



Get the Lead Out

Cool cat. The cat's pajamas. Let's face it—cats are groovy. And nowhere did catamaran sailing seem more appealing to me than the bright, busy beach at the Santa Barbara Yacht Club, where 87 boats from 15 different countries convened for the Hobie Tiger World championships. Here I had the chance to explore the wonderful world of beach cats for *SAILING* ... and now, to coin a phrase, "The cat's out of the bag."

According to the legend, the late Buddy Ebsen, aka the "Beverly Hillbillies" Jed Clampett and Barnaby Jones, declared a monohull is merely half a boat. The differences between single- and multi-hulled boats go beyond the ama however.

Intrigued, I asked Tiger World championship hopefuls what it takes to become cat-savvy.

"You really have to have a sense of adventure and be a bit of a thrillseeker," said John Bauldry, a 50-year-old competitor from Detroit,

The thrill of sailing on unballasted twin-hulled rockets has generated a cult following

By Betsy Crowfoot with
photography by Sharon Green

Michigan, who compared the ride at the gusty four-day championship to "a white-knuckle roller coaster at a theme park."

"There's a physical aspect and certain skill level that goes along with catamaran sailing," Bauldry said. "Believe me, on really windy days we get worked over pretty good."

Larry Harteck, described the first day of racing at the Tiger Worlds saying, "We like it when it gets windy and we were grinning from ear to ear." But soon it was blowing 30-plus

and they doused the spinnaker, changing strategy from "sticking with the frontrunners" to "keeping the stick up."

"We got hit by a huge gust dead downwind and both bows submarined," Harteck said. "The boat cartwheeled violently ... I tried to hold on to the back as the front disappeared but it acted like a catapult and flung me past the masthead in to the water."

Adrenaline pumping, Harteck ("I always wear a life jacket") and crew Alex Bernal rolled the boat and kept going. They pitchpoled one more time before completing the race of 23 finishers, from a field of 87 starters.

It's not for the faint of heart.

"The first thing is you have to enjoy excitement," said Steve Leo, who competed alongside Wayne Mooneyham (their combined age of 127 made them the most senior team in the regatta) in addition to organizing the event. "Multihulls are designed for excitement; they go so much faster and things happen so much quicker."



"To be good at it you've got to enjoy the challenge against the elements and the excitement of the ride, so you can push the boat hard enough to be competitive," added Mitch Booth, the 2003 world champion.

But despite all that talk about physical prowess, Carina Cartwright, a slender 36-year-old competitor from Adelaide, Australia, described the Tiger as "a pretty smart boat."

"The boats are comparatively high-tech these days and well set up," Cartwright said. "It's not just a matter of brute strength. With some boats that's the only way you'll get things done, but on the Tiger you've got the chute to get the sail into; you've got a self-tacker. I find it a lot easier to sail than some of the littler boats."

From Larry Harteck's perspective, there's nothing better than hanging on a wire six feet off the hull. "The trapeze is a much more comfortable way of sailing. I refuse to go on a boat where I have to hike out."

The added benefit of standing off the side hull comes in sensing the movement through the waves and shifting your weight to ease the way, he said. "You have a great perspective for seeing the wind and water, which has made me really good at reading the puffs and waves."

Harteck also noted the lack of instruments forces cat sailors to hone their senses and judge boat speed by feel, as well as comparisons to competitors. "Sometimes monohull guys rely too much on the instruments when they should get their heads out of the boat."

Harteck, 46, is an interesting case study. He admitted he "goes both ways" enjoying monohull and multihulls alike. He grew up sailing Sunfish and Victories in the waters off Santa Barbara, California, but by the time he was 15 he had bought his first catamaran. A two-time Nacra 5.2 world champion with numerous national titles on four continents, Harteck now owns a J/105, *Repeat Offender*, and has regularly sailed an Olsen 30, Farr 40 and several big ULDBs.

"I like both. I like cat racing: the speed and thrill of going fast with one other person, preferably my wife Becky. But the monohull has the different dynamics of a big team. It's like comparing tennis to baseball."

But Harteck agreed the pace is poles apart. "Things happen very quickly in catamarans: starting line situations, crossings, mark roundings. When I'm on a monohull, it's like everything is happening in slow motion." Monohull sailors by contrast find things transpire very swiftly on a multihull. "You have to make deci-

sions right away, right or wrong, or you'll miss things, because they happen so quick."

And while multihull sailors have been known to poo-poo the dismal speeds of monohulls, Harteck said that a lot of monohull sailors also carry stereotypes about catamarans and their sailors.

"They say, 'These people are fringe sailors; they don't have strategies; the boats are poorly constructed, they don't tack,'" said Harteck, who clearly has one foot in each camp.

"Some of that was justified in the early days. A lot of catamaran guys were partiers; they didn't care about the rules. And they built the boats in their backyards out of plywood: pretty funky looking things."

That's not what modern multihulls are like now, Harteck said. "The sailors have evolved and so have the boats. They're safer, they don't rock, you don't get seasick and you don't spill your cocktail."

But there are still the parties.

"You go for the race, but in the end, it's the whole experience," Harteck admitted. "It's meeting people, the parties, the fun. At some monohull regattas, unless you know people on the other boats, you don't mix. You might be docked near each other but afterward, everybody goes their own way."



Fast action keeps Hobie sailors on their toes as they round the mark, left. Beach cat devotees have evolved into serious racers, top far left, but it's still about the joys of beach culture, middle left, and camping out the tribe, lower left. Along with the thrills there's plenty of spills, below.

He talked about the cultural phenomenon his dad had launched with the introduction of the Hobie Cat, when Alter was just 10.

"The big difference the catamaran guys brought to sailing was sailing outside of the norm," said Alter, "where you met at a campground or parking lot and a bunch of people got together to have a good time as a group without putting all the emphasis on the sail. A lot of the emphasis was on the beach, the family atmosphere, where they always had hotdogs and beer and Cokes for everyone."

Nowadays recreational vehicles have taken over because of limited beach access but the atmosphere is the same.

You don't have to be a fat cat to get into multihull sailing. Leo estimated a competitive used boat and sails could cost \$9,500. Add \$700 for a trailer, and another \$500 to \$600 for critical personal gear such as dry suits, harnesses and other safety items and repairs. "You could get started for about \$11,000 and be competing immediately," he said.

"The nice thing about the one-design class is you have to use the factory spinnaker and jib; you don't alter your boats. It's not about who has the most money," Leo said. "It's a completely level playing field."

Once you're adept at one cat, the skills are mostly transferable. "If you sail enough it really doesn't matter what boat you're on," said Booth who has raced in 120 championships on scores of different kinds of catamarans. "You should be able to adapt to the equipment and the subtle differences in the boats. Some boats are a bit more extreme than others, but the same principles apply: like where the wind is coming from and how you should sail the boat to the most efficient course."

For the beginner, Alter recommended the Hobie 16. "It's a bit more crew-friendly; it has just the jib (no spinnaker) and doesn't go quite as fast downwind. No one has to be an expert crew."

"If you've never sailed a dinghy or a high-performance sport boat, you might have a tough time at first with a catamaran, because there's no forgiveness," Harteck said. "Not only can it tip over sideways; it can tip over forward too, and you have to be really special to get over backwards but it can be done: I've gone over every which way."

Still, Harteck said the appeal and excitement is worth the effort.

"It's fun, fun, fun to sail. To take someone who's never been on a catamaran, launch it on the beach, put them on the trapeze and instantly go 20 mph past every other boat on the water like they're standing still, is a thrill like no other."

Booth was there defending his world championship title with his son Taylor at his side, and noted the abundance of family partnerships present: siblings; boyfriends and girlfriends; parents and children; and the fleeting uncoupling of Tom and Susan Korzeniewski who each skippered their own entries and were racing against each other.



I caught up with Hobie P. Alter on a spectator boat, where he'd come to observe some of the friends he's amassed over the decades. "I just came to watch: you always run into people you haven't seen in 10 or 20 years. That's the nice thing about sailing."

"But everybody is together at a catamaran regatta," he said. "Especially if you're going on and off the beach. You can't help but talk to people; and if there are good sailors there, the not-so-good sailors come check out their boats: look, touch, see how they're rigged."

The weeklong tailgate party atmosphere of the recent Tiger Worlds fascinated me just as much as the exciting racing. Recreational vehicles had circled the parking lot like a wagon train and taken over, creating a compact village of campers and lawn chairs, coolers and barbecues. People in half-peeled wetsuits sat shooting the breeze while kids rode by in tricycles, and a cacophony of music blared.

It's all part of the appeal, explained Bauldry, who once lived in Santa Barbara. "I've been doing this almost 28 years and have friends from all over the world. We see a lot of the same people on the circuit, and I'm just really excited to have them come to my old 'hood and play here," he said.

"It's a special sort of sailing culture," said Booth, who after 120 championship regattas still isn't jaded by the spectacle. "The Hobie beach scene is a really fun environment, and everybody's very sociable."