



Cats

*invade the Greek
isle of Vassiliki*

Words by Joe Constable Photos by Simon Beary/Wildwind



Anyone who had visited Vassiliki in the past would have not recognised the Greek village last month: the turquoise bay was ablaze with Hobie colours as 118 teams from 16 nations (from as far as Australia, Namibia, Guadeloupe and Martinique) fought each other for the 28th Hobie 16 European championship title.

Hosted by Wildwind Sailing Holidays, this was the first ever Hobie Europeans to be held in Greece. It was also the best attended for many years – this was thanks to a travel subsidy arrangement for teams bringing their own boats and the availability of 48 charter boats (supplied by Wildwind and Hobie Europe). The racing was organised by the Toroneos catamaran club of Thessaloniki, under the auspices of the Hellenic Yachting Federation and the European Hobie Cat class association.

Lefkas is a beautiful island situated some 60 miles south of Corfu; Vassiliki bay lies at the southernmost tip and is surrounded by mountains on three sides that create a famous thermal wind effect in the afternoons. For this reason there are a number of sailing and windsurfing centres along the beach which keep at bay the "bucket and spade" tourism that is associated with other islands.

Gold fleet winners, Mohr and Rock.



Cats

Days one and two

At the opening ceremony the competitors were welcomed by the local community with a dazzling display of Greek dancing and fireworks. The first two days of the competition were devoted to the youth, masters and women's championships which were taking place at the same time as the open qualification series.

Brian Phipps, the RYA youth multihull coach, was in attendance supporting five British youth teams. He was amply rewarded for his efforts: out of a total of 15 youth teams (more than were at the ISAF Youth worlds), John Worthington and Tom Quayle were never placed lower than second and comfortably took first place overall in a series of five races. Team Smith and Lynch also made it through the qualification rounds but were generally frustrated by minor technical problems with their boat.

A French team of Feraud and Doglio won the women's event, with Britain's Kami Marshall and Helen Scott coming a close second. The German team of Szaimemat and Blum captured the Masters title.

Tuesday night saw the up-and-coming British band, Armada, take to the stage and competitors rocked the night away while those in the results rooms calculated just who would qualify for the finals in the gold fleet.

Finally the 28 qualifying places were announced, these teams joining the 36 pre-qualified teams collecting brand new sails from the factory to sail the remainder of the series with on the Wednesday morning.

With the teams split in to gold and silver, the quality of the field became evident – with some surprising names were pushed out in to larger than normal silver fleet. This depth of skill was needed as not one of the five races sailed was held in less than 25 knots!

Day three

On the Wednesday, the race officer took the fleet out into the bay at midday and was forced to keep the boats afloat for over two hours – awaiting the famous cross-shore wind.

When it finally arrived, it did so with a vengeance, an amazing start for Worthington and Quayle saw them take first place. Simon Morgan, Wildwind's founder, took the lead for two legs but finished fifth in this race and a disappointing 19th overall.

A second race was started, but coming up to the final downwind leg, 'A' mark had drifted (in 300m of water there was always the potential for such problems). The race officer immediately put a rescue boat on station with an M flag, but none of the competitors noticed it in the extreme conditions and the race was abandoned.

Day four

Thursday saw another midday start, but with the wind filling in earlier, three races were held, the last in gusts of 35-40 knots.

The first of the day's races was taken by one of the many Italian teams, Fantasia and Sicuri. The second – due to a capsize on an interestingly tight finish line – became a spectacle of epic proportions with a hail of protests in many varied and, judging by the frantic gesticulations, colourful languages!

Cat supremo Mitch Booth, with his awesome downwind boatspeed, managed to escape the mayhem to take his first victory, whilst the British team of Browning and Gilliland showed their credentials by taking top spot in the silver fleet.

The final race was equally exciting, as the wind had now built yet further seeming to suit Booth and Browning who took another first place each.

On Thursday evening the organisers had arranged a boat trip to the nearby fishing village of Sivota where a traditional Greek