



DoG MATCH

THE AMERICA'S CUP, BUT NOT AS WE KNOW IT

Last month we took a close look at the two giant multihulls of Alinghi and BMW Oracle as they prepared for a 33rd America's Cup that has been mired in controversy. Now they are due to meet off Valencia and Matthew Sheahan anticipates how they will fare on a new type of course at a challenging time of year

The weapons have been chosen, built and tested and the date has been set for 8, 10, 12 February 2010, but in the build-up to the event there was still plenty of argument about where and how the battle for the 33rd America's Cup would be fought. Final confirmation that Valencia would be the venue came only eight weeks before the Cup was due to start (see our story in On the Wind, page 17).

It's extraordinary that so much uncertainty can hang over such a prestigious event. Yet those who have followed the acrimonious road to the 33rd Cup will be used to its convoluted path. To the casual observer the courtroom battles might seem to have been no more than an ego-fuelled squabble between two of the richest men in the world. But it has been much more than that – the fundamental rules of fairness have been questioned and the arguments have involved issues that could set a precedent for Cup Matches to come and even for yacht racing in general.

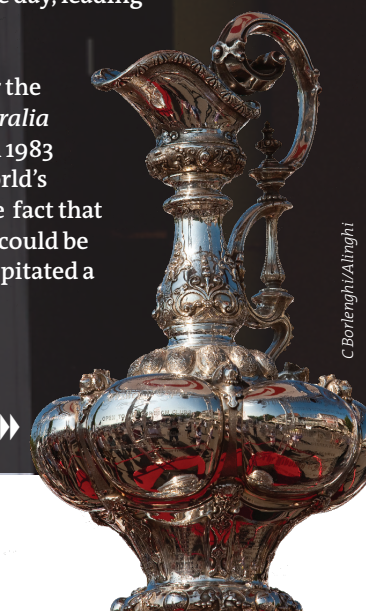
Both sides feel that the cornerstones of the America's Cup have been tampered with. Both have valid points. A Challenger, having spent over US\$200 million on a campaign, would want some assurance before the start of the regatta that their boat would at least measure. And the Defender, having paid out for organising and developing the 32nd and 33rd events, might expect to have their full entitlement to a Defender's advantages under the Deed of Gift. Now a battle that started ashore in 2007 will be played out on the water in Valencia aboard the most extreme racing machines ever seen.

What happens next will set the America's Cup off on a new and exciting heading. Historically, such public punch-ups have always resulted in a major change for the better. The bitter Dunraven affair of the 1890s was so acrimonious that it left many asking whether the Cup could survive. Yet, it pre-empted the Lipton era and his five consecutive Challenges, each in extreme machines of the day, leading to the J Class.

The legal wrangling over the validity of *Australia II*'s wing keel in 1983 brought the world's attention to the fact that the Americans could be beaten and recipitated a flurry of new Challengers.

And then there was the long-running ►►

G Martin-Raget/BMW Oracle Racing



C Borlenghi/Alinghi



THE TEAMS

saga in 1987/8 between the Americans and the Kiwis as to what type of boats were allowed, leading to the exploitation of a loophole in the Deed of Gift and the biggest mismatch in Cup history. Yet that one-sided Match between Dennis Conner's 60ft wingmasted cat and Michael Fay's 120ft monohull led to a new and exciting design, the IACC class. Just short of 100 boats were built to that class over 19 years and never had the Cup seen such financial success.

The America's Cup is an event of extremes, both on the water and off. In 2007 the 32nd edition in Valencia provided some of the best match racing we've ever seen in some of the most closely matched boats – though by today's standards, they were heavy and slow. In 2010 the race will be contested in no-holds-barred, lightweight monster multihulls created by the two protagonists at the diametrically opposite end of the design spectrum.

But one factor that won't change is that the America's Cup will remain the most valuable trophy in sailing, the oldest international sporting trophy in the world and an event that, thanks to its unique structure, is also the most resilient event in our sport. People can talk of rivalling the Cup with a new purpose-built event, with an independent organising authority and a worldwide reach, but no one can erase 159 years of competition history. And most of all, no one can change the fact that you keep the Cup until someone else challenges you for it.

The first five minutes

No one knows how these two giant multihulls will compare, not even the crews. With so little time at the venue and with two very different extreme machines – one a cat, the other a tri – the first few minutes off the line in the first race will be crucial.

Their relative speeds towards the weather mark (VMG) will be what counts. This may sound obvious, but there are several ways of achieving this and in multihulls the options are more extreme than in heavy-displacement monohulls.

In ORMA 60 trimaran racing round the cans teams were pointing high, sailing at speeds typically of 15 knots upwind. But over time some learnt that footing a little and sailing broader angles meant sailing faster (around 17-18 knots) for a better VMG.

Both BMW Oracle and Alinghi might know their boats well and how they will perform in different conditions and headings, but they don't know how they'll stack up against their opponent. So the first five minutes could be the most stressful of the event.

TEAM TALK

Moving to powered systems meant taking a hard look at the sailing team. Powered systems may have provided extra grunt, but the technology also means

extra weight, so the crew list had to go on a diet. Neither team is expected to announce the names, or even the number, of crew it will sail with until

shortly before the start of the event. But here's the pool of talent that each of the teams has at its disposal in their sailing squads.

ALINGHI



Rodney Ardern (NZL)
Alain Gautier (FRA)
Ed Baird (USA) – helmsman
Ernesto Bertarelli – team president (SUI)
Curtis Blewett (CAN)
Will McCarthy (AUS)
Brad Butterworth – skipper (NZL)

Loïck Peyron (FRA)
Simon Daubney (NZL)
Dean Phipps (NZL)
Jan Dekker (RSA/FRA)
Franck Proffit (FRA)
Yves Detrey (SUI)
Murray Jones (NZL)
Lorenzo Mazza (ITA)
Francesco Rapetti (ITA)
Peter Evans (NZL)
Nicolas Texier (FRA)
Warwick Fleury (NZL)
Pieter van Nieuwenhuijzen (NED)
Nils Frei (SUI)
Juan Vila (ESP)



J Delgado/Alinghi. Inset: G Trombetta

BMW ORACLE



Russell Coutts (NZL) – skipper and CEO
Simone de Mari (ITA)
Dirk de Ridder (NED)
Noel Drennan (IRL)
Larry Ellison (USA) – team principal

Shannon Falcone (ANT)
Thierry Fouchier (FRA)
Ross Halcrow (NZL)
John Kostecki (USA)
Joe Newton (AUS)
Matteo Plazzi (ITA)
Max Sirena (ITA)
James Spithill (AUS) – helmsman
Simeon Tienpont (NED)
Brad Webb (NZL)



All photos: G Martin-Raget/BMW Oracle Racing



Brad Butterworth Skipper

"These boats are designed to get fast around a DoG match. To put these

boats head to head could see an approach speed of 50 knots and I've got a lot of friends on the other boat and I'd like to see them in the future! We'd like to keep them apart and see who's the fastest and sails the best."



Dirk Kramers – Chief engineer

"The risk of breaking things is huge, but it's going to be difficult to go back upwind at ten knots again!"



Russell Coutts CEO and skipper

"You can complete a tack much faster with the wing than the sail. That

eliminates a loss in the time it takes you to tack and adjusts the distance you need to sail to complete a tack."

"One of the toughest days we've had so far was when we had to tell the eight grinders they were coming off the boat because of the court ruling that allowed the engines. It's not really the way you want to sail an America's Cup."



Simon Daubney Trimmer

"It makes a change from a Version 5 Cup boat when you'd high five after

finding an extra one-tenth of a knot of boat speed. If we'd been able to employ just one of ten options that we've developed on this boat in the previous Cup you'd have won hands down. This time it's a case of pin your ears back and go."



Murray Jones – Strategist

"You're going into the unknown with loads that are absolutely horrendous, but that's where the knowledge of the design is invaluable to appreciate this."



Loïck Peyron Multihull sailor

"One of the big potential problems with a catamaran is that it might not

be stiff enough, but this is a very stiff one. Most of the time on big multihulls you see the hulls move and eventually the rest of the boat picks up and you fly, but on this boat it flew immediately."



Mike Drummond Design team director

"It's a big step, but it's still only an evolution of what's

been done before. We're trying to sail the boat on one float all the time. Above a certain wind speed we act like a catamaran, we're only a trimaran when we tack."

"When we started the design of the boat we didn't know the venue and we didn't know what Alinghi's boat was targeted at. We've now gone more extreme although now we know they were looking at extreme light airs."



Photos: Alinghi (C Cameron, C Borlenghi)