

SPEED DEMONS

The speed demons of the windsurfing world converged in the Canary Islands in July for their annual battle for top honours and the conditions did not disappoint! Pete Davis reports from the 2018 ISWC Speed World Championships in Fuerteventura and we hear from Andy Laufer, working dad of 3, on how he ended up as vice world speed champion! Finally, if you feel suitably inspired after reading all that to get your speed fix, world champion Zara Davis gives her tips for getting into speed sailing.

Words Pete Davis, Zara Davis And Andy Laufer // Photos Zara Davis





“I love this new event site, it threw all sorts at us!” – Zara Davis.

Pete Davis – “There has never been any denying it, Bjorn Dunkerbeck has always been one of the fastest sailors on the planet. Whilst known for dominating waves and slalom on the PWA tour in his heyday, not many people appreciate that Bjorn really loves speed sailing. Brought up in the Canaries, he took part in the golden years at Sotavento Beach on Fuerteventura in the 90s. Bjorn’s DNA has had speed genes pumping through his veins from a very young age, which has driven him to take himself off to new and established speed spots around the world. Surprisingly in 2004 he rocked up unannounced at Weymouth Speed week to sail at the birthplace of speed sailing, which gave the organisers a bit of a shock. But more interestingly, he’s visited far-flung locations like Mexico, Africa and Thailand, looking for a new speed paradise. He wasn’t selfish in this quest either. In 2006 he went to Namibia to check out Walvis Bay and together with Zara Davis they both set new world records for the Nautical mile, both of which still stand today.

In 2007 he put together the speed dream team made up of himself,

Antoine Albeau, Anders Bringdal, and Robbie Naish, the mission was called “The World Speed Sailing Challenge”. Their aim was to try and break the world record, held then by a boat, Yellow Pages, at 46.52 knots and ultimately take it to over 50 knots. Which eventually, apart from Robbie, they all did in Luderitz, Namibia in 2012. During this time he also won the speed sailing world championship title.

So it was no surprise that in 2014 Bjorn set up The Dunkerbeck speed challenge, a pro-am event on the island of Fuerteventura, which included the official ISWC (International Speed Windsurfing Class) European speed championships to encourage all ages and abilities to get the speed bug. It has run every year since and in 2016 it was awarded world championship status.

The pro-am concept is the real draw of this event. Which allows stars like Bjorn, Anders Bringdal and Zara Davis to compete for the official ISWC world speed title and at the same time encourages kids of all ages as well as up and coming speed hopefuls to rub shoulders with their idols, and in some



cases beat them! The best example of this is Twan Verseput. He attended the event for the first time 3 years ago in 2016. Twan is an ex-volleyball player who entered for fun and came top 10 at his first event. He then returned a year later and upset the form book by beating Bjorn to take top spot, then this year came back again to prove it was not a fluke and won it again!

that went down well with the riders who got onboard with the challenge. The wind gods must have been looking down at this point and decided to play their part. The island for the whole competition period had unusually fluky winds from the north east. This meant that had the championships been run on the original intended site of Sotavento, there would have not been any competition rounds due to light and side-shore winds. Bjorn must have sacrificed a goat or something to achieve this stroke of luck!

The best location with this NE direction turned out to be Punto de Jandia, about as far south as you can get on the island of Fuerteventura. It’s a beautiful isolated spot, accessed via 19 km of dirt roads. The remoteness of the site did cause a timing headache for the organisers and competitors as the GPS units used transmitted their data via a mobile phone signal. But the mobile signal was poor in the area and caused delays and some missed runs, but the majority of this was overcome.

These limitations were worth it though, as 3 quality championship rounds were held in ideal offshore winds ranging from the minimum 20 knots, to the windiest round held with winds over 40 knots. The competition as always at this event was fierce, but the experience of the top riders shone through.

As previously mentioned, in the men’s fleet Twan Verseput from Holland took the top spot with 3 bullets from the counting rounds of competition and top speeds of almost 43 knots. Proving last year wasn’t a one off, Twan said “I really enjoy this competition, the conditions are the same for everyone and this year’s site meant I could use my larger Starboard speed boards to get some serious speeds.” The very experienced slalom racer, Andy Laufer from Germany, was the dark horse of this year’s event. New to speed sailing competition, he revelled in the conditions, surprisingly pushing Bjorn into 3rd place. Bjorn was recovering from a hip replacement in February this year, but still managed to hold his own. The battle for top British spot in the men’s fleet saw the rivalry between Jim Crossley and Nigel Spriggs continue from last year with Nigel taking an early lead, but Jim in the next two rounds found his form to secure 10th place overall and Nigel 14th. Defending champion, Zara Davis, was also dominant in the women’s competition with 3 bullets giving Zara her 3rd world title. Speaking about the event, Zara said “I love this new event site, it threw all sorts at us! I used everything from my 96 litre Simmer 3XS slalom board and 7.0m, down to my 5.4m speed sail and Simmer Speed Demon board. Super happy to make it 3 in a row!” Zara was kept honest by last years women’s vice champion, Anne Schindler from Germany, who finished in 2nd place. Newcomer to the event Anja Kruse, also from Germany, came 3rd; she didn’t get to stamp her authority on the event due to an injury sustained off the water, but has vowed to come back stronger next year.

However, this event is bigger than the world championship, it has been designed to encourage all ages to take part, the youngest being Carlos Kiefer Quintana from Germany at 11, to Trevor Watford from the UK at 61. With prizes in all age groups, nobody is missing a challenge. There is also an eye on the future too, this year a foil category was added and was won by Defi Wind organiser Philippe Bru.

There are also prizes for father/mother/son/daughter categories and non-cambered sails etc., so it really does cover all the bases. Entry is on a first come first served basis, so if you fancy a go next year, keep an eye on the Dunkerbeck Speed Challenge Facebook page when entry opens in January 2019. This event is bigger than the world championship, it has been designed to encourage all ages to take part.

NEW SPOT

This year’s event was due to be held at the classic speed spot of Sotavento, only a few miles down the coast from Matas Blancas where it has been held for the last 4 years. Then at the 11th hour, the organisers were told they needed an additional licence to the 4 they already had, due to it being in a national park. This meant that they couldn’t put flags on the beach and no timing boxes etc. Bjorn Dunkerbeck and his team sprang into action and reacted to this and managed to find alternative sites at different locations on the island. The riders were informed that the event was going mobile and

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ANDY LAUFER

Finn Mullen interviews top German sailor and ex-PWA competitor, Andy Laufer, the new vice world speed champion!

FM: Give us the lowdown Andy, who are you?

AL: I am 48 years old (young ha-ha), 188 cm and my weight is about 99 kgs. I'm married with 3 young children and my 9-4 job is a key account manager for www.neubaukompass.de. It's the biggest website for new real estate projects within Germany and Austria. I look after the major customers (key accounts) in the regions of north rhine-westphalia and eastern Germany including Berlin. I do all the contracts and take care of the marketing and website and have been in the position about 5 years.

Besides that I also am run my own business called www.suredate.de. Founded back in 2012, it's an online dating service agency in Germany, helping people to find the right platform, create their profile and I also do photoshoots if needed. My ghostwriters even write for my clients and arrange a date with their desired partner. It's great fun to bring people together!

FM: What training did you do for the event?

AL: Our third child was born earlier this year and basically I spent my 2 months parental leave from work on Maui with my family. I did some slalom and wavesailing with PWA sailors like Antoine, Arnon and Ross.

FM: What prompted you to enter this event

AL: It was my first speed world championship. I knew that I could go pretty fast, especially top speeds, even if I am not as tall and heavy as Twan. I had a personal best of 53.28 knots top speed in Lüderitz with a normal production board, so I was hoping for lots of wind and gnarly conditions.

FM: What equipment did you use?

AL: I just took my production stuff – 114 litre Fanatic Falcon slalom board with warp 7.7 and a 37 cm C-Fins on the first day, 7.0 and a Fanatic Falcon 89 with a 30 cm C-Fins on the 2nd day. I should have taken a 55 cm speed board with a smaller fin on the 2nd day with more weight on my back. I only realized that afterwards - next time!

FM: Did you wear a weight jacket for the event?

AL: Not on the first day in Fuerte' as the wind was light. On the second day I had about 2 kg on my back. It was too little as I realized that Twan had about 6 kg in his jacket.

I don't wear weight jackets when I go sailing at home, only in La Franqui or Lüderitz. We are still waiting for a record day in Lüderitz. I would go with about 8-10 kg to break the record. Last year I only used 2 kg due to lack of wind.

FM: How does the nature of this style of speed competition differ to previous PWA or national racing you have done in the past?



AL: It's pretty cool as you have a huge area in which you can choose your own 250 metres to get the best speed. You can wait for the gust and do your own slingshot. It's super relaxed, as you just need two good runs. On the first day I managed to do 34 runs within one hour. I love that concept of racing. Totally free, flexible and very accurate.

FM: What did you think of the location of the event?

AL: I really love that spot in the very southwest of Fuerteventura in the middle of nowhere. It's really good for speed sailing and they say it's incredible for wavesailing in the winter. Racing starts already on the gravel road as it is very winding and cool to drive!

FM: What made the difference for you to do so well?

AL: I think it is the experience of all those PWA races with small slalom gear back in the 90s and my last years in the beginning of the millennium. I don't have the fitness to go full speed throughout the whole course of Defi wind, but I can go 100% in speed runs, which is really lots of fun! Also my equipment is very simple and very fast in all sizes and combinations. Lots of brands have fast combinations, but not all of them are suitable for speed sailing or slingshots. I had my best top speed in Lüderitz with a normal production board, the Fanatic Falcon Speed 44. It was the only board I took to Lüderitz.

FM: How often do you get windsurfing normally and what training do you do?

AL: I can't go sailing very often as we only get about 20 days here in Munich

with 15 knots of wind. Besides windsurfing I don't train as my foot is still injured from Lüderitz and I prefer spending time with my family.

FM: Did your family come with you for the event?

AL: I only take them to beautiful places like Maui, South Africa or Southern France. I didn't take them to Lüderitz as it's not really child friendly. It's super beautiful, but windy, rough and not very good for 3 kids. If we travel together we stay in private houses. My wife is windsurfing too and my oldest daughter (7) is windsurfing a bit already.

FM: Will you do any more speed sailing competitions?

AL: I will try to go to Lüderitz this year again. I designed 2 new boards with Sebastian Wenzel, the Fanatic shaper. I know exactly what we need in the canal, it's more acceleration we need to break records. On my fastest 500m run in Lüderitz I passed the entry of the course at 80 km/h, ending up at 99 km/h right at the finishing line. I need to pass the entry at 90-95 km/h.

FM: Have you any advice for other sailors thinking about getting into speed sailing?

AL: Get 2 good boards, 50 (with a 24 cm fin) and 45 cm (with a 20 cm fin), 3 sails (5.4-7.0) and go sailing whenever it's windy. If it is windy here in Germany, I always have to go on my big stuff (8.4 or 7.7), but I can still train my slingshots with this big slalom gear, it's much more physical than doing a slingshot with my speed gear and a 5.4 sail.

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If all this talk of speed has given you some inspiration to give speed sailing a try, read on as world champion and world record holder Zara Davis gives you her tips.

Zara Davis – “Speed sailing in its basic form is easy, you just need a fairly fast slalom or big speed board, semi race sail and a GPS unit like a basic Garmin or Navi and a bit of wind and you can be king or queen of your home spot. But if you want to take it a bit more seriously and your budget can stretch to it, one of the new speed boards on the market like the Simmer Speed Demon that I used to break the women’s world record on last year, the Starboard iSonic, JP Speed and the Fanatic Falcon Speed are all excellent.

If your budget won’t stretch to new, there are many older, no longer made, but still very quick bargain speed boards around second hand. For example the Tabou Manta 49 Dave White signature board or the seriously quick F2 Missile range, or the Mistral Speed 41, which still holds the production speed board record.

Sail wise you really need to be looking at a range of camber induced race sails with the right mast to go with them. Get it wrong and it’s like putting a Morris Minor engine in a Ferrari! For strong winds you will need a minimum of two sizes, (ideally three bridging these sizes) in the 6.5-6.2m and 5.8-5.4m range. Fin wise, get a couple of asymmetric fins (foil is only on one side, flat-ish on the other, these are quicker and you tend to only sail one way fast. 95% of speed spots are on starboard tack and depending upon your board size, anything from a 19 cm to 22 cm and a larger symmetric fin for fun and practice. Buy either the latest GW60 GPS watch or second

hand a GT31, which you will need to put in a waterproof pouch and then you’re set. Go lay down some quick speeds and upload your tracks to www.gps-speedsurfing.com and see how you compare to the sailors in your area, country and the world.

As you get better and start topping the monthly tables in your country, it’s well worth looking at a weight jacket which means you can carry a bit of lead weight and the jacket neutralises it with built in buoyancy. This makes you faster by enabling you to hold down a bigger sail in the gusts and the extra weight helps you plane through the lulls. For more help and advice look on Facebook for speed sailing pages like UK Speedsailing and Weymouth speed week. Weymouth Speed week is a great place to go even for a few days to compete and if nothing else, talk speed with like-minded people. It’s always held early October at the National sailing academy. I Hope this has given you the need for speed, see you on the rankings soon!

“Speed sailing in its basic form is easy.”

