

# Special THE GREATEST RACEBOAT EVER

The Laser is a mere 14-foot long and has only four strings to pull, but its simplicity breeds an addiction that makes it the most popular dinghy in the world.



## And Then There Were Three

BY BRUCE KIRBY

**W**hen the Laser was designed in 1969 we really had no idea how the boat would be used. So in choosing a crew weight to be applied to the displacement calculation, I didn't know if this car-topper—for that's what I had been asked to design—was to be for kids,

adults, father and daughter, man and wife.

I had decided early on that the waterline length would be 12.5 feet, as I felt that was the minimum for satisfactory performance. A sail area of 76 square feet was tossed into the mix with the idea that it could be altered at any time, but in the end remained 76.

The first number that went

into the design formula as crew weight was 200 pounds, but after continued "think time," that number was reduced to 180. I felt it would be better to have the boat float a little low in the water with 250 pounds aboard than float too high and be tender with 150 pounds of crew.

So 180 it was and with the hull, rig, centerboard, rudder, and sail coming out to close to another 180, we had a sailing displacement of 360 pounds.

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This figure brought the boat's sail area-to-displacement ratio to 24 and the displacement-to-length ratio to 82—good numbers to produce a light and lively little boat.

During the refinement process after the boat's first outing the rig was moved forward, mast rake was reduced, and the sail was given a slightly higher aspect ratio. These alterations moved the center of effort 7 inches forward. These step-by-step enhance-

ments were aimed at reducing weather helm because I hadn't gotten the relationship between lateral plane and center of effort right at the first stab.

All that seems like ancient history today, nearly 37 later. But by guess and by God, by trial and by error, and even with a little simple math thrown in, we got it right. One of the more satisfying results of all this was discovering that the crewweight of 180 turned out to be opti-

mum on the racecourse, too.

But with 180 pounds as the ideal, anyone weighing less than 160 or so was at a distinct disadvantage in strong winds. And certainly the 180-pound optimum discouraged most women from racing the boat at the highest level. With this in mind, the original sailmaker, Hans Fogh, and builder, Ian Bruce devised the Radial rig, which has a shorter and more flexible lower mast section, 14 sq. ft. less sail

**Laser sailing is a global phenomenon, and now, with three different sail sizes, the experience is universal.**

area and, of course, a lower center of effort. (Later the Radial was refined to its present configuration by Performance Sailcraft Europe working with British sailmaker Eddie Hyde.)

The Radial came at a time when the Laser was spreading rapidly to countries outside North America and Europe,

so the new rig, which was considerably easier to handle in a breeze was not only right for smaller males and most women, but also better suited to the huge numbers of Asians who were thronging into the sport.

Almost before the Laser Class knew what was happening, a new class was born, and one that appealed to enormous numbers of people throughout the world. One of its great strengths was that a single family Laser, with centerboard, rudder and mast step unchanged, could accommodate either rig and thus satisfy not only the strapping sons, but also smaller siblings, or perhaps even parents who had decided that less sail went well with advancing age.

Following on the success of the Radial, the 4.7 rig was developed in England in 1989. What made it work was a permanent aft bend in the lower mast section to bring the sail's center of effort aft to nearly the same point as it is in the other rigs. There were doubts whether 100-pound (or less) youngsters would find the hull too large to handle in heavy air or after a capsize even if the 50.5 sq. ft. sail was truly "kid size," but when the little ones found they could master the big guys' boat with the little guys' rig, the 4.7 took off. Acceptance was rapid in Europe during the '90s and the idea caught on quickly in Asia as well. There was a pause in the more conservative Americas, but now the 4.7 is fast becoming a familiar sight in the Western Hemisphere.

So after all the sweating about choosing exactly the right crew weight in 1969, it was all for not. We now have a product that accommodates the widest range possible of weights and physiques. No, I don't think there will be more versions of the boat, as three iterations seems to be about right. But you never know.

—BRUCE KIRBY

# Master Of The Domain

INTERVIEW BY DAVE REED

In 1991, Robert Scheidt, a young steely-eyed Brazilian Laser champion stepped into the international spotlight for the first time in Kiel, Germany, after trouncing the fleet at the ISAF Youth World Championships. Many great junior sailors come and go, but Scheidt was far from ordinary. In his hometown of São Paulo, his celebrated status was materializing with early successes in the Optimist and Snipe. Over the next two years he stormed to the top of the Laser class, winning his first Laser World Championship in 1993 in Tenerife, Canary Islands. From there, he went on a virtual tear, winning seven more world titles in 10 years, three Olympic medals (two gold, one silver), and countless events in between. In the history of Laser sailing, he's legendary in every sense of the word and his status as such, says Glenn Bourke, of Australia, who with three consecutive world titles is the only other to rival Scheidt, will never be usurped.

**How do you explain your reign over the class?**

I have been in the class for a very long time. My father has owned a Laser since 1976, so when I was young I was sometimes going out with him on the water and sailing the boat

with friends. When I got big enough to sail the boat on my own I had my father's, and just really started sailing that boat a lot and enjoying it because my body fit well with it and I liked to hike and the fast reaches. I just really enjoyed sailing that boat and that's why I've stuck with it for so many years. With good results I naturally kept at it because I was enjoying the fruits of training, preparing, and trying to get better day-by-day.

**Many of the people you've sailed against over the years say what separated you are your fitness and the intensity of your training; is that true?**

Fitness is 70 percent in the Laser because on a long regatta like a world championship or the Olympics you have so many days of racing and if it's a windy venue, people start to wear out after the third or fourth day. If you're fit enough, you're concentrating on the racing and the things that matter because you know your body will respond to the demands.

I always focus on the fitness part with swimming, biking, and sailing in strong winds. That was never my problem. My problem was always in light winds because I enjoyed so much the heavy wind that when the light day came I start thinking that I couldn't do well. That was my biggest challenge, being confident in my light-air sailing. Before Athens I did a lot of work on this and it worked. That has been my biggest victory because I could show that in an 11-day light-air regatta I could do well and win.

**Was there a moment in your youth that you realized fitness was paramount?**

One of my biggest rivals in the Laser was Peter Tanscheidt [also from Brazil, the 1991 world champ]. He was seven years older than me and in Brazil he was unbeatable for a long time. He was very fit and worked out a lot, so I grew up

really influenced by his training style and routines.

**Has your approach to sailing the boat more physically changed the way the boat is sailed today?**

What I've seen over the past 10 years is that more people are sailing full time. The top 20 guys in the Laser are always sailing and training. So now you must be fit, but also mentally sharp and more consistent in your tactics. The races nowadays are shorter and you have fewer opportunities to catch up because everyone is sailing so well downwind.

**What is it about the downwind sailing that's different?**

This goes back again to Peter Tanscheidt. When I started in Brazil, people were already pushing very hard with their downwind sailing, but when I went to Europe people didn't care much about it. The Brazilians were working on surfing and working the boat really hard in the waves—using your weight and using the sheet a lot—so they were managing to make big gains. Today, the biggest gains are made downwind in the Laser. The differences are amazing between a guy who can sail downwind and a guy who cannot.

**What's so important to this downwind technique?**

It's about balancing the boat and moving your body around smoothly. It requires fine-tuning of the boat with the position of the centerboard, the outhaul, and the vang, and being able to do all these things naturally without thinking about it. I'd go out to practice and sail downwind for long periods so I could focus on the boat so I could concentrate for a long time. Sometimes a guy could go very fast for 400 to 500 meters, but on a 1.5-mile leg he loses

**Vaulting himself into the annals of the Laser, Robert Scheidt takes a dip after winning his second gold medal at the Athens Olympic Games.**



CARLO BORLENGHI/ISEA & SEE/DPPI

concentration. The important difference is to sail well for a long period of time.

You have to do a lot of adjusting. Sometimes people leave the outhaul too loose and it makes the sail into a bag and they lose sail area, sometimes the vang is too tight so you can't go by the lee as well, and sometimes the vang is too loose and when you surf the wave on a broad reach there's not enough pressure on the leech. It's especially important to adjust all the time downwind. The wind changes, the waves change, and the angles change all the time by as much as 40 to 50 degrees.

**In the boat park before a day of racing you're said to be very intense and focused, mainly keeping to yourself.**

I'm a quiet guy and don't like to talk too much before the race. I try to concentrate on the day. I try to keep to my routine before the race: washing the boat, checking the gear and going to the course early to check the conditions. After each race I relax, have a quick discussion with my coach, and not think too much about the race. I try to not bring bad feelings into the next race or the next day and deal with each race at a time. If I win the race, OK, but focus on the next. If I do badly, I try to forget it.

**You're now several years into an Olympic Star campaign and dealing with a much more technical boat; what does the Laser bring to this?**

The Star is definitely more complicated and there's a lot of tuning. What I really like about the Laser is when someone is sailing faster you can't complain about mast being wrong or start thinking you have the wrong sail, the wrong gear, or the wrong technique. That guy is just sailing the boat better than you. The Laser teaches you that sailing the boat well counts so much. Whoever sails well wins.

**Has your success spread**

**the word of sailing to other parts of Brazil?**

It has helped. After my Olympic success, the sailing schools in Brazil had more people going sailing, and more people interested in the Laser. Sailing is not very big in Brazil, but it's getting bigger. The base is not so broad as it used to be, but the top is high quality now. The sailing is getting much more professional, which means not as many guys who start sailing can afford to take as seriously.

**How did you manage over so many years to remain motivated, keep it fun, and not burn out?**

I always tried to divide the season well. After the worlds I took some time off and sailed other boats, played tennis and other sports—staying fit, but not sailing the laser. I'd come back two months later and I'd come back hungrier, ready to start things over again. This allowed me to hit my peaks at the right times. I wasn't pushing too hard all year long, just when I needed to.

**Do you ever just go out and blast around the boat for the pure joy of it?**

It's hard to go out and just have fun—whenever I'm in the Laser I just want to push. If I stop for one month and go back I get angry with myself if I'm not sailing the boat as well as I can. I always need to compete against somebody. So if a friend wants to go out and do some tuning then, OK. I do go out with my girlfriend or nephews in the boat sometimes and have fun, but if I am alone I have to push hard.

**Everyone I've spoken with says there's no way your world title record will be ever broken; what do you think?**

You never know, records are to be broken. It will take a talented, motivated, and keen guy to do it. It's not impossible, but it will be a hard thing to do. ♦



With more than 100 boats to rotate between 350 competitors in the round-robin eliminations at the 1980 Laser Worlds, the long waits of launching and retrieving simply became part of the daily grind.

## The Kingston Swarm

BY DAVE REED

PHOTOS BY FRANÇOIS RICHARD

**L**ate last year, Terry Neilson, a 48-year-old software professional from Toronto, Ontario, was sharing a sauna with his buddy Rob Muru, a teammate of his from Canada's America's Cup challenge in 1983. On a nearby shelf sat a trophy Muru had picked up at a district

Laser event. It got them waxing nostalgic about an event they'd both long forgotten.

"We got talking about what an *amazing* scene it was," says Neilson, thinking back to the 1980 Laser Worlds in Kingston, Ontario, a 350-competitor spectacle that spanned the better part of two weeks. Before Kingston, no one-design class had ever attempted a world championship of this size (nor has anyone since). But try they did and the result was a regatta of epic proportions, a watershed event that cemented the Laser's reputation as the best big-fleet game in sailing.

"It seemed like it [the Laser] was suddenly a big deal," says Ed Baird, who at the time was 22. "An event this size probably hadn't been done because there were few classes that could provide boats at that kind of volume."

A qualification system had kept previous world championships in Bermuda ('74),

Germany, Brazil, and Australia to 100 entries or so, but Kingston offered several logistic benefits that enabled organizers to open it up to a much larger contingent of Laser sailors—including one doublehanded women's team from Japan. The boat's builder, Performance Sailcraft, headed by the Laser's co-founder Ian Bruce, was nearby in Montreal, simplifying the delivery of more than 130 new boats. Most importantly they had at their disposal the sprawling facility of Portsmouth Olympic Harbor, host to the 1976 Olympic regatta, and ample beds in the dorms of the local Queen's University. With pre-registration required, organizers had at least some scale of the event's attendance, but what they couldn't predict was the additional onslaught of wives, girlfriends, families, tag-alongs, and spectators.

Only days before the regatta did vans, cars, and bodies

begin to populate the waterfront. "It wasn't like it is today where you have the top guys coming early and training for several weeks in the venue," says Jeff Martin, the current International Laser Class Association Executive Secretary, and the regatta's principle race officer. "Everyone just started showing up."

On a single racetrack on July 25, the opening day of the regatta began the long laborious process of elimination, which eventually earned the regatta its title as "The Leisure Worlds." Using rabbit starts the sailors went through a drawn-out series of round robins to weed the field down to a 94-boat Championship Fleet (and a separate 20-boat women's fleet). In an incredible choreography of race management and boat rotations, the racers were divided into seven subgroups of 50 boats, with each group sailing each other group four times. Six qualifying races and four



final races were eventually completed over the span of two weeks, many of which carried on into the waning hours of twilight.

"During those qualifying races some people had two, or sometimes three, lay days," says Neilson. "When you had 100 people sailing you had another 250 people hanging around waiting, so it was quite a scene."

There was little to no boat work to be done before, after, or between races, as there is nowadays, which only added to idleness. "In previous worlds you were given your boat and you were free to tweak it—everyone would be sanding their blades and that kind of stuff," says Baird. "In Kingston, it was draw your boat and race. But the boats were so much simpler at that point; you only had to come up with a clever way to bring your compass along."

With so much free time, many of the competitors naturally found themselves either venturing into town in search of mischief or killing time directly across the street from the Olympic Harbor in Kingston's notorious Lake-view Manor. "You'd walk in and there was this bar that served a good lunch," says Neilson. "It had the video games, there was usually a band, and then of course there's a strip bar in the back—I think there was mud wrestling on Wednesdays—and that's where most of us would hang out after the race."

"The onshore activities and stories became even more legendary than the racing," says Andy Roy, now 49, of Toronto, Canada. "This included a Kingston pub crawl, where a few guys got acquainted with the local constabulary, and a 'pass the boot' beer drinking game at the old Manor. What was especially scary about that game was that a few contestants had previously overindulged in the bar's 25-cent hot dog special."

There was also a nearby go-cart track, the scene of complete four-wheel anarchy. "It was wild," says Roy. "I recall watching Dave Perry, who had got out of his cart to try to push it back on the track, leaping in the air to avoid Boner's [Terry Neilson] cart spinning out of control on a hairpin turn that someone, I think Boner, had intentionally spilled oil on for a little added excitement. Amazingly, no ambulances were needed."

One incident at the track, however, did put Cam Lewis, one of the best young American Laser sailors of the time, briefly out of commission. "I got a cart that apparently hadn't been governed, and

Favini, Jim Brady, Lynne Jewell, and Russell Coutts, to name but only a few.

"That's what was really significant about this event—it was really about who was there," says Neilson, who was 21 at the time and subsequent-



ly went on to be an America's Cup sailor and Finn bronze medalist ('84). "This was a time when there were a bunch of good sailors beating each other up, and we were lucky to be beaten up because it made us sail a lot harder, and that went on to make a difference in other classes later."

Case in point: During one of the regatta's lay days, recalls Roy, about 20 guys and girls piled on board a 40-footer owned by Neilson's father for a cruise. "It was a perfect Kingston summer day, with an 18-knot thermal rolling in on schedule. The beers were flowing and the party was in full swing when someone spotted a lone Laser sailor in



ended up at full throttle, spinning around and getting hit head-on. I wracked my balls and couldn't move my elbow. Having also met a "really nice nurse at the hospital," Lewis, his arm in a sling, missed his first race of the round-robin qualifiers and instantly accumulated 108 points. (He did, however, win his second race but finished 67th overall).

It may have been one big lazy regatta for some competitors, but most were naturally out for the big title. There were dozens of great sailors of the era that ultimately never went pro, there were many of today's top sailors making their career starts; here were the likes of Baird, Andrew Menkhart, Torben Grael, John Cutler, Colin Beashel, Flavio



**A younger Ed Baird, top left, won the spoils of the drawn-out, 10-race series, when Terry Neilson, left, the regatta's leader found himself hung out to dry in the last beat of the final race. (Bottom left) In the early days of Laser production, some boats were drier than others. Multiple races were sailed each day—lucky competitors got in their race before the sun-and-breeze-disappeared.**

the kind with fanning puffs that drop from the sky at random, with gaping, windless holes and unpredictable shifts.

Baird woke that morning, looked outside, and liked what he saw. "I remember getting really excited because I wanted it to be shifty and weird," he says. "I just like the complicated nature of these types of conditions."

On paper, Neilson held a full-hike mode well out past Snake Island—maybe 4 to 5 miles from shore. We sailed over to see who this nut might be, who would use a lay day to go out alone to beat himself up. It was Russell."

Neilson held a 16.5-point lead, but he was shouldering heaps of pressure as he slipped his boat into the water. As the local star of the day, and this being big local news, as many as four Canadian television news teams interviewed him that morning.

The first legs of the race were challenging for Neilson; he bounced around the middle of the fleet, in and out of the lead, until he turned onto the final leg in 14th place or so—a position that all but assured him the win, so long as he held his own. "All the good guys were up there, just ahead of me," he says. "I just didn't have to do anything stupid."

Far up the left-hand side of the course he could see the signs of a developing sea breeze so he and many others tacked to starboard soon after rounding. "The top 12 or fifteen are heading out there [to the left] and we're just getting in to the breeze," says Neilson. "And then it just shuts off."

Baird, meanwhile, had dug into the right side where the new breeze filled off the shore. "It was the scariest race of the week because you could be in the top-10 on your part of the racecourse and then suddenly be in the 50 to 60 range 2 minutes later," says Baird.

On the deck, just to the right of his centerboard, he'd penned a complicated grid showing the finish positions of those who were around him in the standings. "I had figured out how many places I needed to finish ahead of and behind certain guys, and when I finished fourth I could see that none of the guys that had to beat me did, so I knew I was OK. It was just a matter of how far behind me the others were.

One of the great challenges of this event was that you had a different sail number every day so you couldn't quickly figure out who was who."

Baird headed to the Harbor, figuring he'd missed Neilson's finish and assuming he was second overall. Only later, did he learn that Neilson had finished 58th, plummeting to ninth overall.

"All the races counted," says Neilson, who redeemed himself by winning the 254-boat Laser Worlds the following year in Sardinia, Italy, and today easily rationalizes how he let the big one get away. "My undoing wasn't really that race, it was earlier in the series when I had my 35th, which didn't leave me with a good drop."

Still, he adds, "it was a drag," because events like this only come but once in a lifetime.

**Editor's note: To see a copy of the full results, including the women's finals, won by Marit Soderstrom, visit [www.sailingworld.com](http://www.sailingworld.com)**



# The Anti-Aging Antidote

**BY DICK TILLMAN,  
PHOTOS BY CHRIS ODOM**

If you ask a master Laser sailor at what age they'll stop racing, you'll likely get the universal—and perfectly acceptable—response, “When

they take the oversized hiking stick from my cold, dead hands.” This seems true now more than ever as masters racing, for those age 35 and up, becomes a vital, growing

facet of the Laser sailing experience. Why now? The answer is simple. The class's earlier generations are starting to recover their free time and returning to the boat that most likely addicted them to sailing in the first place. But beyond the obvious attraction to the boat, master sailors are pur-

veyors of the anti-aging attitude. Longevity comes not from pills or medications, but from a certain 14-foot high-performance dinghy.

The relatively short path to the beginnings of organized Laser masters racing leads straight to David Hartman, 65, the Great Grand

Master from Vero Beach, Fla. “Nick James and Alan Broadribb came to my house for dinner after the Miami Boat Show in 1980,” says Hartman. “The Midwinter Championship was the following weekend in Apollo Beach, Fla., and we talked about ‘old guys’ sailing Lasers. The oldest guy I

knew in Miami—with apologies to ‘Old Man’ Gonzalo Diaz—was a fellow in his late 40s named Ben Verloop. We discussed the need for a master's award, and possibly a master's category, patterned after similar groups in other ‘big dinghies’ like the Thistle, Star, Lightning, and Snipe.

At the Midwinters that year, James announced a special award for the first Master to finish, with the criteria being the winner had to be 35 or older. The award, a pair of brief bikini underwear, was presented to Jack Couch.

Today, masters-level racing is firmly entrenched and mas-

**Masters sailors convene every February at the Jack Swenson Memorial Regatta in Palm Beach, Fla. From l to r, Newt Wattis, David Frazier, Peter Seidenberg, and Joe Van Rossem.**

ter categories are included in nearly all events. There are masters-only events at the regional, national, continental,

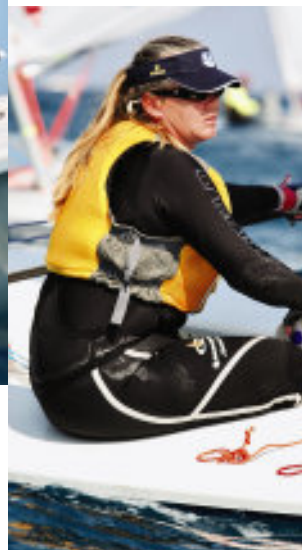
and world levels, with four divisions: Apprentice, age 35 to 44; Master, age 44 to 54; Grand Master, age 55 to 64; Great Grand Master, age 65 and up. There are a dozen masters-only events around the country that regularly draw 30 to 100 competitors or more (see events box) and many of the sailors attend the same events year after year.

“Many of the master sailors have owned and raced dinghies and keelboats of various sizes,” says Hartman. “But here’s the appeal of the Laser—it’s simple. No crew, easy logistics, and low expense make it a great way to escape the everyday world. For most of us, *competing* is winning.”

James Liebl, 38, a scrap salesman and apprentice master, says he has multiple reasons for racing the ubiquitous



Great grand master David Hartman and master Eric Robbins (above), and apprentice masters James Liebl, and Michelle Davis (below) are regulars on the popular Florida midwinter Laser masters circuit.



14-footer, and every single one of them has a common denominator—fun. “Sailing Lasers is a blast,” he says. “The bottom line is that Laser sailing is a good time, and Masters sailing is just another excuse to go sail the Laser.”

Another strong attraction, says Liebl, is the age-based handicap scoring system, which has been in use for many years in North America. The system encourages older

sailors to show up and compete with some hope of success. To compensate for age differences, and determine the overall winner of a regatta, 3 points per race are added to the Apprentices’ scores, 2 points per race are added to the Masters’ scores, and 1 point is added to the Grand Masters’ scores. The Great Grand Masters receive no additional points.

Another method of leveling

the playing field and encouraging sailors of all ages, sex, and weights to compete is allowing competitors to switch between the Standard (76 sq. ft. of sail area), Radial (62 sq. ft.), and 4.7 (50 sq. ft.) sails throughout a regatta accord-

ing to the wind conditions and the ability of the sailors to enjoyably handle them.

“Masters tend to be heavier, so the average competitive weight is higher,” says Ed Adams, of Middletown, R.I., a past masters world champion. “In a regular full-rig Laser, the competitive weight is about 180 to 185, and in masters racing you really want to weigh about 10 pounds more because you’re not able to hike as hard as the young guys. Lighter guys like me can get pummeled on the really windy days.”

While the elders may be given preferential treatment on the scoreboard at the end of the day, that’s typically not the case on the water, where the racing is mostly blind to age brackets and the competition at the front of the fleet is often populated by Olympic and America’s Cup veterans. Yet, as if driven by an unwritten ethos, racecourse conduct at any Masters event is always mature and good-natured. Verbal jabs, however, are par for the course, as are the occasional grumblings over the

sticky issue of kinetics.

“Some guys tend to complain about the younger guys because of their better kinetics, especially at open regattas,” says Adams, “It’s a young man’s boat and when you race against them they’re supposed to beat you—it’s not supposed to be fair.”

“These regattas do have a different atmosphere to them than Open regattas,” says Michelle Davis, 38, a wildlife biologist who sailed Lasers as a teenager and bought her first boat in 2002 when she moved to Miami. “It’s nice to go to Masters events and feel like I am among my peers, since we all have work or families cutting into our sailing time. I’m always intrigued by the different backgrounds and careers people have. It’s also nice to see other women out there, although we are too few and far between. The men I meet at regattas have always treated me as an equal and with respect.”

Many of the regulars, especially those who compete at the national and world levels, take the sailing quite serious,

maintaining a high level of training, practice, and physical fitness. In this regard, especially among U.S. Laser sailors, Peter Seidenberg, 69, and the current Great Grand Master world champion, is in a class by himself.

“I believe in the saying that ‘nothing beats time in the boat’ and, since my retirement three years ago [as founder and President of Seitech Dollies], I sail as much as possible,” says Seidenberg, of Portsmouth, R.I. “I train on the water with three or four friends one afternoon during the week (from spring to fall) and race in as many weekend regattas as I reasonably can. Even though the Laser is a comparatively simple boat, there is always something new to learn on how to sail it more successfully, which is what fascinates me and keeps me interested in the sport.”

The Laser is a very physical boat and rewards fitness and agility, and this also appeals to Seidenberg. His physical conditioning includes two yoga classes per week, as well as yoga stretches every morning to stay flexible. He lifts weights in his basement gym on three mornings per week and bicycles three mornings, either outdoors on his mountain bike or inside on a stationary bike. Reading racing-related literature, he says, especially in the winter months, keeps him mentally focused.

There are, however, many masters, at all levels, who approach it more casually. Now 70 years old and five years in to my Grand Master status, I fall into this group. The last time I had a distinct goal of winning an event—the 2002 Laser Master Worlds—I trained for nearly a year and went to major regattas, including the Rolex Miami OCR, for practice. That year, Ed Adams and Mark Bear, a 49-year-old Professor of Neuroscience at M.I.T., had a similar goal, and trained with

**BEST OF THE MASTERS EVENTS**

- CALIFORNIA MASTERS CHAMPIONSHIP**  
Mission Bay YC, April 14-15
- LASER MASTERS U.S. CHAMPIONSHIP**  
Wrightsville Beach, NC, May 18-20
- LASER MASTERS NAS**  
Austin, Texas, June 1-3
- NC LASER MASTERS**  
Oriental, N.C., June 23-24
- CANADIAN MASTERS NATIONALS**  
Vancouver, B.C., September 1-3
- CHESAPEAKE BAY MASTERS**  
Fishing Bay, Va, Sept. 8-9
- NEW ENGLAND MASTERS**  
Newport, R.I., Sept. 8-9
- MASTERS ATLANTIC COAST CHAMPIONSHIP**  
Rock Hall, Md. Sept. 29-30
- 2007 MASTERS WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP**  
Roses, Catalonia, Spain, Sept. 29 - Oct. 6

For more dates and venue specifics, [www.laser.org](http://www.laser.org)

each other on nearly a daily basis in the months before the worlds, and placed first and second, respectively, in the Masters division.

Since then, for my part, my sailing has been at a more casual level, racing in an occasional regatta and doing my best; however, I haven’t completely forsaken practice. In preparing for this year’s Jack Swenson Florida Laser Masters Regatta in Palm Beach, Fla., a fixture on the East Coast winter masters circuit, Hartman, Liebl, and I launched our Lasers (using Radial rigs) at Port Canaveral, sailed out into the open ocean, beat to windward for an hour, then surfed downwind in huge waves.

“I’m probably preaching to the choir, but racing dinghies may be the perfect sport—you get to play on a boat, you get a mental challenge, you can socialize, you can compete, and you create no greenhouse gasses,” says Liebl. “Want to be a better sailor? Then come race, because every time you race, you’re going to learn something.”

Master sailors, often at a point in their lives where they can look back on the richness and challenges of their life experiences, tend to be mature

philosophical types, better able to make sense of what makes the experience of Laser sailing so unique. Dave Olson, winner of the first World Masters Games in 1985 and a prolific Laser sailor of the late ’80s, was one these, and wrote about masters racing in *The Complete Book of Laser Sailing* [Ed’s note: the author wrote the book, which was published by *International Marine* in 2005.]

“It’s not just the scoring that’s different from other Laser regattas,” he writes. “A different atmosphere and philosophy is present at Masters regattas. The words *congeniality* and *fraternity* come to mind. When you go to a Masters regatta you sense an almost subliminal understanding that everyone has been busy fulfilling countless responsibilities, and now they are coming together to have some good clean fun in order to rejuvenate the body and spirit... Conviviality develops so that all participants have a good time and, despite the adverse circumstances and conditions that can occasionally develop at any regatta, they leave with a warm, comfortable feeling of fatigue of the body and a quiet renewal of the soul.” ♦