



Mark Upton-Brown, Ian Mitchell: 505

For Upton-Brown and Mitchell, winning the 2006 505 Worlds was all about keeping their cool. From our October 2006 issue.

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By Jesse Falsone

When two teams are sailing extremely well in a series, each race result is crucial. Such was the case at the 2006 CSC International 505 Worlds, in Hayling Island, England, where Mark Upton-Brown and Ian Mitchell, of England, won their second 505 world title by edging Americans Howie Hamlin and Jeff Nelson in the final race of the series.

Upton-Brown and Mitchell's winning formula in this very competitive fleet might be described as a careful assessment of risk. In keeping with the theory that big risks can also reap big rewards, it is telling that Upton-Brown and Mitchell didn't win a single race in either of their winning world championship efforts (the first being in Gilleleje, Denmark, in 1997). Rather, this team was masterful at stringing together a consistent series devoid of big mistakes, winning in 1997 by a scant 0.3 points (under the old bonus-point scoring system) and by 2 points this year. Mitchell hypothesizes that "with low-point scoring, there is not much reward for winning races, whereas a couple of poor results can be disastrous."

Poor individual race results haunted numerous would-be contenders, and with a shortened series and only one discard, only two teams proved to be consistent enough to have a chance at victory.

The Pre-Worlds regatta provided Upton-Brown and Mitchell with an excellent indication of who the top contenders would be during the world championship, and they used this knowledge to their advantage at the Worlds. "The conditions at Hayling were varied and sometimes very tricky," says Mitchell, "so we tried to sail conservatively and keep the initiative by not having to rely on using our discard. We took calculated risks, but wherever possible, we made sure we knew where the other contenders were and what we needed to do to protect our overall lead."

Upton-Brown and Mitchell credit their daily race routine for putting them in the right competitive frame of mind. "At the championship we followed a bit of a routine for getting ready each day so that we didn't forget anything and kept stress levels low," says Mitchell. "We tried not to have too many big nights in the bar, which is an easy thing to do at the 505 Worlds. We also didn't dwell on mistakes that we had made the day before."

Upton-Brown and Mitchell took a self-proclaimed "professional approach" to running their campaign, which was compacted into three months of intensive training, and with a great deal more focus than they had given previous efforts. Mitchell elaborates: "We started our campaign around Easter and tried to do everything as well as we could the first time around. This meant sourcing the current winning kit [an all-carbon Rondar hull, Holger Jess Foils, Superspar M2 Mast, and sails from Bojsen-Moller and Pinnell & Bax]. We endeavored to make small improvements rather than undertaking a full development program as we were very short on time. We did the campaign for fun but always tried to sail and train as if we were racing, and to improve on any weaknesses that we found as quickly as possible. Whenever we made a mistake in training we tried hard not to repeat the error." Upton-Brown adds, "We covered all aspects and tried to be truly objective about each, including the equipment, weather data, local wind and current effects, and personal preparation like weight, fitness, attitude, and team development."

While the pair took a hiatus from the class from 2001 until 2006, the 505 continued to evolve. This evolution was most evident with foils and spinnakers. High-aspect foils were going through rapid

development during this time, especially among American teams that increasingly tested ever-smaller gibing centerboards and very high-aspect rudders. In fact, as far back as 1999, Upton-Brown suggests his low-aspect, non-gibing foils were outclassed in anything under 12 knots of wind. The change in the spinnaker rules in 2002 allowing an effective 50 percent increase in area had a dramatic effect on downwind sailing performance, opening up more tactical options. Additionally, Mitchell felt that 505 sailing style has also changed; "Everyone now points very high upwind, which we found a struggle to match at first." However, the changes in downwind technique did not elude Upton-Brown, who has spent time sailing International 14s, a boat that always sails downwind at tighter angles in apparent wind or "wire-running" mode.

The championship was still undecided going into the final race, where a fickle westerly filled, and flirted with the sea breeze. Many top teams expected a left shift soon after the start, but to their dismay, a substantial right shift filled early on the first beat. Upton-Brown and Mitchell had gotten separated from Hamlin and Nelson after the start, the latter gaining an advantage on the right.

Rounding the first weather mark in 40th, well behind the Americans, Upton-Brown and Mitchell were looking down the barrel at defeat after leading for most of the series. However, the British team was unfazed, knowing full-well that more big shifts were in store as the sea breeze started to settle out. "There was too much to concentrate on to be concerned about where Howie was on the course," says Upton-Brown. "We could see Howie up ahead," adds Mitchell, "and we knew that he would move forward through the fleet, so we concentrated on doing the same."

Sensing a shift back to the left, Upton-Brown and Mitchell made a bold decision by rounding the right-hand leeward gate mark for a clear path and going left up the next beat. This was the decisive move, as they were able to gain valuable leverage on the fleet and close down the American's lead as the wind increased and backed. By the end of the race, Upton-Brown and Mitchell finished right behind Hamlin and Nelson to secure the championship.

The 505 World Championship perpetual trophy—affectionately known as "the Junk" (it's a metallic replica of a Chinese Junk)—is littered with the names of Americans. Hamlin's name is on the trophy more times than he probably cares to remember (about a half-dozen), but the 1999 world champion is more disappointed for his teammate, Jeff Nelson. "Jeff's tactics were really good," says Hamlin. "It would've been really cool for him to get a worlds win. I don't do the 'woulda, coulda, shoulda' thing anymore. We sailed a great regatta and could have just as easily won. Of course that is much easier to say once you have won a worlds!"

Nelson will have another crack at the title in only five short months when he teams again with Mike Martin for the 2007 SAP 505 Worlds in Adelaide, Australia. Martin won as a crew with Hamlin, and has since been on his own quest to win as a helmsman since 2000, finishing third in 2004 and second in 2005. Hamlin feels he owes it to Martin to help him succeed.

"Mike was responsible for our worlds win, so now it's my turn to help him and Jeff by being a good training partner. It's good to have a singular goal instead of conflicting ones." So, in Hamlin's opinion, what were the keys to Upton-Brown and Mitchell's win? "Nothing unique," says the affable Hamlin, "just solid boatspeed and tactics."

Upton-Brown, however, summarizes the win with one word: teamwork. "I am lucky," he says, "because I enjoy sailing with Ian. Teamwork is easier if you enjoy sailing together and know that you can depend on the other if necessary both on and off the water."

Ed.'s note: Falsone, crewing with Tyler Moore, won the opening race of the Worlds, but finished fourth overall in the 111-boat fleet, lower than they'd hoped for (they were second overall at the previous worlds), partly on account of a DNF in their scoreline.

Falsone explains: "We made an awesome move on the first run by wiring out to the left in a puff while the leaders were sitting DDW in the middle. We made a huge gain, but slightly overstood such that we were a little tight coming into the leeward mark on starboard. We crossed the path of the first few boats around the mark on port. In doing so, our kite snagged on someone's rigging and

tore in two.

By the time we realized it, we had already gone around the mark and couldn't ID who had fouled us. Judges saw the whole thing but could not protest on our behalf. So, since we couldn't identify the boat, no protest, no redress. They did let us measure in another kite though. Basically, that took us out of another top-10 finish and third overall, but that's how the cookie crumbles."