



Speed thrills *prix fixe*

Got a five-letter word for "cat most often found in water"? According to the *L.A. Times* crossword, it's Hobie. Looking for a fast family boat with worldwide racing fleets? Lots of people have the same answer. As the t-shirt says, "Don't fear the speed, fear the addiction."

There's more than one right way to stage a regatta, but this formula for the 2004 Hobie 16 Worlds can't be wrong: Start with an estate-like hotel an hour's drive out of Cancun, on the Yucatan peninsula. Once there, the hotel covered all conceivable legal desires, *prix fixe*, and Hobie provided boats, parts, repairs, starting signals, marks, feasts, and trophies.

Class founder Hobie Alter became a name in the 1950s shaping surfboards in South-

ern California. He wanted to "never own hard-soled shoes or work east of the Pacific Coast Highway," and in pioneering the shift from wood boards to composites, he shaped the future as well.

But when he got the catamaran itch and invented beach-cat sailing, the boats or the sailors or both didn't fit. "In the 1970s, when we started with the catamarans, the yacht clubs didn't want us," explained Hobie's son Jeff at the recent event in Mexico, "so we had to do our own thing."

As Alter spoke, he gazed out across an expansive swimming pool filled with cavorting Hobie sailors and, in the background, waving palms, white sand, turquoise water, and the masts of 60 new Hobie 16s. "Doing our own thing," Alter said dryly, "has

worked out rather well."

Olympic sailors remember Bob Merrick as the 2000 silver medalist in the 470 dinghy. But Merrick knew that after the Games he wanted to sail with his companion, Liza Cleveland. He came to Hobies by accident. Liza recalled, "Bob was racing in Italy, and the two of us hadn't been sailing together at all, but there was a place that rented Hobies, and we had *so much fun*."

So now their Hobie 16 lives in their backyard in Connecticut—except on weekends—and Bob and Liza contributed to that one-fifth of the Worlds fleet made up of family teams. "What we didn't know until we got in," Bob said, "is how big this Hobie thing really is."

In all, 120 teams from 17 countries competed in the 10-day event. The women's

Jeff and Cody Alter having a Hobie day. Alter's racing formula still makes 'em smile

championship went to the mother-daughter combo of Pamela and Martha Noriega from the host country, Mexico. Three-time Worrell 1000 winner Rod Waterhouse of Australia placed second in the Masters with his daughter, Bridget, crewing (no crewage minimum), then raced the Open with wife Kerry while Bridget and 12-year-old Jason found other rides in a championship won soundly by a pair from Guadeloupe, Axel Silvy, 18, and Pauline Jupin, 19.

The littlest crew out there was an 11-year-old named Cody, Hobie's grandson. "We're close to minimum weight," father Jeff said. "We're blazing fast downwind." K.L.