

A-CAT 2008 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BELMONT AUSTRALIA

Place	Skipper	Origin	Hull	Mast	Sail	Boards	Championship points
1	Glenn Ashby	AUS	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	8
2	Steve Brewin	AUS	Tool	Saarberg	Brewin	Straight Canted	26
3	Andrew Landenberger	AUS	Marstrom	Fiberfoam	Landenberger	Curved	35
4	Manuel Calavia	ESP	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	35
5	Bob Baier	GER	Nikita	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Curved	37
6	James Spithill	AUS	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	42
7	Luc Du Bois	SUI	Scheurer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Curved	42
8	Scott Anderson	AUS	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	45
9	Dave Brewer	AUS	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	48
10	Brad Collett	AUS	Flyer	Fiberfoam	Ashby	Straight Canted	53

After these windy worlds in Australia I am going to try to make a summary of the boats performances of the top 10 finishers. First: the wind conditions. We sailed Two races in light conditions (trapeze upwind and no flying downwind) so probably 7-9 knots TWS. All the 7 other races were sailed in more than 12 knots with sometimes wind in the 20 knots range (starting to be difficult to fly downwind). So overall I would call this championship a “breezy one”. This is also reflected in the fact that some heavy guys did OK. James Spithill, Dave Brewer and Brad Collet are all weighing in the 85 kg range. Steve Brewin was the lightest at around 72 kg.

Regarding the sea state it was flat.

Both Glenn Ashby and Steve Brewin were using their conventional equipment so they were perfect references regarding boats performances. If you look at Glenn the conclusion is always the same: in any wind condition he has the best speed of the fleet, but not any faster, and he makes the difference by never slowing down. He manoeuvres better than everybody, he adjusts to changing wind conditions before everybody and on top of it he keeps his eyes on the race courses and rarely misses the next wind shift. If you put all that together we are racing against almost the perfect sailor and that explains why he is unbeatable for the moment. Steve Brewin is not far behind but he is not consistently as fast as Glenn, especially upwind above 12 knots. He compensates a little bit downwind (Incredible speed) but it is not enough.

Nevertheless both Glenn and Steve didn't have to sail the last race of the championship so they were clearly ahead of the fleet. For me, the main conclusion is that the proof has been made again that standard equipment is still good enough to be world champion.

Having said that a lot of people had their eyes turned toward the curved boards. Following is an attempt to analyse the effects of curved boards. This will mainly reflect my personal point of view since I didn't compare too much my feelings with Bob or Landi. Thomas Paasch also has curved foils but the geometry is more like normal canted boards (distance between tips is approx 1.7 m). From a behaviour standpoint I have to say that I was expecting more differences with straight daggerboards. You start noticing some changes in the boat behaviour only at high speed. Upwind it means that you need more than 12 knots of TWS. What happens then

is that the boat becomes lighter to steer as the wind increases. It also seems that the pitching motion of the boat is less. The boat is quieter. From a performance point of view it doesn't make a noticeable difference initially but as the wind keeps increasing the feeling gets better and better and by the time the wind reaches the 20 knots mark you definitely have a very light boat in your hands. You also need to move your weight forward to keep the bow close to the water. We did only one entire race with 20 knots and it ended up being my best one of the championship (2nd). Even though it was only one race I thought I was unusually fast for this wind range especially upwind. Another interesting aspect is that the boat is really easy to tack.

Regarding downwind performance, I have to say that I was a little bit disappointed. I didn't feel a fundamental difference with conventional daggerboards. The reality is probably that the limit of 1.5 meters still doesn't allow enough horizontal area to create some serious vertical lift. This feeling is shared by Bob and Landi. The most noticeable effect downwind was, again, the damping effect in pitch. It will be interesting to see the performances in waves or very choppy conditions. If I remember well I thought Bob was faster downwind in La Baule than he was in the flat condition of Australia. At the end of the championship I was leaving the leeward foil completely down and raising the windward one (if I had a chance).

To be complete I also have to mention that Bob Baier was from far the fastest upwind and in almost any conditions. The main question is why? Now that several people have curved foils it is clear that it is not only because of his foils. I looked a lot at his boat, both on shore and on the water and there are two things that caught my attention. The first one is the way he trims his sail. Even though he has a standard Fiberfoam mast (medium) and a standard Ashby sail, his sail looks fuller than Glenn's one but he never seems to get overpowered. I think that he has something special there and that with this particular mast, his sail is self-depowering in a perfect way. The other point is that on the Nikita, the mast and boards are further back approx. 200 mm more than all the other boats. Personally I don't think that should make that much difference and especially not in all conditions. My conclusion is that the main reason he is so fast upwind is in the mast/Sail combination.

The last point is that in the top 10 we all had very similar speed and the game was fundamentally about sailing and racing well. The Australians don't have particularly sophisticated boats but they all sail very well. All the radical things are coming from Europe. The only Australian with curved foils was Landi (but they are manufactured by Marstrom). An extreme example is probably given by Outteridge (49er World Champion) and Slingsby (Laser World Champion) who came with very old boats (I am not old enough in the class to know what kind of boats it was) and finished very often in the top 10 (two 3rd for Slingsby) They were just too new in the class to be consistent during the entire championship.

I will finish with a non boat performance related subject. If we look at the points in the result list we can see that to finish in the top 10 you needed no more than 53 points. That is an average of 7.6 points per race. This is from far the most difficult championship that the class have sailed in the last years. The next table is a simple comparison with previous championships

Year	Type	Place	Avg. pts per race for top 10 finishing
2005	WC	Sanguinet (FRA)	14.5
2006	WC	Vastervik (SWE)	14.6
2007	EC	Los Alcacares (ESP)	10.9
2007	WC	Islamorada (USA)	12.8
2008	EC	La Baule (FRA)	11.6
2009	WC	Belmont (AUS)	7.6

My final conclusion will therefore be that, for sure fast equipment is a must to win championship, but being on the water and racing as often as possible is still the key to success. After having seen the average sailing level and enthusiasm in Australia, I think I will definitely try to spend more time on the water rather than building carbon parts and it will be much more fun as well!!!

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