



The Monsoon Cup village

GOOD FORTUNE RAINS DOWN ON MALAYSIAN YACHTING

Keith Ingram, the editor of *Professional Skipper*, reports on the inaugural Monsoon Cup held at Pulau Duyong Terengganu, which may prove to be a catalyst for sports tourism in Malaysia.

The inaugural Monsoon Cup, which was held from November 29 until December 4, 2005 in Terengganu, was the brainchild of the Malaysian Prime Minister, YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, as part of his vision to develop the state of Terengganu on the eastern coast of Malaysia.

Organised by the Terengganu state government, the regatta brought together most of the best yacht racing skippers in the world. It was also the 50th official event of the Swedish Match Tour, and served as the Malaysian leg of the prestigious international sailing event.

Dubbed The Formula One of Sailing, this professional sailing series was formed in 2000 to unite the world's best match-race regattas under one banner. The Swedish Match Tour comprises nine events in nine selected locations around the world.

As the leading professional sailing series in the world, the tour events have become compulsory regattas on the match-racing circuit and attract professional skippers from the America's Cup, Olympics, world, European and national championships.

The series was started by the President of the Swedish Match Racing Circuit, Scott MacLeod, who had a vision to bring all the match-racing events under one umbrella with a collective sponsorship deal and television rights. All the sailors knew each other as they were competing in the races, which were all run as individual



events, loosely associated through the Match Racing Association. Finally Scott said, "Let's pool our rights," and said to the association members, "Each one of you give me some rights to your event and the television rights, and I'll package them up and present them to a total sponsor."

Swedish Match saw the benefits of the promotional package and came on board. The inaugural event, the Steinlager Cup, was held in Auckland. Since then the

circuit has consisted of eight or nine events. Ideally they are trying to keep the series to nine or a maximum of 10, says Scott.

Some events have come and gone, and unfortunately the Auckland event dropped out because the America's Cup was taking up so much of the economics in the marketplace.

"We would love to have Auckland onboard again. Auckland is a great venue, the Kiwis are good organisers and the public give it excellent support," he said. "I understand that there is an event being organised down there this January. We haven't talked to that promoter, but certainly we would like to talk to them about coming back on the tour. I like Auckland, it has a great history for sailing."

When asked how do you keep all the top names in the cup, Scott says the sailors give good support to professionally run events. "A good prize purse helps, but really we feel we have a very established series, one that has got a lot of credibility among the top sailors and the up-and-coming crews as well. We get a tremendous amount of support from the America's Cup community. We talk



The Malaysian Prime Minister, YAB Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi concentrates on the racing



The line-up of international skippers for the quarter-finals reveals some familiar faces



Dredging the harbour entrance



Terengganu Bay is suited to close match racing

with ACM about working together and we work with the teams a lot. We try to give the sponsors exposure and marketing opportunities between AC events.”

The name of the tour is expected to change in January, due in part to changing world views on some sponsors’ products like tobacco. (Swedish Match markets niche tobacco-related products, such as matches and filters.)

As well as the name change, Scott MacLeod says he will be announcing some new and positive changes for the tour. “The name change will not be sponsor-related, and the changes will not have a direct effect on the season.”

“We are pretty solid through to 2007. The key is that we do not run the events,” said Scott. “We are like the PGA, a governing body or rather a marketing body that provides marketing support and sanctions to events like the Monsoon Cup. This is one of the key changes where we now see major a developer of a resort promoting an event in what is going to be a luxurious seaside resort, something along the lines that some major golf courses have been developed and have then attracted an event with big names to help promote and market the complex.”

Times have changed and the tour events are mainly commercially run. “This is not suggesting that there is something wrong with the yacht clubs,” says Scott. “They are great to have involved, as they have the history and know how to run the racing, but the commercial side needs to be run as a business.”

The yachts sailed on the Swedish Match tour have to be 9.2m to 12.2m long, with up to six crew, but generally the guys like to sail with four or five. Most run with a core group of skipper, tactician, mainsheet, trimmer and bow man.

“We built a boat called the Swedish Match 40, now known as the SM 40. A really good match-racing boat, it looks like a mini-

America’s Cup boat and we have encouraged some of the tour venues to buy them. The sailors like them and have commented that they sail just like an AC boat.

“Team New Zealand has two for training. The MRX is okay, but - the J24s are too small. We try to stay with the bigger boats as it’s all training for the sailors.”

On our arrival at Pulau Duyong we were awed by the transformation that has taken place since the Monsoon Cup was first mooted earlier this year. The project was just an idea at the beginning of the year. The bay originally contained many shoals with narrow navigatable channels and some 12 islands, but in five weeks the harbour was dredged and about five million cubic metres of golden coarse sand, the equivalent of 50,000 10-tonne trucks, removed.

The sand was used to reclaim the waters surrounding the main and two smaller islands, making an even larger island in the middle of the harbour linked by two bridges to the mainland. The addition of marina berths and huge transportable pavilions as large as a big top have sprung up to accommodate the enormous media contingent with a live broadcast centre and entertainment areas.

Hundreds of local spectators lined the harbour or visited the cup base to view the yachting event, many for the first time. The first of many luxury chalets has been completed, and the start of a new Heritage Bay village has set the standard for things to come. A local village has been relocated, as the new complex will nestle up against a local shipyard.

Resource management what?! It is great to see that common sense still prevails in some parts of the world where the criterion is: Is it good for Malaysia? Will it bring in international visitors and increase tourism?

Is it good for Terengganu? Will it increase spending, employment and small-business opportunities. And is it good for the people of



The start of the last race



A large, environmentally friendly digger builds the rock retaining walls



The drums and pipers of the Malaysian Navy pipe the Monsoon Cup aboard

Terengganu? The answer to all of these questions was yes.

In which case, make it happen, said the Prime Minister. "The eastern coast of Malaysia has traditionally ground to a halt with the arrival of the wet and windy monsoon season. The monsoon is a true force of nature, one we cannot hold back or fight. We can, however, harness the power and the sea to fuel a truly spectacular international regatta off the shores of Kuala Terengganu," he said.

Terengganu has traditionally been known as the quiet state, with many small villages, quiet roads and secluded islands and beaches. With a land area of 12,995sq km and 225km of picturesque coastline, the region bears testimony to Malaysia's cultural heritage, which goes back for centuries and has been well guarded. The clear waters and teeming marine life have made Terengganu an increasingly popular travel destination in winter.

Together with a six-star resort and a 300-berth marina develop-

ment, along with the Swedish Match tour, Terengganu is making a quantum leap into the international world of sailing

Also in attendance was the New Zealand voice of yachting, Peter Montgomery. Peter has been a yachting commentator for 25 years. Affectionately known by his peers as "PJ", he has covered eight America's Cup events, four Olympics and six Whitbread races, plus countless other regattas.

Twelve teams of some of the world's top sailors and skippers competed for the Monsoon Cup, including New Zealanders Russell Coutts, Dean Barker, Chris Dickson and Cameron Dunn.

The event quickly proved to be a wet and wild affair, as the event sponsors had a taste of the things to come when the squall blew in from the South China Sea on the opening days.

As a lead-up to the cup, the sponsors' held a race with local sailors and international skippers manning the yachts. Skipper Peter Gilmour, with captain Datuk Patrick Lim at the helm, won first place and bagged the inaugural Terengganu Cup trophy and a cheque for RM15,000.

Second was the Asia Experience team, with skipper Doug Coohseyin command, while third place went to TM. Both teams won a trophy each and a cheque for RM10,000 and RM5000 respectively.

After the first days in the round robins it was obvious that the local conditions were going to present the sailors with a different set of challenges from what they might normally expect.

Terengganu Bay is fast becoming a match-racing venue, with Russell Coutts summing up the situation. "Normally the race is won or lost in the pre-start or by whoever gets to the top mark first. Here at Terengganu you have the wind and two ribbons of tide to contend with, the water is very hard to read and unforgiving.

"A race can be won or lost at any stage, as the lead can quickly change. Even if the boats are within several hundred metres of each other, a lull or an isolated gentle puff or the sneaky grip of the tide can make or break the race."

Peter Gilmour won what he described as a "fairytale event" when he defeated Russell Coutts 2-1 in the final, to take the inaugural Monsoon Cup. Gilmour was instrumental in forming the cup in association the Heritage Bay Resort development Director YBhg Datuk Patrick Lim. He's also a key player on the Swedish Match Tour and the only skipper to win the championship twice.

The win increased his career victory total to nine. "At the outset of the event I wasn't sure it would happen. I'm quite amazed, almost to the point of being embarrassed," said Gilmour, aged 46, who lives in Perth, Western Australia. "I put a lot of effort into organising and promoting this event. The result has been greater than my wildest dreams and expectations."

Gilmour and Coutts put on a spectacular final, complete with lead changes and come-from-behind wins and finish line penalty turns.

Gilmour won the first race despite carrying a penalty around the race track. He earned the penalty in the pre-start for a port-starboard incident. He trailed Coutts by about four seconds around the first lap and then passed him on the second upwind leg of the six-leg course.

Gilmour slowly stretched out to a 19-second lead beginning on the last leg. Approaching the pin end of the finish, the bow man, Kazuhiko Sofuku, hoisted the jib and retrieved the spinnaker. Gilmour began his turn and the boat went through the eye of the wind. Trimmer Tatsuya Wakinaga backed the jib as the boat fell off on port tack with Coutts rapidly approaching. Gilmour's bow crossed the line just three seconds ahead.

Coutts led race two from wire-to-wire, claiming a seven-second win to even the series at one all. He started on port at the boat end, went right up the beat, won the first cross and was never truly threatened. His margins at the mark roundings were between 10



Russell Coutts and Peter Gilmour in the final pre-match press conference



Action aboard Coutts' boat



Close racing with Coutts leading at the bottom mark to win the second race



The victors, Peter Gilmour and his team

and 15 seconds. Gilmour closed on the run, and although he never had a real chance to get around Coutts he took an important note out of the race.


"I suddenly realised that we were sailing pretty fast there," said Gilmour. "At that point I thought we could start even or behind Russell, be close at the first mark and jump him downwind. To me he looked a little unstable downwind. He wasn't his confident self."

In the third pre-start Gilmour got a penalty on Coutts. Coutts tried gybing to starboard in front of Gilmour but didn't complete his turn before Gilmour had to alter course. "It was a close call," said Coutts. "The mainsail filled but it probably filled too late."

The race was close, with Gilmour leading by less than 10 seconds at the first three mark roundings. Coutts closed on the second run and was overlapped to the outside rounding the second leeward mark. But Gilmour opened on the next beat to 12 seconds at the last mark rounding and was on his way to victory, his first win against Coutts in a tour final after three losses.

"You've got to wake up pretty early in the morning to catch Russell sleeping," said Gilmour. "It was one of those days where I think Russell was starting better, but on the racecourse we were a tiny bit quicker. As a result we were able to go where we wanted to go and Russell started sailing a bit defensively."

"We got out of phase with the wind a couple of times," said Coutts, "and that allowed him to sail around us in the wind shifts. It's a tough place to sail."

The 25 points Gilmour earned for winning the championship moved him into first from sixth in the Swedish Match Tour standings. Gilmour has 48 points and leads Finland's Staffan Lindberg of the Alandia Sailing Team by 11 points. England's Ben Ainslie, of Emirates Team New Zealand is on 30 points. He fell from first to third. 

For more on the Monsoon Cup and the Swedish Match Tour see www.sail-world.com or www.swedishmatch.com




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