



technical director of the Spanish Sailing Federation coached them at the start of their remarkable 49er career. He was in Barcelona to encourage them at the start and there for the finish, and he couldn't hold back tears while sitting alone waiting for his friends to appear on stage. 'These guys are really good, at the top of the world in sailing.'

'Whatever they take on, they always fight to win. It's very, very difficult to stay at the top for so many years and in different classes and races. They are very talented but what people don't know is just how persistent and hardworking they are. I know them well but still they have surprised me yet again; they had only one year preparing this boat and it was their Imoca debut...'

Iker explained that they weren't really there to win this race, 'but everybody knows that if we have a small opportunity we take it! Our childhood dream was to race around the world and it was also a perfect chance to do it together.'

Xabi explained the background to the campaign: 'We couldn't



**Double Olympic medallist Iker Martínez updates the Cape Horn scorecard for himself and Xabi Fernández on their way to second place in the Barcelona World Race. One of the most talented, hardworking and versatile pairings in the sport... they will return**

prepare as we would normally like to. We gave our best, though the last 10 days were very long [they finished without any food onboard]... But we enjoyed everything.

'We had neither the time nor the experience to build a new boat – with which we probably would not have finished the race. This boat was perfect for us, we were very confident in terms of performance and reliability. Plus we learned a great deal from Mich during training.'

Except for the daggerboard problem the boat was reliable, Xabi emphasising two of its best points: 'The wing mast is fantastic, especially when you gybe with 30kt, forgetting the runners and mainsheet! Also the batten cars are so perfectly set up for when you reef. The first day we saw this boat we thought that the outrigger configuration was horrible... now we love it.'

'The aft-projecting coachroof is also fantastic, we just can't understand why more boats don't use it. Inside the boat stays dry, and when you are steering outside you are safe from the waves and water that sweep the deck. Being more comfortable boosts you physically and directly benefits how you sail.'

A big problem was discovering that a large proportion of their freeze-dried food had gone bad. Immediately they knew they had a big problem. Recalculating the daily diet meant that by the finish Xabi had lost 14kg and Iker 10kg. 'We prepared for 90 days and we were at sea nearly 95 days. The food would have been just enough... without the problem. Plus we were out of diesel in the last few days, which forced us to cut down on communications and

use of the pilot. We knew that the latest boats would be lighter than us, so our whole strategy was to be as light as we could to minimise the disadvantage in light air...'

Iker's post-race analysis is revealing: 'Virbac sailed for seven to eight per cent less time than us. Our loss clearing the Mediterranean and Santa Helena High was about three to four per cent. The rest is down to boat speed and their better meteorology and navigation strategy.'

'We must learn more about routeing. Experience is fundamental here because sometimes the grib files are simply not accurate, which is what happened in Santa Helena. We began with the west option, changing when the routeing suddenly predicted a big low if we pushed further south; but *Paprec* and *Foncia* were both already there and making gains. Sometimes you must follow instinct as much as the computer. But we will improve.'

Xabi and Iker are staying quiet about what they'll do next. They have Volvo plans with Telefónica but... the 2012 Olympics are also looming. A challenge for a third 49er medal is possible, combining their preparations with the final phase of the Volvo Race. After that, well, they seemed uncomfortable when I tried to push them about the next Barcelona World Race...

## Elsewhere

Pachi Rivero and Jean-Pierre Dick are the only skippers who have finished both Barcelona editions. This time Pachi sailed on *Renault ZE* with Talpi Piris – two old friends from Santander who make a solid team. Piris is a well-respected technician and boatbuilder as well as a talented sailor, with two Whitbreads under his belt as well as the Caixa MedCup programmes.

Pachi Rivero was clear about his own plans: 'We have proved that the Spanish teams can do well in Imoca. After two BWR experiences the big difference from the French is that we do not have the continuity. Talpi and I need to get moving again now – if you stop for two years before the next race it's impossible to recover the lost time. We need more experience, and now is also the moment to plan a new boat.'

Rivero's ideal boat is a hull designed by Marcelino Botín with everything else by Michel Desjoyeaux, built by Chimo López at Longitud 0 and supervised by Toño Piris. 'And include a wing mast with outriggers and an aft keel position to help keep the nose up!'

Piris also enjoyed his experience. 'When Pachi called me 14 months ago offering the BWR I asked him if he hadn't another option. I'd never accept this invite from anyone else... after the experience I know I was right!'

And if Iker explained the benefit of their roof in terms of cold protection, Piris explains how the new gates to keep the fleet further north affected the racing. 'This is the first time I have sailed such a course without gloves... the difference is dramatic. The race direction also made for a great feeling of security, especially when they advised that there was a big iceberg a few miles ahead of us. We must thank Denis Horeau and his team because they took care of all of us during this race.'

Now the future of the Barcelona depends upon the city elections next May. If there is a change in the political mood then most likely there will be some more changes at the FNOB. This time let's wait and see before we make a prediction!

Carlos Pich

## NEW ZEALAND

Some six weeks before ISAF was to meet in Russia to finalise the slate of medal disciplines for the 2016 Olympic Games, a newly turbo-charged 6m keelboat slipped unheralded into the water in Auckland. Its designer, Greg Elliott, believes this boat has all the characteristics to retain a men's keelboat in the Games. But he is under no illusions that, ranged against the clamour from the powerful seasoned lobby groups that populate the corridors of power in world yachting, the merits of his argument might amount to a mere whisper.

Elliott's case is strengthened, one might think, by the fact that

MAPFRE



his Elliott 6M will be used in 2012 for the women's match racing and has been well received by the sailing community. More than 100 boats are now distributed in 28 countries. 'It provides quite a racing spectacle and has been taken up with enthusiasm at World Cup events,' he says.

As a logical progression, Elliott has taken the same hull and turbo-charged it by adding a 1.6m carbon prod and a more powerful sailplan on the existing rig. This simple modification, which can be easily retro-fitted, has resulted in a lively high-performance keelboat, modern in concept and technology, that would make for exciting racing as a two-man (200kg) boat. 'It would make a good successor to the Star,' he says.

Of course, the politics of Olympic selection are frequently unfathomable. The chances of this, or any other men's keelboat, staying in the Games might seem bleak, as the discipline has been removed from ISAF's proposed slate to be finalised in St Petersburg. But Elliott's argument is that this disenfranchises a significant proportion of the sailing population. 'I find the absence of a

women's match racing, the proposed ISAF slate for 2016 does not specify match racing at all. 'It is quite clear that for 2016 ISAF is simply proposing the Elliott 6M for a women's keelboat medal,' says Elliott. 'It could be match racing, or fleet racing, or both.'

Anyway, given the vagaries of Olympic selection, Elliott is not putting all his eggs in that particular basket. 'I am not doing this only for the Olympic Games,' he says. 'But I do believe it is a fantastic opportunity to use the same platform for men and women. If it doesn't get selected it is still a great boat.'

He describes it as a high-performance keelboat, as opposed to a sportboat. 'The ballast ratio is about 50 per cent, which means it does not rely on crew weight to keep it upright, unlike sportboats which typically have a ballast ratio of about 35 per cent.'

'This is something I always wanted to do with the Elliott 6M. It is just that up to now I have been so tied up with organising the Elliott 6M project that I've not had the chance.' In fact, he has come up with two turbo versions, the first he calls the Elliott 6S and the second of which has a bigger rig plus a masthead gennaker. This is intended as a three-man boat (265kg) – the Elliott 6SS. The standard Elliott 6M is built by McConaghy's in China and they also made the modifications for the retractable bowsprit.

Given the requirement to reduce athlete numbers at the Olympics, the two-man version would probably be the one to push. 'It is intended as a tight one-design and, if it made it to the Olympics it would be best as supplied equipment,' says Elliott. 'It is not intended to be over-technical. I believe the Olympics should be more about sailors than equipment. It should be about who is the best sailor, not who is the best at tweaking and tuning.'

'The best sailors generally come through anyway. Take Anna Tunnicliffe: she won the Laser Radial gold medal in 2008 and now she is campaigning the Elliott 6M to try to make the US team for 2012. Her crew are already up now in the top five in the world in the class in the space of one year. World-class sailors adapt very quickly to the equipment.'

For the modified Elliott 6S the additional sail area is achieved with a very slightly larger headsail (from 7.7m<sup>2</sup> to 7.81m<sup>2</sup>) and a mainsail increased from 15.9m<sup>2</sup> to 16.55m<sup>2</sup> through the addition of a square top. The gennaker is

38.32m<sup>2</sup>. 'In this configuration the boat is probably best suited for fleet racing,' says Elliott, 'but it could be used for match racing as well. You can match race any boat – look at the America's Cup, they are using catamarans!'

On its first outing under this rig the boat was helmed by Guy Pilkington, who heads the Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron's much admired Youth Programme. With one of his students crewing, their combined weight was right on the 200kg target. Conditions were about 12-14kt.

'It was physical and demanding, but very rewarding,' says Pilkington. 'It certainly gets up and boogies very quickly and you can hold it on the plane. Mark roundings would be a proper test of skills and athleticism. It is a big gennaker and getting it down tidily and setting up for windward work is demanding for a two-person crew. You need to be on your game. Coming into a leeward mark on the plane, it all happens pretty quickly. Getting your gybing angles right would also be critical.'

The Squadron Youth Programme have used Elliott designs for the past 20 years, starting with Elliott 5.9s, moving up to 6m boats and last year changing to Elliott 7m four-person boats. As such, Pilkington is familiar with their characteristics. He reckons the modified Elliott 6M would be an ideal two-man boat for the Olympic Regatta.

'At that level they are supposed to be elite athletes. They are



**Suitably demanding... in two-man guise the turboed Elliott 6M will keep its crew busy with a bigger sailplan set on the current rig. It is this version – rather than the rerigged three-man boat – that proponents are advocating as an Olympic keelboat in 2016. Given the 6M hull's one-design history, the Elliott '6S' does at least give ISAF something modern against which to measure the continuing claims of the Star boat**

men's keelboat medal from the proposed slate very surprising,' he says, 'particularly when you consider that by far the biggest form of sailing worldwide is in keelboats... This design offers a modern interpretation of keelboat racing with a great future.'

His proposition is further undermined by the fact that Elliott's own national authority, Yachting New Zealand, does not even support retaining a women's keelboat for 2016, let alone reinstating a men's version. New Zealand is aligned with the lobby favouring, among other medals, the 470 for both men and women, which leaves Elliott bemused and wondering how what he describes as a low-performance dinghy does anything to raise the excitement factor half a century after it was designed.

Explaining Yachting New Zealand's position, chief executive David Abercrombie notes that close attention was paid to the criteria set out in the Olympic Commission Report. 'We then evaluated which events we believe best meet these criteria,' he said.

'We concluded that the cost of campaigning a keelboat in the Olympics limited access for sailors to compete in women's match racing on the international stage and the costs involved in hosting keelboat races mean that this event does not best meet the criteria. Yachting New Zealand believes that Women's Match Racing in the Elliott 6M is in an exciting position to build its own World Series, aligned with international men's match racing.'

Elliott is quick to point out that, while the medal for 2012 is for

IVOR WILKINS





Can you blame them... among a star-studded cast unable to resist a 505 world championship held in the tropical setting of Hamilton Island were Australia's roving medal-munchers, Nathan Outteridge and 49er crew Iain Jensen. With little practice – in recent months the pair have collected the Moth and 49er world titles – the favourites for 49er gold in Weymouth finished a solid ninth in the 85-boat fleet. This month Outteridge will be squeezing in an SB3 worlds with Tom Slingsby before Medemblik and his next 49er engagement...

meant to be strong, clever, fit sailors. They would need to be all those things with this boat. If the Olympics are looking for excitement and boats that look good on TV, this is exactly the type of boat they should be sailing. The hull is proven and the ability to turn it into something else at very little cost is a great option.'

Sailing three-up with the SS rig was arguably less demanding with one more set of hands for handling the sails and adjustments. But, with a big 45.40m<sup>2</sup> masthead gennaker, the demands of holding it flat kept the crew on their toes – literally.

A first competitive outing in this configuration saw the 'new' boat finish second on handicap in the local sportboat fleet, beating plenty of much larger boats over the line. 'It was fun to sail,' says Elliott. 'It is challenging, but it rewards good sailors. Which is exactly what it is meant to do.'

Ivor Wilkins

## AUSTRALIA

### The entry is in...

Usually, as this part of the world turns its sights towards the advent of winter, there is encouraging news in the form of new builds for the offshore scene; but be it the 'GFC' or some other unknown factor, that side of life down under is currently in the doldrums. There's just nothing happening on the custom build side of IRC racing. However, there is one light starting to appear at the end of one tunnel, though it's got nothing to do with ocean racing...

Through a peerless degree of determination and an 'I'm not drowning, I'm waving' attitude, Team Australia Challenge (TAC) has been confirmed as the sole Australian entry for AC34. Some months ago there was great fanfare in the media about an Australian challenge, and subsequently an entry was lodged. However, unsurprisingly to many, that campaign couldn't find the accelerator and died soon afterwards. Now TAC has stepped into that void and once again raised the Australian flag.

Project co-ordinator Simon Grosser is cautious about making claims, maintaining the challenge is only worth doing if it can be done properly. 'We will approach this a step at a time,' he said. 'Our initial aim is to confirm our participation in the AC45 World Series by May, and the signs out there are sufficiently encouraging for us to proceed with the entry at this stage.' He firmly believes that an Australian AC45 campaign will help the profile of the challenge and will contribute to drawing support from partners and backers.

While he has raced plenty of miles over the years Grosser's name is not known on the international scene, but he is well recognised in the industry as the former boss in Australia of what is now SP-High Modulus. For the past four years he has worked as an independent management consultant in the composites industry. At the same time he has taken it upon himself to do something about getting Australia back into the AC game.

Already he has pulled in some credible support: Sir James Hardy is patron while Simon McKeon, current Australian of the Year and former holder of the world sailing speed record, has accepted the position of chairman. Also, TAC now has the formal endorsement of Yachting Australia. A leadership group has been formed and this includes sailors whose credentials are beyond question.

This one seems to have better legs... Now it's just a matter of watch this space.

### Unfair at Lake Eyre

Two years ago a wave of excitement radiated from central Australia because Lake Eyre – usually a crusty, dry salt pan – was beginning to fill with floodwater. This natural phenomenon meant that what is probably the world's most isolated sailing establishment, Lake Eyre Yacht Club, was going to be able to stage a regatta on a waterway that has only been at maximum capacity three times in 150 years. Well, it happened and the event was a huge success.

The lake is deep in south Australia, 700 miles north of Adelaide (its remoteness is obvious to users of Google Earth). It's also at the lowest point on the Australian continent: at its centre it is 15m below sea level, and for most of the time it's devoid of water. However, when it does fill to capacity (5-6m deep) its surface covers an astonishing 9,690km<sup>2</sup>: more than half the size of Wales! When full the largest stretch is 144km long and 77km wide.

Now, as the world knows, a massive tide of water recently overwhelmed much of northern Queensland. However, on the plus side of the tragedy the floodwater eventually swept 1,500km to the southwest, and the incredible inundation has brought new life to an otherwise dusty and parched country. This same water has now spilled into what is, once again, a true Lake Eyre.

News that water was back in the lake has been enough for dinghy sailors from across Australia to prepare to trek into the outback for a regatta Lake Eyre Yacht Club planned for July – then suddenly those plans were put on hold. The local Aboriginal tribe,

CHRISTOPHE FAVREAU