

Adam one handed carve at Ho'okipa.

LÜDERTITZ

Words Zara Davis & Pete Davis // Photos Pete Davis

Luderitz is a coastal town in southwestern Namibia which has become THE place to go to break windsurf speed records and where the UK's amazing speed sailing queen, Zara Davis, retook her world speed record last year. **Pete and Zara Davis** give us a compelling insight into the event, the place and the adventure of getting there!

LOWDOWN

THE CHALLENGE – PETE DAVIS

“Lüderitz Speed Challenge is back! So, do you fancy having a go on the fastest speed spot on the planet? Why not? Who wouldn't want to windsurf down a canal the width of a single track road at close to 100 kilometres per hour right?

Well, believe it or not you wouldn't be alone, there seems no shortage of mad buggers out for glory on these famous waters. This canal has delivered 8 world records and 38 National Records since it started in 2011! So if it's a world record, national record, personal best or just bragging rites you're after, read on and see what's involved in getting there, entering, costs and everything in between.

LOGISTICS

Entry is on a first come first served basis and the cost per week is €1250, then there is the cost of getting there. The two best options are to fly to either Cape Town/Johannesburg in South Africa or Windhoek in Namibia then drive. The closest airport is Windhoek and its advantage is you don't need to cross borders etc. but Car/Van hire is much harder and more expensive and the flights from most of the world is via South African Airways who don't take sports equipment longer than 1.5 metres. So the majority fly to Cape Town where there is much more choice on flights and Kennings car and van hire are geared up for windsurfers and have a good van range and organise all the paperwork you need to cross the border.

DRIVING

The drive is definitely part of the adventure, the scenery is beautiful and constantly changing. From the lush green of South Africa to mountain ranges as you near the Namibian border and miles of desert wilderness. Lüderitz is approximately 1200km in total from Cape Town and the roads are very good in general and mainly straight, stretching into a dot into the distance. There is always some wildlife to see like springbok, kudu and even flocks of ostrich, which is why I recommend taking two days to drive with a stop overnight at Springbok (the town) which is about half way and avoids the risk of hitting an animal at night as they do have a tendency to lay on the road at night for warmth.



THE PLACE

Lüderitz is a quirky town lodged on the least hospitable coast in Africa. It was founded in 1883 when Heinrich Vogelsang purchased Angra Pequena and some of the surrounding land on behalf of Adolf Lüderitz, a Hanseat (First Family) from Bremen, from the local Nama chief. It began life as a trading post, fishing and guano-harvesting town, but when diamonds were discovered in 1909 in nearby Kolmanskop, Lüderitz enjoyed a sudden surge of prosperity. Now the diamonds are mostly found elsewhere and offshore, so Lüderitz has reverted to its former self. Its appeal as a town lies in the fact that little has changed since the early 20th century but they have wind...lots of wind and now the town is exploiting that.

The town has a few good restaurants and a great pub called Barrels, all good value with the good exchange rate as it is. Accommodation varies from good quality self catering apartments at about £15 a night to the 5 star Nest Hotel who is a sponsor of the event and offer a discounted rate for competitors from £45 a night. There are a few things to see and do if it's not windy. The tourist bits are the old diamond-mining ghost town of Kolmanskop and boat trips to see the abundant sea life of penguins, seals, dolphins and the occasional whale but let's be honest if your reading this then that is of little interest if it's a world record you are after.

So over to double world record holder Zara Davis who has just succeeded in getting her women's world record back at this event, about why she keeps

coming back, what equipment and preparation you need for the event and what a typical day is like.”

NAMIBIA NOTES – ZARA DAVIS

“I have been to this event four times now, the 1st time in 2010 when we were running on the sea, which was not ideal but showed us the potential of this location. It was down to French couple Seb Catalan and Sophie Routaboul, who despite the difficulties and isolation of Lüderitz's location, were absolutely convinced it would make a speed sailor's dream spot if they dug a channel inland at the perfect angle to the prevailing very strong winds.

“ This canal has delivered 8 world records and 38 National Records since it started in 2011!.

PERFECT

The reason we all believe the spot to be so good is down to two essential elements. Firstly, the wind in Lüderitz blows consistently, in the same direction, from August to March every year. The wind is strong, and in spite of the surrounding desert, it's not too hot, which gives higher density to the airflow and contributes to better performances. It is accelerated by a funnel effect as it comes from the cold Southern Ocean waters, over the dry savannah of south Namibia, and into the Namibian desert. It is precisely in Lüderitz that the wind, channelled through a range of high hills perfectly shaped to increase its speed, reaches the sand desert, where high daytime temperatures amplify it by creating an additional low-pressure “suction effect”.



As a result, it benefits from extra strong winds, very regular in direction and strength. Secondly, the wind angle. The right angle needed to reach high speeds in kitesurfing or windsurfing is around 140 degrees to the wind. This angle is easily achieved with the canal at Lüderitz as it almost follows the natural shoreline and makes it easy to keep full of abundant seawater. The event in 2017 was taken over by Mark Grinnell and Raffaello Gardelli, both successful businessmen working in South Africa and who are great speed sailors in their own right with Mark the 3rd fastest windsurfer the world. So thanks to Seb and Sophie's initial belief in the site and their "If we build it they will come" attitude and Mark and Raffi's continued support we have an amazing venue to realize our dreams and be the best that we can be as speed sailors.

"The drive is definitely part of the adventure, the scenery is beautiful and constantly changing."

R O U T I N E

Once your there you quickly drop into the fun and relaxed routine of the event. The organisers give us good notice when the course is running and timing will be open for official days based on fairly accurate wind forecasting. These days start at a very civilised 12:00 skippers meeting. The wind starting to kick in about 1:00 and builds all afternoon peaking around 3:00 to 4:00 when it can go nuclear at any point and you need to be on the water and getting as many runs in as you can hoping for that magic carpet ride. It's normally all over by 5:30 when it starts to cool down and time for a well deserved drink after the adrenaline blasts from tearing down the canal and being sand blasted the rest of the time.

Taking part is not without its drawbacks however. Besides the obvious dangers of hurtling down a narrow, shallow trench at close to 100 kph with no brakes. This event is not cheap, with entry fees, accommodation and travel costs for four weeks, you are looking at a minimum of €8000. Plus it requires fairly specialist speed equipment, which is not cheap or easy to come by.

K I T

I took with me two 40 cm wide speed boards, one Moo Custom and the new

production Simmer Speed Demon 40 which I used to break the record. This narrow board size was the order of the day for most of the top riders, only varying a few cm's either way depending upon the weight of the rider. The canal doesn't really work until you get over 35 knots of wind and record breaking comes in at 45 knots for the girls and close to 55 for the men. So sail wise depending upon your weight you need a minimum of two small speed sails and the high-end carbon masts and booms to go with them.

I took Simmer SC speed sails 5.8, 5.5, 5.0 and 4.6m with the dedicated 100% carbon masts and AL360 Carbon booms custom made to a shorter length so they fitted these sails small boom lengths. Having said that 90% of

the time was spent on my 5.0m. Some of the bigger guys took 6.2m sails but these were not really necessary as we were their to break records and you will never be able to get near the top speeds on sails that big. Quite a few of the guys were also using asymmetrical booms as well as you don't need to worry about sailing back. But I have my doubts as to the benefits of these

unless the sail is built from the ground up to not have boom support on the main batten. But its all about marginal gains and it may give you a bit more top speed with less wind resistance on the leeward side of the sail.

F I N S

The last vital bit of kit you need is a set of asymmetric speed fins. Get the fin choice wrong and it's like putting a Morris Minor engine in a Ferrari. Assy fins are the speed sailors weapons of choice for many years and they are definitely what works best here, as the trip back upwind is on a truck and trailer! Which assy fin do you choose? It is a very is a personal thing and is very much dependant upon your weight, technique and how you like a fin to feel. The length on an assy fin required is generally 2-3 cm shorter than a standard symmetrical fin, as it generates more power with less drag. Size needed varies from 18cm to 21cm as a max. I use fins made for me from Sonntag in Germany. They custom make them to my weight, board and sail size and I took with me 18, 19, 19.5, 20 and 20.5cm so I was covered for all eventualities.



There are a lot of high quality assy fins out there to choose from that are tried and tested from manufacturers like Gasoil, Z fins and F Hot so you pay your money and you take your choice. But I highly recommend that you try them before you go to Lüderitz. Its not the place for fin testing, if it goes wrong it can get real nasty, real quick!

F I T N E S S

On a personal level getting a fit as possible for this event is very important as it is with most high-end windsurfing competitions. The difference here is you may only be on the water for 20 minutes a day, if you're lucky, but those 15 to 20 runs that last less than a minute, will be the most intense windsurfing you will ever encounter.

Most of the top guys and girls are carrying 6 to 20 kgs of weight to carry them through the lulls and stop them getting lifted in the gusts and you are water starting a board only just wider than your foot and with less than 55 litres in volume with a relatively small sail in very strong gusty winds and that is before you have even got to the start line. So a combination of heavy weight and flexibility training together with good core stability is required prior to getting there and kept up with on the non-windy days in Lüderitz. So when you need it on that big day and it all starts to rock and roll you're not left wanting and disappointed.

E F F I C I E N C Y

The thing I love about speed sailing is we never stop learning and going faster. Remember it was only in 1983; 34 years ago that Fred Hayward broke the 30 knot barrier, now Antoine's record is over 53 and I'm at 46.49 knots, who knows what the limits are? The future I believe is in getting more efficiency out

of our equipment and getting away from the need for apocalyptic winds we need today. An illustration of this for me came this year when I broke Karin's record by a small margin at 46.49 knots in about 45 knots of wind and the top boys were hitting 49 knots over 500m. When Karin did it only two years ago the likes of Antoine Albeau, Patrick Diethelm and Mark Grinnell were hitting 52 plus knot runs in winds thumping 60 knots.

The best example of how efficient sailing craft can be, is Sailrocket, a one off experimental boat, which holds the outright world sailing record at 65.45 knots and Paul Larson and his team achieved this incredible speed in only 27 knots of wind. That's almost 3 times the speed of the wind. We need to tap into this effectiveness to take windsurfing speed to the next level and who knows we may not need a man made canal to do it on. Will I be going back... not sure? I believe given the right conditions and the ever-improving speed kit I think I can go faster. So watch this space.

R E G I S T R A T I O N

But what about you? Life is short and who knows what your future will bring? These are the provisional dates for 2018 - 29/10 to 25/11, plenty of time to start saving your pennies. Contact Raffi, raffaello@surf-n-curve.com and get booked for Lüderitz speed challenge 2018. 🍷

“The canal doesn't really work until you get over 35 knots of wind.”