

CRASH AND LEARN

SW's Vector test pilots take on the North Americans and surprise themselves.

October 29, 2001

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.

Oct. 6-7

Planing Home

Peter

After over four months of training, the moment of truth had arrived, the inaugural Vector North American Championship. Francis and I had been anxiously awaiting this regatta since the disappointing second day of the Newport Unlimited. We were curious to see how much we had improved in the interim.



Norm Grant

PETER BEARDSLEY (LEFT) AND FRANCIS SHIMAN-HACKETT EN ROUTE TO A SECOND PLACE FINISH AT THE INAUGURAL VECTOR NORTH AMERICANS

Due to the terrorist attacks on Sept. 11, racing was postponed for two weeks. This change had some unintended consequences. While the original weekend, Sept. 22 to 23, featured slightly warmer air temperatures and a light to moderate breeze, two weeks later we had a cold front sweeping through the area and packing 30 to 40 knot winds. Only six boats showed up for the regatta—part of this might have had something to do with the date change—but the fleet was competitive. Former U.S. Sailing Team member Tracy Hayley Smith and her husband had been sailing the Vector all summer. Also in the fleet was Vanguard one-design rep Dave Kirkpatrick, a former member of the Tufts sailing team. A strong team of Polish 49er sailors were the mystery guests. They hadn't been in the boat before, but they had plenty of skiff experience. On Saturday, discretion proved to be the better part of valor, and racing was cancelled by 11 a.m. After lunch, we returned to Sandy Point in Portsmouth, R.I., to check on the boat, and noticed that the northerly breeze that followed the front had moderated to 15 to 20 knots, sane enough for some practice. We headed out for an hour to survey the racing area. Knowing that the forecast called for another northerly on Sunday, we tried to study how the land would affect our strategy—the Sakonnet River is open to the south, but a point of land jutted out into the racing area to the north, causing the wind to be extremely shifty, and drastically reducing the time we had to pick up and react to puffs. We hoped that the race committee would somehow find a way to not bury the windward mark underneath the shore, as anticipating gusts is half the battle in the Vector in windy conditions. While no boat enjoys sailing blindly into a 30-degree header and a velocity change, having both skipper and crew on the trapeze when said shift occurs often results in an instant capsize to windward. On the whole, the practice time was valuable, and reaffirmed our confidence in our boathandling.

Sunday greeted us with sunnier skies, but the same shifty, gusty northerly. From shore, the wind did not look too strong, so we raked the mast forward. However, as the race committee was setting the course, the breeze began to build, leaving us with lulls of 12 to 15 knots, and gusts well over 25. We knew the boat would be easier to handle if we could rake the mast aft in the puffy conditions, but decided to remain on the water and stick it out rather than sail in to quickly change the rig. In fact, in the first race, our problems had less to do with tuning than tactics—our boat-end start proved slow and boats starting toward the pin were able to foot out for speed and sail in the lifts along the shore. We opted to go to the right side of the course to get away from the land, and although we sailed in steadier breeze (and were not as vulnerable to capsize), we had to come back on a monster header that ultimately negated any gain from the increased stability. Still, we managed to finish fourth in the tight fleet.

The wind continued to build as the second race began. Learning from race one, we headed left and quickly bounced in and out on the wire to cope with the 15 knot differential between the gusts and lulls. We rounded the windward mark a boatlength behind the leaders, Vector novices (but skiff veterans) Mike Marzynski and Sebastian Zarzeczanski-Rozanski. A sloppy downwind leg cost us a boat, but featured our smoothest leeward mark rounding to date, we went from a full plane under spinnaker four boatlengths from the mark to a quick douse, and then hopped right back on the wire to trim in and plane upwind, nearly grazing the mark with our lifejackets. Normally we would have given a high-five, but Francis had his hands full with the main and tiller. Not having sailed together in wind this consistently strong, our boathandling was not as crisp upwind as we would've liked. Halfway through our training program, I began to trim the main upwind so Francis could focus on driving. However, nearly all of that practice had been in 10 knots of breeze or less, and in the puffy conditions, Francis preferred to trim the main to keep the boat on its feet, something that would not have been necessary with more practice. We stayed upright long enough to cross the line in third place.

By race three, the wind began to take its toll on the fleet, and Francis and I were glad that we had stretched before heading out. We locked horns with Mike and Sebastian all race, though our match race ended as we flipped on a jibe downwind. Still, a second place was our best finish in the boat all season, and we were excited, though tired. While the Vector is forgiving of mistakes (it doesn't break when you crash), it was still grueling to sail in big wind, and I trimmed the main between races to give Francis a break. Thankfully, we had purchased thicker spinnaker sheets and heavier ratchet

blocks the previous day to save my hands downwind. By the fourth race, we were just trying to get around the course, capsizing several times due to fatigue, and we limped across the line for another third. Mercifully, the race committee called it a day at that point.

At the makeshift awards ceremony (with the fleet sitting on trailers, dollies, and the backs of their cars), Francis and I were awarded second overall in the battle of attrition. Apart from Mike and Sebastian, we were the only boat to finish every race. As I left the Vector for the final time, to drive into the teeth of New York-bound traffic, I wondered if it would've gotten me home just as fast.

The Victors

Francis



Norm Grant

2001 VECTOR NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPIONS MIKE MARZYNSKI AND SEBASTIAN ZARZECZANSKI-ROZANSKI

For a couple of class rookies, Michael Marzynski and Sebastian Zarzeczanski-Rozanski did fairly well at the Vector North Americans. While they'd never sailed the Vector before, the duo relied on their experience, including a lot of 49er sailing, to win the event.

Michael raced on the Polish National Team in the 470 class, and, after moving to the United States, raced One Design 14s and, most recently, 49ers. He raced 49ers out of Newport for the past three seasons, but is now looking for another class as 49er activity has become more concentrated on the West Coast.

Sebastian, Michael's crew for this regatta, was on the Polish national team in the Europe class, and has raced Lasers extensively. Prior to the Vector NAs, Sebastian crewed for Michael on the 49er a few times.

Tactically the Polish duo sailed very conservatively, focusing more on keeping in control. In the heavy conditions, Michael found the boat more difficult to sail than a 49er, due mostly to its stiff mast and lack of hard chines. While these did make the boat more difficult to control in the survival conditions, Michael

noted that, off the wind, simply coming in off of the trapeze with the rig loaded in similar conditions in a 49er would have caused the mast to break.

Michael hopes to find sponsorship to pursue an Olympic campaign in the 49er, but while he still has his day job in Connecticut, he hopes to be racing Vectors in New England.

For more on the Vector, log on to www.teamvanguard.com

© World Publications, LLC