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VICEM 107

The Art of Cold Molding | El Arte del Moldeado en Frío

PERSHING 82

Class and Sporting Spirit | Clase y Espiritu Deportivo

AZIMUT ATLANTIS 50

Double (R)evolution | Doble (R)evolución



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The Future of Racing is Here - A look back at the 34th America's Cup Race.

By/Por Nancy Birnbaum

You may have heard... team Oracle USA beat the Kiwis (team Emirates) after an astounding comeback, winning 11 races to New Zealand's 8 in the 34th America's Cup. Though they've called it "the greatest comeback in sports history," the press has had some negative responses to Oracle's victory along with a sea of speculation. The longest-running international sports event in the world has always proven to be a tough nut to crack. And in the end, team Captain, Jimmy Spithill steered Oracle's 72-foot catamaran across the finish line in the final winner-take-all Race 19 on San Francisco Bay just 44 seconds ahead of Emirates team New Zealand. It was not without some controversy and hot debate over what was behind the sudden jump in speed and handling beginning with Race 11. The speculation centered on some special device that allowed the catamaran to foil more effectively. Rumors floated in the Kiwi press that team Oracle had sent to New Zealand for a new 'Stability Augmentation System' (SAS) nicknamed "Herbie", similar to those used on aircraft. They speculated that Oracle founder, billionaire Larry Ellison, had spent a couple of million dollars on such a system and had sent 10 Kiwi boatbuilders back to San Francisco to install it. Oracle Team USA general manager Grant Simmer told Sailing World, "We made no changes in that regard." And, "The only people who came from Core Composites were a couple of managers who were always coming to see the event. We didn't increase our workforce at all during the Cup." But what exactly did cause the Oracle boat to suddenly surge ahead mid-regatta? According to Yachting World's Matthew Sheahan, there were a number of modifications



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to Spithill's machine – the biggest being to the T-foils on Oracle's rudders. "This was one of the biggest performance enhancing changes," said Sheahan. Other improvements included raking the mast further aft to improve her balance, and removing the bowsprit for more breezy days on the racecourse.

Yet Simmers' disagrees. "There was nothing that we physically did—no physical changes—it was just technique changes that improved our tacking." Depending on whom you asked, fans and spectators alike agreed that the spectacle was worth watching. The Kiwis came in droves to San Francisco's America's Cup Park and those watching the fantastic television coverage on Oracles' YouTube Channel, were all enthusiastic supporters. A common theme resulted from my rather unscientific random polling of the spectators – a simple request to return the America's Cup back to the realm of the average sailor. Perhaps racing the new high-tech catamarans, while admittedly fun to watch, are just a little bit beyond the reach of most sailors. Though most likely, the sport will continue to evolve along with the available technology and there's not much we average sailors can do about that. It's still up to the guys with the most money to spend. Like Bob Oatley, for example...

The Next Cup

Look for the 35th America's Cup to be held in 2017 with Australia's Hamilton Island Yacht Club as the official Challenger of Record. So far, a few key personnel have already been put in place including Olympic gold medalist Tom Slingsby who served as strategist on the Oracle Team USA boat. Slingsby has already been in discussions with Sandy Oatley who, with his billionaire father, winemaker Bob Oatley, is heading up the Australian challenge. What they will be sailing on is anyone's guess. ■



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