

HOOKED!

A windsurfer in a dark wetsuit is captured in a dynamic pose, leaning back and holding onto the boom of a large, bright orange sail. The sail is taut and billowing, creating a sense of movement and power. The windsurfer is riding a white board on a blue wave, with water splashing around the base of the sail. The background shows a dark, silhouetted coastline under a deep blue sky.

Steve West
Ulli Seer

Windsurfing's
Untold
Stories

Huisman
Publishing



Maui Glory Days:
October 1st 1982
O'Neill Invitational

From left to right:
Suzan Gedayloo (†), Peggy
King, and Betty Birrell.
Peggy's husband Bill King
started Sailboards Maui
with Mike Waltze and Fred
Haywood. Betty was one of
the first woman windsurfers
at Kailua and Diamond
Head.

Steve West
Ulli Seer

Published by
Ado Huisman

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WINDSURFING'S
UNTOLD
STORIES

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CHAPTER 1

ROBBY
NAISHTHE
KAILUA
KID

J. I'll begin with the road least travelled in introducing Robby; given you're reading this book, you will know who he is. Robby is a car guy; had he discovered cars before windsurfing, it would be no surprise if he were as revered a racing driver as he is now a board rider. The sum of a person is only sometimes as it first appears; if you look at the peripheral edges beyond the polarised perception of a person, you're going to miss out on knowing more. I'm a car guy. I get it.

Specifically, Robby is a Porsche guy. In an interview on the Porsche website titled: Robby Naish, LDB 343 (the car number plate), *'When it comes to the feeling of driving combined with the power, Porsche is in a class of its own,'* gushes Naish. *'I love the design integrity that Porsche has maintained through the decades and that you can drive them in races without changing a thing. Every manufacturer does races, but the amount of work they have to do with their cars before they're ready to go! I'm shy and introverted, not very social, and I honestly don't really enjoy having people around me. But looking at my cars, anyone would think I was some totally idiotic show-off'.* He 'loves cars', he says. His favourite time to drive around Maui is at three in the morning when the roads are empty, and no one sees him.



Above: Robby Naish 1980

In delving into this other passion, his distraction, his 'time out place', the essence of Robby can be appreciated more coherently, beyond what he does on the water, the domain and narrative of the few. Cars, by contrast, are omnipresent, readily attainable, and relatable, unlike what Robby has done on the water.

His appreciation of Porsche is mirrored in his views on board and sail design. He appreciates classic designs, sees no need for constant changes for the sake of change, and appreciates turn-key design icons. He has simple needs over complex. Wind, water and good equipment under his feet and in his hands, has been an eternal way of life counterpoised when seated in his beloved 1977 Porsche 911; hands wrapped around the steering wheel, foot on the accelerator pedal; a clear, quiet, fast open road ahead, which suggests few limits, an open horizon and the joy in simply being at one with an otherwise inanimate object.



Left: Sebastian Vettel and Daniel Ricciardo (both Infiniti Red Bull Racing) talk to **Robby Naish** in the garage during previews to the Malaysia Formula One Grand Prix at the Sepang Circuit on March 27, 2014 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia



Left: Robby's work-horse, a Ford F-650 XLT truck



Left: Robby's first car, a Dodge Charger, 1981



Far left: during the mid 1980s Robby was sponsored by Audi - here pictured with his iconic original Audi Quattro



Above: another toy from Robby's car collection



Above: Robby's 1991 Evans Series One (left) and his beautifully restored VW Bus, left in the background his Porsche 911 'Slantnose'

He is every bit as authentic and grassroots as his Peter Pan athleticism upon the water's surface or when flying above it and it's futile to compare him with his peers, as he remains the quintessential, 'one of a kind' who has inspired others to be his equal, rarely better: he set the bench mark for a generation. Talking with Robby was refreshing and I choose by design, not to be overly prescriptive with a line of questioning, opting for the organic approach of responding to where he wanted to go. My only distinct aim was to try to understand the emergence of the Naish name as a brand which lives on today. Naish is not some corporate juggernaut, nor is it a brand obsessed with image, nor is it answerable to shareholders. It's as autonomous and free-spirited as Robby himself; not taking itself too seriously, always keeping fun and



the big picture of creating water toys for grown-ups who take growing up as optional, or at least something that can be parked to one side on weekends and vacations. What Robby has to say resonates an inner sincerity and perhaps reveals what makes him tick. Before you hear about our conversation we start by exploring his family influences.

FAMILY INFLUENCES

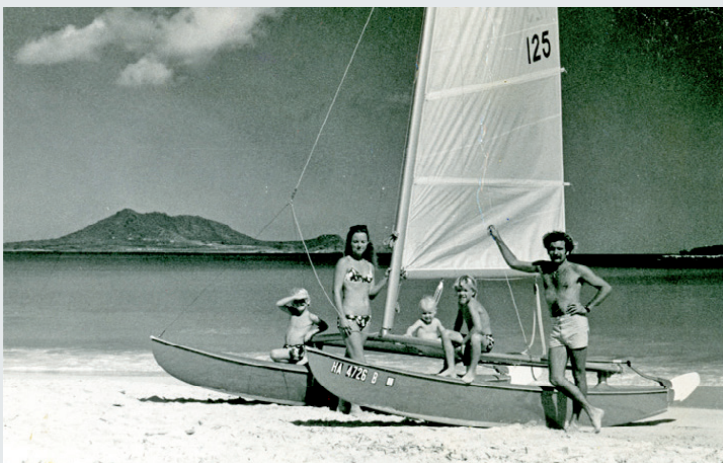
His father Rick's job teaching photography and marine biology at a Honolulu High School allowed him plenty of water time,



Above: Robby 1972 at the age of 9 with his first surfboard

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 racing against adults, won the State Championships on their Hobie 12.

About this time the first windsurfers appeared in Kailua Bay, and the boys lost all interest in their Hobie 12. They met Mike Horgan and Larry Stanley at the beach and used their boards for a while. All they wanted to do was windsurf. The Hobie was sold, and



Above: the Naish family with their Hobie 14 at Kailua Beach, late 1960s, Robby on the far left

.....
 Robby (at 12 years old) took his share of the proceeds and bought his first windsurfing board and rig. As Robby was developing his skills and winning races, Rick was also developing his skills as a board designer. Using the family garage as a workshop, he built

boards for himself, Randy, Robby and a few friends. Meanwhile, mother Carol began international marketing of 'Windsurfari' trips to Hawaii. The first Naish Hawaii rental fleet consisted of 10 Mistral Kailua boards. Guest accommodations were arranged in Kailua in private homes, cottages, and B&B's.



Above: Robby and Rick Naish - the perfect father and son team

The performance of Rick's boards was impressive and generated orders for more boards. They eventually opened their own shop and, I found this suggestion startling; in the history of the shop over 10,000 Naish custom boards have been sold world-wide. Eventually this business would develop to become the Naish brand we know today.

In 1978 the Naish's, and a group of friends from Kailua, organized the first Hawaiian Windsurfing World Cup Regatta which drew nearly 100 competitors to Kailua Bay for a series of course racing, marathon and surf slalom events. This amateur event later became the Pan Am World Cup which was the premier windsurfing event in the world until the professional world tour began in 1983. Rick's boards performance at the Pan Am drew the attention of Mistral founder Peter Brockhaus (Chapter 2) and he was offered a contract to develop several new designs for Mistral.

TALENT AND STYLE

There's a sense that Robby has been a product of divine intervention from the moment he could swim, let alone haul a Windsurfer® rig out of the water on his own, just in time to win his first World Championship at a mere age 13. Under the wing of Larry Stanley (Chapter 3) and Mike Horgan, Robby won the Windsurfer® Hawaiian Championships winning a ticket to Berkeley, California for the 1976 North American Championships. Robby took second place and won a plane ticket to the Windsurfer® Worlds in the Bahamas where he became the World Champion winning another plane ticket to the 1977 Worlds in Sardinia, which he also went on to win. And so it went on.



Above: talent and style - as Robby's skills grew, riding a board simply became an extension of him

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 As his physicality and skills grew, riding a board simply became an extension of him. His symmetry, form and riding style remain iconic, dynamic, intense, the personification of being at one with nature and often with equipment under his feet, honed and refined by father Rick and within his hands, a US-1111 sail



Main photo: La Perouse, Maui /
small inserts right: Hookipa

Very occasionally, you hear people talk of **Robby** as if he's no longer relevant to the big picture and young kids ignorant as to who he is. This is akin to not knowing the origin of the species or the possibility of the existence of a God; whomever that may or may not be to you. When you're knocking on 60 and pulling stunts like this, you're either on a death wish or master of your domain. You decide.





Above: first windsurfing trip to the Bahamas 1974:
Peter Brockhaus (red sweatshirt) and Chris Forstmeier (yellow t-shirt)
later to be Peter's wife.

CHAPTER 2

PETER BROCKHAUS

AN ALTERNATIVE
EARLY EUROPEAN
WINDSURFING
STORY

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eter Brockhaus's lucid memory of the beginnings of windsurfing in Europe of people, places and conversations is quite remarkable. Here he reveals his thoughts behind some of the challenging circumstances he faced as an entrepreneur trying to grow the sport and his business interests. He started working in windsurfing in 1973 with 'Windsurfing Deutschland' as the distributor of Windsurfer®; three years later, he founded Mistral and, in 1980, the F2 brand.

His story covers the need to develop formal teaching for windsurfing (1973) and an early realisation that shorter boards with foot straps orientated to stronger winds (i.e., funboards) would be the future. He describes the philosophical disagreement with his Mistral business partners about a direction of travel, among other issues, resulting in his stepping down and establishing F2 (1980). Founding a second new company is also a rich story with many twists and turns.



Above: Peter Brockhaus

Brockhaus was a tour de force in his field, and his insights make for compelling reading, opening your eyes to a seldom-told alternative windsurfing development narrative. The Americanization of windsurfing's history, interesting as it is, often obscures the reality; Europe became the primary market and nucleus of the big brands and popularisation of the sport. His quest was to improve the original Windsurfer® design and board manufacturing processes and materials. In addition, he confronted significant business and growth challenges, often in very creative ways.

IN THE BEGINNING

Brockhaus discovered windsurfing when working on the island of Sylt in Northern Germany in the autumn of 1972 as a consultant for the Government carrying out a feasibility study for tourism, where he met Calle Schmidt, who had imported the first Windsurfer® boards directly from Hoyle Schweitzer in America. He purchased a board and learnt what trial and error means.
'... in the packaging was this ridiculous piece of paper with some





Calle Schmidt,
Germany's first importer
and distributor of the
American Windsurfer®

Calle Schmidt was from Hamburg, born in 1939 and regularly vacationed with his parents on the German Island of Sylt. He was a trained advertising specialist and owner of an advertising agency. Being a sailing and surfing instructor, in 1971, he moved to the island to open a sailing school. 'One day before I wanted to buy my boats, I read the article [about windsurfing] in the magazine, *Yacht*, at the end of January '72.' Calle contacted Hoyle Schweitzer in the USA, ordered two boards by air freight in early April 1972 and started his first shaky learning attempts.

'NO ONE
WAS SELLING BOARDS
PROFESSIONALLY
AT THIS TIME'



instructional match-stick figure drawings supposed to teach you how to master the sport. I will never forget shaking my head over this poor marketing from the USA.'

This singular lack of a good instructional booklet was, in fact, seminal and a blunder of epic proportions on the part of Windsurfing International. Even its creators struggled with mastery of the contraption they had made. Yet, when sold to the general public, buyers were expected to know how to rig it and master the art of this new windsurfing sport in the absence of any formal instructional material save for a few random drawings. Consequently, when Brockhaus set out to resolve this issue, the resulting missing part of the sales and marketing strategy he helped kick-start windsurfing in Europe.

Schmidt's distribution system was crude but effective, supplying to anyone willing to order five boards, making them pay for four. No one was selling boards professionally full time, and Schmidt was failing to meet the sales figures required by Hoyle Schweitzer's manufacturing licensee for Europe, TenCate, located in Almelo Holland. Ultimately, in November 1973, Brockhaus took over Schmidt's Windsurfing Deutschland business as an importer and distributor of the original Windsurfer® into Germany. TenCate signed the German distributor agreement with Brockhaus' GmbH (company). Brockhaus would then set up an instruction centre at Lake Starnberg with a partner, Hans Taubinger, who had designed his own board and built a few in polyester.

INSTRUCTION: ESSENTIAL FOR GROWTH

It was clear that here was a sport technically challenging to learn, which presented a barrier to entry. Brockhaus wanted to reverse the usual buying experience through what he termed 'Verkauf nur mit Schulung' (instruction prior to purchase). Lessons had to be made part of the buying experience, presented in safe, efficient controlled and enjoyable circumstances.

His vision also considered a key risk; over-crowded lakes in Germany could lead to local bans since German authorities are quick to rule on safety issues. There was also consideration of the difficulties young people without a car might have; therefore, included in the service was the storing of their board at the lake in a protected shelter as part of the package where possible. Lakeside windsurfing schools were ideally suited to this format.

The formalisation of this teaching methodology led to the founding of the 'Verband Deutscher Windsurfing Schulen (VDWS)' which centred around the teaching of safe practice, without which closure of the sport in key venues may have occurred and the belief that instruction would lead to buying, and it did. The outcome was a sustainable infrastructure for the sport.

As a result of this initiative, the resulting schools sold the sport through instruction, so retailers did not need to convince buyers to purchase, as they would have already been persuaded through instruction. The business model was a complete success in offering instructional courses as part of a service-focused business.

'This decision encouraged young windsurfers to create windsurfing schools that popped up on every lake in Germany. I developed the simulator, which you still find in some places today, produced by

my father-in-law, who had ironworks. It would be much easier to develop the sport if I seperated instruction as a paid service from selling the product and have the person pay first for the service. At this time, we had two different people selling the Windsurfer®. We had well-established equipment retailers and garage dealers, with whom I wanted to get better organised and become more profes-sional. I had inherited the garage dealers from Calle.'

With the contract with TenCate signed for Germany, Brockhaus ensured the VDWS concept was implemented and invited seven retailers to develop a Windsurfer® marketing strategy centred upon his instruction-based approach. The VDWS was founded



Above: in contrast to many of the later managers in the windsurfing business **Peter Brockhaus** has always been a keen windsurfer from the beginning. This photo shows him on one of his early trips to the Bahamas sailing an original *Windsurfer*® reaching downwind with the old-fashioned wooden daggerboard halfway up.

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Left: the Simulator produced by **Brockhaus's** father in law. Some re-main in use today.

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CHAPTER 3

WINDSURFING HAWAII

PUSHING EARLY BOUNDARIES

*W*indsurfing Hawaii was an iconic early group of 4-9 riders, a group think-tank initially operating out of a garage in Kailua where no new technique or design modification was off the table. The genesis and impetus for experimentation originated from the experiences and thinking of two Vietnam Vets (Mike Horgan and Larry Stanley), anti-conformists of the creative kind, who sought to take the windsurfing concept on a journey of exploration from calm waters into the trade winds and surf of the Hawaiian islands.

Such was the group impact that a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researcher would later study them. She described their unique activities as different from conventional business wisdom since they developed equipment in a new sport outside of any existing manufacturer. She says, *Innovations were instead developed by [these] . . . lead users who built innovative equipment for themselves and . . . built businesses focused on producing it . . . to benefit from their innovations and establish a lifestyle around the sport.* (p.2, Shah, 2000). That is some impact, but how did this come about?



Above: Larry Stanley & Mike Horgan, co-founders of Windsurfing Hawaii

Their windsurfing and design exploits were spread worldwide through magazine coverage, posters and photos by Steve Wilkings, Ulli Seer, and John Speer, who showcased a new way of windsurfing to the world. In summary, they helped evolve the sport from regatta-centric to wave sailing-focused designs, manifested in high-wind daggerboards (Mike Horgan, Larry Stanley), scooped noses (Mike Horgan, Larry Stanley, Warren Aitken), the harness (Ken Kleid, Pat Love), full-window sails (Pat Love, Mike Horgan, Larry Stanley) and footstraps (Larry Stanley).

YET AGAIN: 1973

Like other significant developments, it all began in 1973 when Mike 'Thor' Horgan of California sailed one of the first Windsurfer® boards in Kailua Bay on the island of Oahu. He was 'Hooked' on the new sport and became the Windsurfer® distributor for Oahu, naming his business 'Windsurfing Hawaii'.

Stanley was living in Kailua on Omao Street, a block from the beach where he regularly surfed, when Mike Horgan first appeared, windsurfing in the shore break in 1973 on an unusual craft. *'I introduced myself and, without pleasantry or pause, inundated him with a hundred questions, which forged the beginnings of a lifelong friendship. Our BS radar was similarly tuned; we both had recently returned from military service in Vietnam, living on budgets that barely covered rent and food expenses. We had come to Hawaii intending to luxuriate in our oceanic passion until circumstances demanded otherwise. I offered to teach him how to surf if he would teach me how to windsurf.'*

So much was to come from their meeting. Two veterans collide in paradise, seeking to cleanse their lives via the warmth of Pacific winds and water and the distraction of learning new skills, and the rest is history for the contributions made to the sport. Larry recalls, *'On that day in Kailua, it became a day of revelation for me. Thor had me watch him for a few minutes and then gave me the rig, and we pushed it out until the daggerboard cleared. Side-shore north wind, 12-15 knots, pretty flat in that part of the Bay. Thor says it took me an hour to go straight out a half mile toward Birdshit Rock and back; I remember 30 minutes, but he's probably right. I remember getting onto the plane during that first run; it was instant hookage!'* This very description here is the inspiration for the title of this book.

'Within a week, I was totally immersed in the exhilaration of windsurfing and the beginnings of a lifelong friendship. Thor's roommate, Andy Chaffee, was a University of Hawaii student and semi-pro tennis player whom Thor had also hooked. Thor and I sailed every day from the shorebreak at Pilipu Street, a short jog from my house and right in front of his rental, to the Kailua boat ramp, a mile and a half each way, frequently accompanied by Chaffee.'

We spent most of the day encouraging the locals and tourists to try windsurfing in the hopes of getting some sales for Thor. It was slow going at first, not altogether unexpected, but it wasn't depressing because, when business was slow, we got to explore the wonders of Kailua Bay: sandbars and reef passes and shore breaks.

Thor sold only a few Windsurfers the first year, so he joined me working in Lanikai as a carpenter for a custom home contractor.



Above: 1975 Kailua Bay. From left **Pat Love** (white sail), **Larry Stanley** (red) and **Dennis Davidson** (blue) testing themselves during a small craft advisory i.e., storm.

.....
'I REMEMBER GETTING ONTO THE PLANE DURING THAT FIRST RUN; IT WAS INSTANT HOOKAGE!'





After a few months, we were fortunate to connect with a new contractor in Lanikai who lived on the beach a half mile south of the boat ramp. Dave Purington was a great person and boss in every way, but we appreciated him letting us keep our carpentry tools and work clothes at his house so we could sail to and from work. Half the commute was in the exposed waters of Kailua Bay, and the other half was inside the barrier reef [see picture on the right]. When so inclined, we'd rise early, rig and sail two miles to Dave's house, work our eight hours, sail back to the boat ramp to pitch quick passes at the tourists and locals if it seemed worth it, and then play in the Bay on the way home if conditions were 'cooking'. Our time on the water was enormous.

Soon Mike Horgan, Larry Stanley, and Andy Chaffee, as good as lived together in the Kailua house and were later joined by sailmaker Pat Love (California) and Ken Kleid (California). Dennis Davidson (Kailua), John Speer (Kailua via the US Navy), Colin Perry (Kailua) and Hugh England were also part of the scene but did not live with the

group and let's not forget the family Naish also lived close by seeing all the innovations first-hand. Into this mix would be Nalani Heen Stanley, whom Larry would marry, a poster Queen of the sport at that time.

To quote the Windsurfing Hall of Fame, 'This group of vagabonds that looked like something from an episode of *'Survivors'*, [some] lived in the same house a block from Kailua Beach.' Every day was an adventure trying to sail the Windsurfer® in the wind and waves of Kailua Bay. It wasn't designed for that, so they set about modifying the various parts of the board and rig to make it so.



Left: The 'Hawaii Vagabonds' at the Open Class Worlds in Jamaica 1977

From left to right (standing) : Rick Naish, Dennis Davidson, Pat Love (sitting) Robby Naish, Dave Foy, Larry Stanley (sitting)



Above: Larry Stanley in the shore break at Kailua. Larry recalls: '...we could sail to and from work. Half the commute was in the exposed waters of Kailua Bay, and the other half was inside the barrier reef.' The scooped nose of his modified Windsurfer® is very visible (1975/6).

In late 1974, Stanley and two friends, Ken Kleid and Tom Marciel, bought Windsurfing Hawaii from Horgan. When Pat Love joined the crew, his creativity and sewing ability added a new dimension to the design talents of the group. The MIT researcher explains the next stage. 'As people who saw or heard about their advanced sailing techniques and equipment asked to purchase the equipment, they made and sold hand-made copies of their innovations from their house for the next two years.' (p.11, Shah, 2000)

In time, the photos of their exploits created international media coverage, including articles in major magazines and book covers; the coverage opened the eyes of the world to what was happening in Kailua. As a result, hordes of mainlanders and Europeans descended on Kailua beach to visit this growing Mecca of the sport and demand for their products grew.

'HORDES OF MAINLANDERS AND EUROPEANS DESCENDED ON KAILUA BEACH TO VISIT THE GROWING MECCA OF THE SPORT'



CHAPTER 11

I SAIL FOR SMILE...

1973 - 1983

CULTURAL SHIFTS IN WINDSURFING



Once asked a French windsurfing friend on the first day we met, *'Do you compete'* his reply was, *'No, I sail for smile.'* By the late 70s, this playfulness was becoming more embedded in those who often gained satisfaction and meaning from racing and its social scene. Playful windsurfing meant perfecting new moves or seeing the sport's potential for play in the waves. For many new windsurfers their recreational time was a means to be free from the restraint of rules and regulations compared to many who used competition to shape the rhythm of their sport, which sometimes included travelling to experience new race venues. Of course, some people did both, but it begins to illuminate some core differences between participants in the first decade of the sport. These different perspectives perhaps shaped Mistral more than other brands.

The evolution towards high wind sailing could be said to have commenced in 1977 partly due to the efforts of those at Windsurfing Hawaii in developing existing equipment. The challenge of mastering new wind and wave conditions soon became conflated with 'fun', and the 'funboard' term emerged. The more wind you could handle, and if combined with waves, all the better. Equipment and rider skills were the limiting factor, but it was clear that skill levels and aspirations were now overtaking the performance levels that conventional longboards offered. A range of changes spread beyond Hawaii's beaches to allow the sport to develop further, which inevitably happened, but not without some aggravation.

SAILING; BUT NOT AS THE WORLD KNEW IT

In 1979, US instructor Glenn Taylor published an influential book called *'Wherever there's water and wind: A complete guide to the sport of Windsurfing'*. Windsurfer® endorsed it. The contents are a fascinating historical record of that time and include 'Why Race?' and 'Regattas for Windsurfers', including descriptions of typical competition formats; the *Olympic course*, *slalom*, formation sailing, buoy ball, tag and *freestyle*. Note that there is no mention of waves or speed. Only the formats in italics lasted until today. One-Design racing was aligned to sailing in its rules and conventions, but as you can see, there were attempts to offer something distinctly different to sailing, but the prestige was al-



Above: the 1979 Engadin Surf Marathon (Switzerland) showing the European boom in action. **Robby Naish** won this race against 300 competitors after his visit to Sardinia in 1979 (see Chapters 1 and 2); in 1981, it was won by **Charly Messmer**. Mistral dominated in Germany, Austria and Switzerland but this image also shows other brands – *Alpha, HiFly, Sailboard, Tornado, Windsurfer, Windglider*. The Engadinwind, as it is now called, is the longest running annual windsurfing competition in the world.

CHAPTER 15

RAPID EVOLUTION

Co-written by Steve West and Ben Oakley

WINDSURFING'S OVER-DEVELOPMENT BITES BACK

The story of windsurfing was crafted by magazine editors demanding intense imagery and stories, fed through the lenses of photo-hogs and eager type-writers. Aspirational pipe dream images would in part, fuel the recreational element to death. Between 1968 and 1998, windsurfing's popularity grew in an organic, analog manner, over 30 years via the windsurfing press. When Google was founded in 1998 and YouTube in 2005 the digital age of marketing had arrived, expediting the sharing of information. It was a design, production and technology 'arms

race' towards faster, lighter, stiffer and stronger performance equipment. The big question we try to unravel in this chapter, is when an equipment-based sport like windsurfing experiences a rapid evolution, how does this impact end-users; the buying public?



Above: '...stand up paddleboarding is the singular fastest accelerated sport of our time.'

Mistral Vortex SUP race boards in Tahiti designed by **Steve West**, shaped by **Chris 'Bro' Diplock**.

PADDLE BOARDING COMPARISON

In more recent times and by comparison, stand up paddle boarding (SUP) gained traction around 2005 and has been exclusively digitally driven in the absence of print-based magazines, except for a few latecomers. The

consequences of a digitally disseminated sport has led to a 'sound-byte' generation of supposedly arm-chair experts. There are numerous participant experts and every other one after that, a coach or instructor with a van full of paddle boards at the ready to monetise their so called knowledge.

Because SUP was largely taken up by windsurfing companies; Naish, Fanatic, Mistral, Starboard and others, these brands adopted a highly conservative approach in avoiding too much evolution and technology on account of their past experiences.

'...stand up paddleboarding is the singular fastest accelerated [water] sport of our time, largely because of the intervention of the windsurfing industry (and the internet) who need this to work for the sake of their own survival. If the sport is going to be goose-marched down the path of extremes, promoted and portrayed as a surf sport as a consequence of the media and magazines, led by editors controlling content and photo editors promoting imagery which serves to alienate the elderly, women or children's involvement, then SUP will be a dead sport floating' (West, Stand Up Paddle, A Paddler's Guide, 2012).





CABRINHA

CHAPTER 16

CHOCOLATE AND MORE

1991 - 2003

FROM
JACOBS
TO
BOARDS & MORE



Above: Florian Brunner
Mistral Manager from
1996 to 2000

Left: 'Solo Maalaea'
art by Pete Cabrinha

The average windsurfer may not care who the brand owners were or are, but looking at the challenges of the 1990s, reveals a lot during this decade of change. Windsurfing Hawaii, Naish and F2 all had their upheavals during this period, but for Mistral, as you will see, it was a bumpy ride. Adia had owned them since 1981, a mainly staffing and recruitment empire, and Mistral just a sideshow. Then in 1991, Klaus Jacobs, the former chocolate and coffee mogul, acquired a controlling stake in Adia and became Chairman. Adia was in financial strife due to the deepening recession during the early 90s and would have to approach their shareholders in 1993 for additional funding, the second time in a year. It was not long before Klaus Jacobs turned his attention to Mistral.

THE 1990s: A BUMPY RIDE

With the impact of a recession, Mistral's fall in sales from the 1980s continued. Part of their response was their diversification into snowboarding, with Charly Messmer managing this area. Eventually, in 1996, Jacobs sold Adia to French part-time employment giant ECCO (to form ADECCO), but Mistral was an unwelcome complication which did not fit, and it remained with Jacobs. Consequently, Jacobs was left with Mistral to manage. Meanwhile, according to Bilanz (1999), Mistral lost SFr5 to 10 million yearly on SFr40 to 50 million in sales. Although Jacobs invested 20 million francs in bringing stability to the company, attempts to sell it raised offers amounting to no more than 2 million francs. *'Mistral was in a state of disrepair when we got it out of Adia'* [in 1996], announced Jacobs. Incredibly there was talk in 1992 of Mistral merging with Adidas, but negotiations failed and with figures like this, no small wonder.

Inside the Mistral brochure for 1996, they had the largest ever range of boards in their history. There were astonishingly 19 different boards, incorporating 13 construction options. The problems for Mistral started to mount. It was later reported in the financial press Mistral was *'... expected to lose SFr2.6 million for the year ending August 1996'*. Things needed to change to help the brand survive.





CHAPTER 17

OLYMPIC CHOICES

Co-written by
Steve West and Ben Oakley

CONTENTIOUS OLYMPIC DECISIONS

In 1981, I won my first cash prize at the Bacardi World Cup (UK). It was a lot for a young windsurfing junky; I was informed, *'If you want to try out for the Olympics, you must surrender the money to a trust fund; otherwise, you will be branded a professional and unable to be considered.'* That's how things were back then. Being a wave sailor at heart, I grabbed the cheque, called my travel agent and headed for Australia, not to return.

In the grand scheme of things, to what extent do the Olympics represent the pinnacle of competition for all sports? *'Not always'* is the short answer, as much as the IOC would like you to think differently. Wimbledon (tennis), USA/UK Open (golf), the Eddie Aikau Big Wave Invitational (surfing), and the PWA Tour are often *'the'* events to win. The contentious issue for windsurfing is represented by a single competition format and a one-board, one-rig choice within a constantly evolving sport. Imagine trying to select one electric car model to be used for a global e-competition in 4 years. The evolution of these cars is rapid, and hydrogen cars may rise to prominence. Likewise, for windsurfing, 1973 – 2003 is a long time span. It's not easy, and there are difficult choices. We've already discussed some early Olympic decisions (1984-92) in Chapter 9, so we pick this up from 1996 onwards.



Above: Alessandra Sensini - the most successful female Olympic windsurfer winning one Gold in Sydney (2000) and two Bronze Medals in Savannah/Atlanta (1996) and in Athens (2004) on the Mistral One Design. She won another Silver Medal in Qingdao/Beijing (2008) on the RS:X.

I have a different perspective from that of my editor, Ben. While I hold the belief those in the 1980s who lived for the monotony of sailing around a triangular course governed by rules were not truly *'free-spirited'* riders, Ben is an advocate of the Olympic ideal, having coached at three Olympic venues: Pusan (Korea), Barcelona (Spain) and Savannah (USA). Ben states, *'You must consider the limitations of what you can stage at Olympic sailing venues'*. My point has more to do with the efficacy of the Olympics in relation to the big picture of the spirit of windsurfing when it serves to constrain, suffocate and govern.

What follows then is a distinct chapter from others since his and my responses to Olympic matters differ, though not so different, I believe, as he may think. Overall, should the sport focus on presenting itself as a TV-friendly event or making it accessible to as





CHAPTER 18

REBUILDING THE BRAND

MISTRAL'S RETURN TO THE WATER

It's easy to read between the lines how a premium windsurfing brand ended up on the metaphorical rubbish heap when shelved in 2007 by Swiss-based owners, Airesis operating as Boards & More (Munich, Germany). Following several setbacks, including losing IMOD as the Olympic board, they would sell while residual equity remained in the name. Each successive owner put in less; meanwhile, the sun had set on the sport's popularity. How Mistral became a viable going concern once again would be centred initially around a strategy of licensing and then both licensing and manufacturing of hardware.



Above: Ado Huisman

Ado Huisman, familiar with Mistral as part of the management in the 1980s, was contacted regarding purchasing. Huisman took on the Mistral license for sportswear Europe. Within a few years, Huisman and Boards & More negotiated the purchase of Mistral and, in 2009, reached an agreement. Huisman purchased the brand, and B&M retained a 49% shareholder stake. A few months later, Peter Van Merksteijn joined forces with Huisman to complete outright ownership, creating Mistral International BV in the Eastern Netherlands based on a 50/50 ownership.

Huisman had recommended Mistral separate their commercial activities through licensing in the late 1980s, a modus operandi successfully implemented and negotiated with Gaastra when he approached them for a licensing agreement creating a separate apparel line from Gaastra sails. Semi-retired after building it up and selling, he was restless. With a fondness and nostalgia for Mistral, Huisman recognised an opportunity to acquire the brand with a vision to restructure and nurture the remaining equity from its past.

Huisman recalls, 'By 2009, Mistral had gone into free-fall, beginning in the 1990s. Boards & More should have given more attention to the brand since 2000. Mistral was dormant, and there was no further planned investment. A Japanese licensee had winter clothing and two Argentine licensees, streetwear and watches; all three had no connection with watersports and were ignored. Club Mistral existed but had almost no Mistral equipment and now used Fanatic. After my successful period with my companies X-Tend BV, Gaastra, Craft and Rossignol, I was ready for something new. My first love Mistral had sunk so low that it was a thorn in my side.' Fanatic equipment, owned

Left: 'Windy Palm'
art by Pete Cabrinha





CHAPTER 19

HOOKED...

Co-written by
Steve West and Ben Oakley



BLAST FROM THE PAST

Many interviewed in this book have iterated they, ‘were hooked’ or words to that effect from their very first windsurfing experience. Windsurfing sage, Larry Stanley, expressed it best, ‘I remember getting onto the plane on my first run; It was instant hookage!’ ...the inspiration for the name of this book. Of course, that capacity to bring about that hooked feeling must still exist unless modern life has numbed subsequent generations, which may be close to the truth when you acknowledge how over-stimulated we have become on the one hand and so apathetic on the other. Or is it that we’ve simply too much choice today?

The past fifteen years in the watersports industry have been tumultuous. New activities such as stand-up paddle boarding and that ultimate spoiler, the boom in foiling, have served to impact windsurfing at the precise moment kitesurfing was coming off the boil, and windsurfing might find meaningful traction once again. Surfing, wingfoiling and skateboarding are currently enjoying a surge of growth; everywhere you look, you’re spoilt for choice; not so back in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s, windsurfing was indeed an epiphany, something uniquely different, it stood alone. To be truly hooked requires a degree of obsessiveness, to embrace something as a lifestyle, not just a casual thing, nor even a weekend thing, somewhat more akin to a marriage. You invest heavily both emotionally and financially; ultimately, separation becomes problematic; meanwhile, you may go through an actual divorce because of too much water time and not enough devoted to important human relationships. You may end up living out of your VW Transporter, sleeping amongst your wetsuits, fins, foils and boards, wondering where it all went wrong.

So what was the essence of windsurfing, setting it apart from other activities and experiences to create this emotive reaction? For one thing, it connected with the bohemian lifestyle of all that surfing culture had previously created, and years later, stand-up paddleboarding fed off this very same energy. Everyone, so it seems, wants to connect with the romantic, hedonistic aura that surfing portrays. Those in marketing know this and milk it for all its worth; all paths lead back to the purity of surfing, even urban sports such as skateboarding and winter sports such as

Windsurfing's Untold Stories

How did windsurfing develop, and who were the individuals behind the genesis of some leading brands? Further, to what extent has the sport influenced the development of other board sports? To answer these questions, researcher Steve West has combined interviews with Mistral, F2, Naish and Windsurfing Hawaii pioneers and broader research to provide fascinating untold stories from the sport over 50 years.

The sport's evolutionary journey goes far beyond the equipment and on-water technique advances. It explores how the boom years of windsurfing were uniquely influenced by culture, image, competitive drive and a Hawaiian catalyst. The iconic images of Ulli Seer, Mistral's principal photographer for some twenty years and other leading photographers of the time show the sport's progression through the decades from basic wooden booms to carbon-enhanced performance.

Mistral's ups and downs throughout the book, by way of example, include the impact of six different owners (1976 to 2022), tensions between individuals and how a brand can survive through the highs and lows. This engaging visual and anecdotal book told through personal stories may remind you of your own personal journey in the sport. **HOOKED!** might entice you to wash the dust from your old board in the garage and hit the water again.

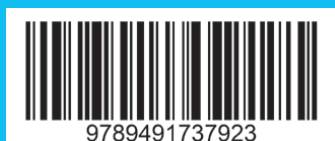
"Hooked is a vibrant and colorful look into the most profound era in Windsurfing. The worldwide windsurf community, with its tight knit friendships, visionaries, and spectacular action, propelled this rapidly growing movement into one of the most dynamic water sports of all time. This book beautifully captures the essence of Windsurfing's greatest time and how the sport developed since then".

**Pete Cabrinha, artist and designer,
World Wave Champion 1985**

Wow! "Steve - What a fine job you've done putting my scattered thoughts and anecdotes into order. I thank you for the effort and for not trying to rewrite history."

Larry Stanley, founder of Windsurfing Hawaii and windsurfing innovator

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