

and interests – this meant Claire could join a beginners' group while I joined the advanced coaching course.

First taste of Vass

For those of use who had signed up for Kostas's coaching week, we had a day before he was due to arrive, enabling crews to pair up, and get acquainted with the resort's boats.

Vassiliki offers superb sailing conditions for sailors. A typical day sees a glassy morning, allowing you too sit and eat your breakfast at a leisurely pace,

“Sail with the heart, win with the mind”

watching the light Southerly breeze gently roll in. The Southerly holds until around 1400hrs, and then the local mountain breeze (Eric) kicks in, beating the gradient breeze back out to sea, and delivering a strong and constant breeze until the early evening.

Being a little too slow in sipping my morning Frappe, all the normal performance boats had been taken by the time I came to pick my steed. However, I spotted a Hobie Fox lurking in the corner of the compound. Rigging was a simple task, and my Dutch crew, Tjalko Jansz and I were quickly on the water for our first taste of Vass sailing.

The day's brief was to sail around as much as we liked, and the Wildwind instructors would offer advice as we went. Tjalko and I were quickly working our way up and downwind, throwing as many tacks and gybes at the instructors as we could before we decided to break for lunch and conserve some energy, ready for Eric.

We were not disappointed. At 1430hrs, we unhooked the Fox from its mooring ▶

BELOW Claire learning to cat sail on the Hobie Pacific with her instructor Rory. The goal for the week was to be able to crew the Tornado for Richard.

PHOTO: MIKE LING



PHOTO: Y&R

Two in one

Race coaching is expensive, and something that only the elite receive, while holidays are a luxury, but what if you were to combine the two? Is it possible? And is it worth doing? **Rich Thoroughgood** investigates...

There are a number of holiday companies offering specialist coaching weeks, some focusing on particular classes. It seemed an ideal way to combine learning, and a holiday. While I have been sailing for years, my girlfriend, Claire, had only been catamaran sailing once previously. Our aim was to find something that would build her experience, and stretch me... a tough ask. A bit of research will throw up a variety of options, and we soon found our match.

Wildwind Sailing Holidays, based in Vassiliki Bay, Lefkas, Greece, has a strong

multihull tradition, and a special coaching week with Greek sailing legend Kostas Trigonis seemed perfect for us.

A warm welcome

Wildwind's entrance is unassuming. Set back from a typical Greek road, the only object informing you of the centre's existence is a weathered Hobie 16 hull carefully placed on the grass. The short walk from the entrance of the resort to your hotel room however, fills you with intrigue as to what lies beyond. Peer through the trees and you are greeted by views of crystal blue water surrounded by

green mountains, quaint fishing towns at their bases. The urge to grab your wetsuit and get on the water is almost irresistible!

A welcome meal, laid on by the resort staff at the beach-side bar, was a good way to meet our fellow guests. As sailors sharing a common interest we all had stories to tell, and friendships and crews were made for the week.

The following morning saw us on the beach bright and early for a quick introduction to the resort and staff from beach manager Joe Bennett. Wildwind has built a strong team of instruction staff that return to the resort year after year, and they introduce you to the resort and its procedures with reassuring ease. We then joined various groups depending on our experience



PHOTO: MIKE LING

KOSTAS TRIGONIS

- **DOB:** July 2, 1970
- **Yacht Club:** Nautical Club of Thessaloniki
- **Education:** Professor of Physical Education
- **Languages:** English, Greek
- **Strengths:** Passion for sailing
- **Sponsors:** Red Bull
- **Sailing partner:** Iordanis Paschalidis
- **Current projects:** Keep sailing multihulls, grow multihull sailing in Greece, training for the Redbull 500 mile non-stop sailing challenge
- **Results:** 2x 470 World Champion, 2nd 470 Europeans, 3x Tornado European Champion + 1x 3rd, 4x Olympian from 1996, most recent Beijing 2008, 3rd Tornado Worlds 2009, 19 times Greek national champion in several classes

just off the beach, and sailed out to the Western side of the bay, straight in to the heart of Eric. The Fox revelled in the breeze, but we noticed many boats had stayed ashore, and decided to change to a Hobie Tiger. The Tiger was a much more flighty vessel, and we took a couple of runs to get to grips with its peculiarities. After our third run, we decided to push harder, but as I headed the boat up in a gust with Tjalko dumping the main, we crashed the windward hull into the water. My feet disappeared from under me as the boat accelerated again, throwing me spiralling forward and the Tiger cartwheeled through the air... oops! Gingerly hoisting the kite after our recovery we hurtled back towards the resort, deciding that was excitement enough for one day, and retired to the bar.

Introducing Kostas

Whilst sitting in the bar recounting our afternoon's exploits to anyone that was prepared to listen, a large Orange KTM trail bike burred to a stop outside of the beach cafe. The rider casually removed his helmet and jacket, before sitting down and calmly taking in the surrounds. This was Kostas.

Our first session with Kostas was to set the tone for the remainder of the week. Calm, exciting, informative and insightful are all words that can be used to describe the manner in which Kostas conducts his sessions. His way is not static, but changes with the subject matter. At times he makes a point once and calmly moves to the next, whilst with others the point is

reinforced repeatedly until there is no room for miss-interpretation.

The morning's session was spent on Kostas's mental approach to sailing, before moving on to boat set up. It came as a surprise to me that even after so many years of competing, Kostas still focuses on the enjoyment of sailing as his priority. He believes that if you are not enjoying your sailing, then your head is not in the right place, and whether you are a tactical magician or boat speed king, you simply will not win.

It was also clear that Kostas was keen on simplicity. He appears to endeavour to impart mental triggers within the mind, in a way that they are recalled from the cerebral armoury when needed.

Kostas's simple approach to the sport was reinforced as we moved to boat set up and tuning. Whilst the subject is vast

settings of the boat in your sailing club that you wish to beat. He concluded, 'You do not need to understand why things are fast, just that they work.' Adding: 'If the national champion sails with their mast upside down, do not spend months trying to prove that this does not work, just sail with your mast upside down!'

On the water with Kostas

I must admit feeling a little daunted when we moved on to the water that afternoon. How do you sail in the presence of a World champion? But I reminded myself that if he saw something I was doing wrong he could fix it, and that was why I was there, to learn.

The format for the first session was simple, short windward-leeward races, in order for Kostas to see what we were doing and how we were doing it. Now sailing a Tornado with my crew for the week,

“ You do not need to understand why things are fast, just that they work ”

and often considered a black art, Kostas began to explain the basics with alarming ease. As self-dubbed 'advanced' sailors, we continually asked questions, with every question being further in depth. Kostas began to stave off the questions by promising to answer them later, but only if each of those who asked the questions met the challenges he would set of them. The challenges ranged from hitting a lay line, to hoisting a spinnaker within a set period of time, but were ultimately devised to keep the instruction on track.

To satisfy our curiosity regarding the more detailed points of boat set up, Kostas left us with one simple goal to apply to our sailing, repetition. He elaborated further by saying that the best way to set your boat up to speed quickly is to follow tuning guides, or repeat the

German-born Stefan, we sailed as required, while Kostas watched us intently. Finally we returned to shore for the day's debrief.

What Kostas could see from a RIB sat in the middle of a training course, I do not think I would be able to pick up from slow motion video footage! But pick things up he did, and constructively brought them to the attention of the group. To our surprise, most problems were common to us all, such as keeping your head out of the boat, smooth helming, and correct sheet tension. We all had lots to work on, and as the drinks began to flow in the evening, we enjoyed plenty of laughter as we reminded each other of the highlighted mishaps.

My goal was to take one piece of information each day and commit it to the memory banks. That first day was filled with one of Kostas's many golden ▶



PHOTO: MIKE LING

RIGHT Richard and Stefan rounding the windward mark on race day



PHOTO: Y&Y*

ABOVE By the end of the week Claire was able to crew the Tornado and didn't do a bad job!

catch phrases. 'Sail with the heart, win with the mind.'

Startline manoeuvres

On the second day we headed straight for the water, with our first focus being startline manoeuvring. Our task was to hold our boats on and around the line, positioning them in order to defend our desired area, and attack for better positioning when we could. After a quick demonstration we were left to practice, while Kostas hopped from boat to boat to offer one-to-one tuition before a spell of short course racing.

Whilst the time on the water, flying hulls in the beautiful blue sea and sunshine delivered the enjoyable sailing side of the holiday, the debriefs provided the best learning environment for me. An example that came out of the day's debrief will stay with me for a very long time. We were leading the first race of the day and had to pass between the marks from which we had started before heading back upwind. I had noticed that there were three marks in close proximity, and I passed between the wrong two. When asked why I had made such an error, I flippantly replied that it was because I was stupid. Instead of laughing,

Kostas extricated the real reason, piece by piece. This was not because I had made a mistake, mistakes are fine in Kostas's world, 'I am happy to make 10 new mistakes a day,' he states, while pointing out that understanding and learning from your mistakes is vital in the quest to become a better sailor.

Big breeze sailing

Big winds were a particular area that I was hoping would be covered during the week. And I wasn't disappointed. The penultimate day was dedicated to the art of heavy air multihull sailing. Kostas chose to start the day on the shore, explaining the subtle differences required for sailing in heavy airs, and trapezing techniques for both helm and crew. Again we asked to many questions, allowing the wind to build so much it rendered one-to-one tuition impractical. The solution was to place two crews in a RIB with Kostas, while one crew took a Tiger for a romp around the bay.

Watching from the RIB was very beneficial. At the start of the week we would have been waiting for Kostas to comment, but now we found ourselves spotting the errors. Then it was my turn to sail the Tiger and as I did not have a crew for the day, Kostas stepped into the role.

Sheeting on, we were soon hurtling towards the mountains. While it cannot be said that I was keeping the boat tracking to Olympic standards, we were flying none the less, and soon to perform the high wind tacking from the trapeze technique that Kostas had shown us earlier. Disaster struck! I could argue that my trapeze harness had slipped, but ultimately I had not performed the procedure with enough commitment, which made for an ugly slow tack. But at least I understood my mistake!

Finishing on a high

The last day was race day. We managed fourth in each race, which left us pretty happy, but for me the previous day's final windy exercise had gelled everything together. That brief experience summarised everything we had learnt during the week. From the attitude and understanding required, to the importance of procedures and manoeuvres, and most of all that mistakes are to be learned from. I've been sailing for many years, but I've never put myself in situation where theory and practice can be experienced at the same time - I'd thoroughly recommend it!

Meanwhile Claire had enjoyed a week of fantastic tuition in her beginners' group, so for the last sail of our holiday we grabbed a Tornado and headed out for the ultimate test - a sail together. We returned with massive grins on our faces. I was already delighted at what I had learned from the week, and it seemed Claire had been transformed into a promising crew as well! What a bonus!

The week got a strong thumbs up from all the attendees, many keen to return - in fact so popular did it prove that Wildwind has already scheduled two more weeks on September 18, this year and in May, 2012. ■

BELOW RIGHT Beach Manager Joe Bennett takes the new Hobie Wildcat for a joyride with guest, Gareth

WILDWIND INFORMATION

■ **Boats available:** Cats – Hobie Wildcat, Tornado, Hobie Fox, Hobie Tiger, Hobie Pacific, Hobie FX One, Hobie 16 LE Race, Hobie 15 Turbo, Hobie 14 LE Turbo, Hobie Dragoon, Hobie Teddy. Dinghies – 29er, 49er, RS400, RS500, RS800, Laser 5000, Laser 4000, Laser 3000, Laser 2000, Laser Vago, Laser, Laser Pico, RS Tera. Keelboat – Laser SB3

■ **Healthy Options:** The 'Healthy Options' programme is great for non sailing partners, it includes activities such as Yoga and Pilates, cycling, massages, and herbal walks. If you're enjoying a different programme but need to relax you can dip in and out of this one as you choose.

■ **Other activities:** Windsurfing is available as part of the 'Free as the wind' package which is done in conjunction with Club Vass next door, one of the world's largest windsurfing centres. Stand-up Paddleboarding is now available on site to take advantage of the glassy water in the mornings and diving, wakeboarding and waterskiing can all be arranged through Wildwind.

Tel: 0844 499 2898 • www.wildwind.co.uk

Wildwind are sponsoring (and attending) the biggest cat event in the UK this year – the F18, Hurricane and Shearwater Nationals at Yaverland SC, Isle of Wight from 12th to 19th August. With a HUGE WILDWIND party and live music on Sat 13th. All welcome, even if just for a drink and listen to the merry tunes!



PHOTO: Y&Y*