, 'I think the key to a good match racing boat is one that does not lose too much in a tack or a gybe.' With this in mind the majority of the boats are fitted with symmetrical spinnakers and it is generally felt by the competitors that these generate the tightest racing due to the speed of the gybes, and present a greater range of tactical options.

## Racing the boats

Whilst teams can look ahead and investigate the boats they will be racing, it is very hard to get to spend time training in them before events. Simon Shaw, mainsail trimmer with Team Pindar, says: 'Our preparation and approach to a regatta is very different to Olympic or other kinds of sailing. As a team of five we have a "standard" set of crew work for each drop. Before we sail a new boat we discuss how we might modify this for the any specifics.'

With only one practice session of sometimes just two hours before starting a regatta it is imperative to focus this learning time in the boat before the action starts. Running through the basic

manoeuvres at an elevated tempo helps to expose any potential shortcomings and weaknesses in the crew work and in the boat. Pushing the boat to stall, checking the acceleration, time on distance and turning circle are all standard checks. They allow the crew to test their tool for competition and gain a spatial understanding of the boat, both onboard and the space taken on the water by the boat. The more experienced teams have the benefit of notes taken from previous years.

A lot of focus is on coping with the inadequacies of the boat they are racing, but all this is done within a strict framework. For example it is forbidden to cross winch on the boats, the rig tensions and set-up can't be adjusted, This requires the teams to adapt to sailing with a less than perfect set-up, such as

## THE BOATS

The Tour match race boats range from Sportsboats to long-keeled classics, each bringing a different challenge to the crews.

### SM40

LOA	12m
Beam	2.3m
Draught	2.1m
Displacement	3,800kg
Sail area	(upwind) 72sq m (downwind) 140sq m

Designed by legendary Swedish America's Cup designer and helm Pelle Petterson, the SM40 was designed specifically for the WMRT and fits within a standard 40ft container for ease of transportation. It closely resembles a mini ACC boat and requires a crew of five to sail with wheel steering. It is quite a powerful and meaty boat with a reputation for being brutal in stronger winds with a big spinnaker and displacement hull form generating high loads. Gybing can be tricky with a heavy overlong spinnaker pole and narrow foredeck.

### Bavaria 35 Match

LOA	10.77m
Beam	3.25m
Draught	2m
Displacement	5,400kg
Sail area	(upwind) 64sq m (downwind) 100sq m

These are the only boats on the Tour with a cruising deck layout, developed by event sponsors Bavaria for the cruiser-racer market and consequently universally dreaded by the competitors due to their ability to catch crews on nav lights, stanchion bases and mooring cleats. This trepidation is heightened by the frequently light wind nature of the venue on Lake Constance where it is always a challenge to keep the heavy boats underway. The only perk is having cold drinks from the onboard fridge!

### Foundation 36

LOA	10.85m
Beam	3.48m
Draught	1.9m
Displacement	3,850kg
Sail area	(upwind) 76sq m

The widest of the boats on the Tour, developed for the dual role of match racing and corporate sailing. Well liked by the teams, particularly those from NZ who likened them to the MRXs used for match race training in Auckland and Australia. They are tiller steered and have a clear wide cockpit with plenty of space for everyone's elbows, wide side decks and a relatively high coachroof - just the right height for grinding a spinnaker! Particular care has been given to producing very strong stem and hull/deck joints to minimise down-time from the inevitable collisions.

### DS 37

LOA	11.2m
Beam	3.15m
Draught	2.03m
Displacement	2,100kg
Sail area	(upwind) 60sq m (downwind) 130sq m

Despite being a bit long in the tooth, the DS 37 - designed by Jacob Viero in 1991 specifically for this role - is held in high regard by the competitors. It is fast and nimble, literally able to turn in their own length, providing quick action on the water and sometimes a challenge staying onboard during pre-start! The extremely light displacement of the DS 37 means that they are quick to accelerate and always provide fast and furious action. They can be hard on the trimmers with large sails as they are under-winched. They are used for a number of events in Scandinavia, including a number of training programs giving a step-up for young match racing teams for the Swedish and Danish Match Cups.



PHOTO: WANDER ROBERTO/WMRT\*

PHOTO: BRUNO MANI/WMRT\*



greater headstay sag, more upright rig, worn Dacron sails etc. Even on the larger vessels on the circuit the boats run tackles for the mainsheet when the loads often warrant a winch. The winches on the boats tend to be under-gearred for the loads and the sail controls are the minimum required. The teams are restricted in what they can bring on board: a standard tool kit consisting of tape, 4mm line, bungy and some spare shackles to enable teams to prevent sails and lines catching and allow some ability to repair any mid-race breakages. The individual sailors tend to carry multitools, marker pens, and a notebook.

A number of the events on the Tour are at traditionally light wind venues and, due to the need to keep to a schedule, have to run races even when the wind is at its lightest. In this case it is key to keep the

speed up all the time, if it drops in pre-start you can lose 2-3 minutes in a race. Having speed also means you can react to the other boat rather than be a sitting duck at their mercy. Up course the sails are eased and trimmed in unison with gusts, minimising helm movements, and all effort is made to roll the boat in tacks and gybes. The crews are always looking at ways to increase the power in the sails to speed up acceleration out of manoeuvres, then changing gear into pointing mode to squeeze a competitor out. To achieve this they use the full range of controls repeatedly.

### Communication

Within the tight teams each individual has their own responsibilities and the intense nature of the racing puts a real emphasis on quick decisions and response times –

placing the crew's ability to communicate under the spotlight. 'As much as possible, my primary role is to sail the boat as fast as possible, my crew feed me information with regards to the other boat, wind and the course. This allows me to have a mental picture in my head of what is happening across the course so when I look around I know where and what to look at so I can make fast decisions,' explains Adam Minoprio, one of the young guns on the climb as BlackMatch team skipper.

For this to work smoothly the communication must be simple and clear. Mark Nicholls, long-standing teammate of Ian Williams, has covered most of the roles on the boat and is currently looking after the bow. He explains how things work in the Pindar team: 'Hand signals are used to signal overlaps, the rest is ▶

**ABOVE** When the wind is up like it was in Brasil the SM40s can load up and become a real handful.

## International One Design

LOA	33ft 5ins
Beam	2.06m
Draught	1.63m
Displacement	3,230kg
Sail area	(upwind) 40sq m

Designed by Norwegian Bjarne Aas in 1936, the IOD was developed from a 6-Metre by the same designer, with large overhangs fore and aft and a long keel. The class was the proving ground for many of the older generation of US America's Cup sailors such as Ted Hood, Bus Mosbacher, Arthur Knapp Jr and Corneilius Shields. The IOD still lives up to its name with nine fleets in five countries. It is fondly thought of on the WMRT attracting a lot of nostalgia from the teams who see the root of the circuit as the 12 Metre class used for so many years in the America's Cup competition. With the rudder attached to the back of the keel, the IOD is far slower in responding to the helm than the rest of the boats. Its turning circle is wide and it rewards anticipation. It can be a bit cramped in the tiny deep cockpit, the winch for the main halyard is down below in the cabin and the Bowman only has a narrow strip of foredeck to play on. Being narrow though does help it carry its way when luffing or shooting a mark. The IOD is a bit like Marmite – you either love sailing it or hate it.

## Blu26

LOA	8m
Beam	2.2m
Draught	1.8m
Displacement	1,200kg
Sail area	(upwind) 40sq m (downwind) 75sq m

The minnow of the pack, the Blu26 replaces the Streamline 7.15, the sole trapeze boat on the circuit, which had served up plenty of surprises exposing boat handling weaknesses in dramatic fashion. Developed specifically for racing on the lakes with plenty of sail area and light weight the Blu26 designed by Christian Bolinger (advised by St Moritz event organiser Christian Scherrer) still has the potential to shake a few trees with its masthead spinnaker and Sportsboat performance. One of the big considerations in developing the boat was the ability to transport it up the mountain – this is what ruled out the use of bigger craft. The Blu 26 has both lifting keel and rudder to ease this. Tiller steered, this class should see some fast and furious pre-start with crew dynamics still being a big factor in deciding who becomes 'King of the Mountain'.

## KM36

LOA	11m
Beam	3.48m
Draught	2.64m
Displacement	4,350kg
Sail area	(upwind) 78sq m (downwind) 170sq m

The Bakewell-White designed KM36s, built in Korea, made their debut in this year's premiere Korea event. The boats are the stiffest and most powerful on the Tour with by far the deepest draught, sporting a deep fin with torpedo lead bulb. It was designed with a cameraman's 'cupola' in place of the main companionway generating unique footage in the thick of the action – an interesting idea, which since proved to be impractical. The KM36 is also the only boat currently on the Tour that sports an asymmetric spinnaker. The helm drives a large diameter wheel and the boat has proved to be a challenging boat to race especially in a breeze handling the large asymmetric spinnakers, in the light, however, it does lack a little horsepower.



PHOTO: WMRT\*



PHOTO: MONSOON CUP\*

**ABOVE** The cruiser-racer Bavaria Match 35s proved frustrating in the light winds of Lake Constance.

**ABOVE RIGHT** Foundation 36s show off their brand package sponsors and skippers names large on the mainsail at the Monsoon Cup.

**BELOW** Athletic hiking on the DS 37 for

communicated verbally.' Anticipation plays a very big part: 'For gybes the theory is Ian says gybe and we gybe. However I very rarely hear his call so just listen in to the tactical chat, watch the situation and guess. The rule we have onboard is anybody on the boat can call a drop to start and then we execute, the type of drop is normally my call, I just have to remember to tell Gerry (Mitchell) and Syd (Richard Sydenham) what I am doing, although there is nearly always an on-going dialogue about the tactical situation and implications so it's normally fairly straightforward, if a bit hectic.'

These crew dynamics are carried by the top teams from one event to the next, and can be developed whatever the boat. Simon Shaw explains, 'Over the last three years we have all worked at what we do

when we are fighting with the other boat.

This gives us a trimming advantage through the twists and the turns as everyone on board knows what is going on. Well most of the time anyway!

'In the prestart or other downspeed situation you very much rely on anticipating the helm in his actions. Mainly once the boat has become below a certain speed you can't turn the boat anymore with the helm only. In a straight line, mainly in light air, there's a lot of talking about the trim between jib and helm to make the boat go fast,' explains Christian 'Blumi' Scherrer. As well as organising the St Moritz Match Cup Christian is an America's Cup sailor and sought-after trimmer on the WMRT, sailing in the past with Peter Gilmore and more recently joining Sebastian Col in

winning the inaugural Korea Cup event.

In training the sailors get to develop set pieces in the same way as rugby or football teams, Ian Williams remembers using such a practised move with repeated success. 'We managed to sell a dummy gybe in the finals of both St Moritz and Malaysia last year. Mark Mendelblatt fell for it in St Moritz, effectively gybing onto port in front of us (still on starboard) and that was down the final run of the deciding race so it decided the event. In Malaysia, it was against Peter Gilmore (who should know better!) when we were 1-1 and a penalty down in the third race which became a real turning point in the final.'

### Spice of life

On the WMRT variety is the spice of life, the crews constantly changing their steeds just as polo players change ponies. This helps stop the sailors becoming specialists in one type of boat and evens out the advantages of the old hands over the younger teams, thus making the sport more inclusive. It develops versatile sailors able to understand the cause and effect of the actions rather than just following a set tuning sheet. This was underlined by Team Pindar's performance when they jumped into the SB3 fleet at Cowes Week and ending the week in top spot in an ultra-competitive class.

The variety adds to the challenge and underlines it as a championship, as to receive the crown at the end of the year the sailors will have to have mastered a wide range of vessels. You don't need fast and exciting boats to create exciting match racing, although it can increase the thrills and spills out on the water. ■



PHOTO: DAN LJUNGSVIK/WMRT\*