

**CRASH AND LEARN****Our two Vector test pilots take their first spin in the high-performance skiff**

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By Peter Beardsley and Francis Shiman-Hackett

Skiff sailing took center stage at the Sydney Olympics; the speedy 49ers were the most popular class with spectators and television crews. But while many Americans now know what a skiff looks like, few have ever sailed one. Vanguard is hoping the Vector, a 2001 Sailing World Boat of the Year winner, will bring the challenge and excitement of skiff sailing to the American public. For a first-hand view of what it's like to sail the Vector and the growth of this fledgling class, Sailing World assigned Peter Beardsley and Francis Shiman-Hackett to learn to sail and race the boat. They'll file regular internet reports and wrap up their experiences in a spring 2002 magazine feature.

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Vector Demo Day

Third Beach, Middletown, R.I.

Francis

We arrived at Third Beach at 9:45 a.m. on Saturday morning, the air was approaching 60 degrees with the sky promising a sunny spring day. Rigging the boat was unexpectedly easy. The launching system for the chute looked complicated, but the entire system led to a single line that made the set almost automatic. Still on the beach, we brought the boat head to wind to hoist the mainsail. Even on the dolly the boat was as unstable as the guys from Vanguard had warned. While the maximum beam of the boat is around six feet, the waterline beam is narrow enough that the boats fit comfortably on the International Canoe dollies we were using. Once in the water, Peter fought to keep the boat upright while I climbed aboard and put the rudder and daggerboard into place. The breeze was directly offshore. Peter turned the boat to a beam reach and climbed aboard. As I bore off to a run we immediately heeled the windward wing into the water and then went rolling off downwind, fighting to stay upright in eight knots of breeze.

For the first half of the day the breeze stayed around eight knots, which was great as we couldn't have handled much more pressure. The learning curve on the boat was incredibly steep. The lack of hard chines helped speed in displacement mode significantly and made the transition to planing almost imperceptible. The tradeoff is initial stability—there is none. The cockpit is raised and open at the transom, which worked very well as we never had water in the cockpit for more than a few seconds.

I grew up sailing and racing FJs and Club 420s, and had mastered the basic handling of that type of doublehanded dingy. But I learned more about the mechanics of sailing in my first day on the Vector than I had in the past two years of collegiate dinghy racing. The little mistakes I hadn't even realized I was making became glaringly obvious. An overtrimmed mainsail that would have only slowed my 420 down by a fraction of a knot was suddenly cause for a capsized.

The helm felt very heavy for the first few hours until I realized that much of this was due to the incredible feedback a skipper gets from the helm. The helm will tell you if the boat isn't perfectly flat long before you can actually notice it. This feedback is necessary when you fly the asymmetrical spinnaker. To keep the boat upright going downwind was the hardest part at first. Once I had figured the helm out better I began jibing downwind through 30 degrees, heading up drastically in lulls and bearing off hard in the puffs. As I became more used to the reaction of the rig to changes in wind, the arc I was steering downwind became slightly smaller. The wind in the morning was barely strong enough to have Peter out on the wire, so I didn't get much of a chance to helm from the wire. This was OK, though, as I needed the practice without the trap anyway.

Peter

When we pulled into the parking lot at Third Beach, all I could see was the Vector's stern—from that angle it looked like a normal boat, albeit a fast one, with its completely open transom and fairly tall rig. It was definitely different than the Collegiate 420s and FJs I'd been sailing the past four years, but I did not fully appreciate those differences until I made closer inspection. From the bow, the Vector resembles a bumblebee, with its narrow stinger of a bow, which opens into a fat, curvaceous cockpit. While there are nuances in the boat's rigging, it was nothing that seemed too surprising, and we were ready to launch the boat in fairly short order.

Launching a boat should be simple, right? We had already been warned by Dave Kirkpatrick from Vanguard to keep a steady grip on the boat, as any puff could grab the wings of the boat and make it more ornery than a bucking bronco. This was not an issue in the light morning breeze though, so we naively jumped on board. As soon as we did this the Vector started wildly pitching from side to side, the fine v-shaped bow carving large turns to the amusement of the few spectators on the beach. It was then I realized that anything I thought I'd learned about sailing this boat from the online tuning guide had to go out the window for the time being.

The first hour was spent getting comfortable in the boat and with our boathandling. In light air, the skiff was a bit uncomfortable, with neither Francis



Stuart Streuli

**PETER BEARDSLEY AND FRANCIS SHIMAN-HACKETT**

nor I able to get out on the trapeze to stretch our legs. However, setting the spinnaker was extremely easy. Pulling the reverse 2-to-1 halyard also launched the sprit and helped ease the mainsheet. Now the boat was happy, and the hull began that now-familiar hum in only seven knots of breeze. This was fun! Francis and I took turns on the trap, as there was not enough wind to support us both—attempts to do so resulted in an immediate capsize to windward. Our speed did not seem to be too bad compared to the other four Vectors sailing around, though no one was trying to race, and in retrospect, our downwind angles were too high.

After lunch, Francis and I returned to the water, this time with more breeze to play with, enough to keep us both trapping. Our boathandling still left much to be desired—double-trapping efforts downwind still resulted in near immediate capsize. (We later learned that the skipper should be the first one on the wire downwind if we knew both of us would soon be out there.) With nearly 400 square feet of sail downwind, the Vector was blazing fast on the reaches. Our upwind sailing was another story. While we seemed to be moving OK, these assumptions were quickly erased after some two-boat testing with Dave Kirkpatrick. While our speed was even, we were losing oodles of height, which we quickly learned was due to our fear of sailing the boat flat. I never thought of it as a fear, but after some thought, I realized that's what it was. The Vector is a very sensitive boat, or, at least, more sensitive a boat than Francis and I were used to. The slightest changes in wind velocity produced significant changes in hull trim—and with two people on the wire, not recognizing a lull resulted in a windward capsize. To compensate, we had been sailing with slight leeward heel, which was more comfortable for us as Vector novices, but extremely slow. The next few times we hit the water, we will need to become comfortable with sailing the boat flat.

For more on the Vector, log on to [www.teamvanguard.com](http://www.teamvanguard.com)

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