

PWA SLALOM

TOUR PREVIEW

Following far too long an absence from the World Tour scene, Slalom returned with a vengeance a few seasons ago and is now back at the top of the game. **Brian McDowell** considers who's going to cut it on the racecourse this season...

ALBEAU



completed at each event. This often shifts the results around a bit as a third mistake is effectively now irrelevant. With all that in mind, here's the skinny...

Antoine Albeau (F-192)

Nation: **France** • 2007 Ranking: **1st**

'Supertonio', 'The Running Elephant', or plain old 'Tony Elbow', as the British boys call him, is simply an unstoppable brute. After a shaky start in Korea last year, Albeau immediately fired-up the afterburners and had the title sewn-up after the fifth event to leave no one in doubt as to who's the best at every aspect of racing, from start boat to finish buoy. Since then he's mullered Maynard's

The PWA Slalom Tour is the sport's elite level downwind racing class, using off-the-shelf equipment in a 'Formula 42' system of four sails and two boards per entrant. Since its return to the Tour it's been a resounding success for everyone involved, but particularly for spectators, who can relate to racing more than, say, freestyle or extreme wavesailing – and of course they can buy the same gear as the slalom superstars from their local windsurfing shop.

The 2007 racing series was as blessed as the rest of the Tour for scoring wind, with all seven events providing top-class competition and Antoine Albeau taking a second successive title back to France. In 2008 the PWA revisits the same seven stops in Korea, Costa Brava, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura, Turkey and Germany, and there are rumours of an eighth event in Tenerife being slotted in between Alaçati and Sylt.

If you look at the Slalom rankings it's clear that this is a discipline for big boys in their 30s, and that – unlike freestyle or wavesailing – there's no place for lightweights or

whippersnappers. All bar one of the top 10 are over 30, and perhaps the key point is that not one of them is less than 6ft tall. If you're a small young man who's got a problem with that then I wouldn't recommend arguing with any of these guys, especially in the new 'no rules' racing environment.

The disposal of the protest system last year certainly made the racing more 'entertaining', but the jury's still out on whether it's safe or not, and many of the old school are livid that they can now be pushed out of contention around the marks, even though a tangle-up doesn't exactly give anyone an advantage.

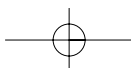
For 2009 the board have voted for 'Formula 63', where the gear is all registered at the start of the season instead of at each regatta. Plus, 2009 will see the introduction of a 'joker' board being allowed as a one-off at a single event, which most riders are likely to pull out at Pozo to cope with the extreme conditions.

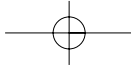
But that's all to come. For the 2008 season one other change sees a third race discard to come into effect after 13 races have been

PRITCHARD



DUNKERBECK





PWA WORLD TOUR 2008

speed record, and with the prospect of a hat trick of titles going in racing you can bet your bottom dollar that Tone's going to do it once again. I'd be certain he'll have a little wobble somewhere, or might face an uphill struggle or two if the wind fails to show here or there, but he's a cutthroat, no-messing-about character who's as focused and hard-grafting at his trade as they come. A gambler might see more value in a punt on one of his close rivals, but that'd just be plain stupid.

2008 Prediction: **1st**

Kevin Pritchard (US-3)

Nation: **USA** • 2007 Ranking: **2nd**

KP's a sneaky slimy snake on the racecourse, and all credit to him too because that's why he's always in the running. If his boss and big brother Matt ain't there, then Kev totally owns the pin-end of the startline and no one – repeat, no one – ever comes downwind to take his quickest-route-to-the-first-mark away. After an off-season kafuffle surrounding his sail sponsorship, Pritchard's now off MauiSails and back on the 'Big G' Gaastra team. To me this doesn't make any difference, as KP's a natural born racer who'd be lethal enough around the cans using a rig made from your granny's bed sheets. I'd say Kev's entire focus this year will be on racing, and his extra work on pre-season fitness is what indicates this to me. Who knows, taking his eye off the ball in waves might make him relax enough to be in for some silverware there too, but for now I think this is where he'll be looking.

2008 Prediction: **2nd**

Bjorn Dunkerbeck (SUI-11)

Nation: **Switzerland** • 2007 Ranking: **3rd**

When you chat to BD he says he's surprised he's still competitive at this level, which might sound odd from such a legend. At the end of 2007 he was on top of his game, and seemed to be enjoying himself too. (He doesn't normally look like he's enjoying anything.) Sometimes, when you see the Dunkerbeck family entourage, it looks like he's just there on holiday. But then you realise he's more than just a doting husband and father, and that the 32-times world

champion (yes, 32 – that's a record in any sport the world over, by the way), is as serious as can be. Bjorn is fully focused on the Speed Tour too, and so his long-suffering caddy Victor is a busy, busy man. Bjorn showed signs of the Dunkerbeck of old to scrap his way into 3rd last year, and I reckon he's still got a few lessons to teach this crowd, so my money's on him to stay somewhere on the podium.

2008 Prediction: **3rd**

Micah Buzianis (US-34)

Nation: **USA** • 2007 Ranking: **4th**

Although 4th is more than respectable, Micah's dropped off the radar a bit by his standards, and seemed to struggle last year unless the water state was flat. But the word is he's pretty pacey already on some new sticks from Werner Gnigler/JP. To me Micah looked a little too heavy in 2007, and could be seen guzzling protein shakes after each race like they were going out of fashion. Albeau, Dunkerbeck and Maynard are even heavier, but they tend to register massive sails and put their size to work by holding down 10.0s in 20+ knots, for example. Buzianis is fit all right, but perhaps a tad too hefty for the likes of Korea, Costa Brava and Turkey. And, if you consider that Sylt also has every chance of being light, then he's potentially doomed.

2008 Prediction: **7th**

Finian Maynard (KV-11)

Nation: **British Virgin Island** • 2007 Ranking: **5th**

Maynard will still be smarting from losing his outright speed record to Albeau, and now the winter waiting period's over in France he'll be intensely targeting the Slalom Tour for success. The big fella will have to watch out though, as when it rains for Finian it pours. The key to his season will be a positive start in Korea, which will give him a solid framework to build on and handle what can sometimes be a fragile psychological state where, err, he definitely wears his heart on his sleeve. The good news is that for a 115 kilo giant, 'Fin-Dogg' seems to score well in light winds as well as being a heavy-weather monster.

2008 Prediction: **4th**



BUZIANIS



MAYNARD



VOLWATER

THE SPOTS

Korea: Jinha beach has light and fluffy trade style breezes but big holes hinder course layouts due to an island blocking the wind as it shifts around.

Costa Brava: The past few years have seen light and fluky sea breezes on this stretch of coast, but depending on the mountain conditions it's possible to get 40 knot plus Tramontanas too.

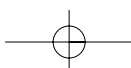
Lanzarote: One constant in Teguije is that the wind is gusty. Apart from that it's likely to be rolling swell outside and either really choppy on the inside or massive breaking swell over the Las Cucharas reef, as we've seen twice in recent seasons.

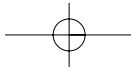
Gran Canaria: Pozo is so far off the how the rest of the Tour is it's not funny. Still, the boys manage to hang onto 7.4s when it's pushing 40 knots.

Fuerteventura: Gusty, gusty, gusty. Mostly choppy but there can be some sweet flat-water days and smoother wind, and sometimes some breaking waves too. It's a nice course for the spectators because the wind is cross-offshore, so the finish line and action are close to the beach.

Turkey: Gentle but reliable breeze and super-smooth water make for very civilised racing indeed.

Sylt: Expect the full gambit from howling onshores with a vicious shoredump, through to gusty, flat and offshore conditions.





MOUSSILMANI



Pieter Bijl (NED-0)

Nation: **Holland** • 2007 Ranking: **6th**

'Pete Beal' (yes, like the old *Eastenders* market trader) has had problems with inconsistency in the past, despite his capability of travelling at the speed of light. He's a real character off the water, but more importantly a big part of the Pryde R&D setup. Personally I thought we saw the best of him last year, but it would be harsh to pitch him much lower. Who knows? Perhaps now he's had a taste of the top there's more to see from him yet? Hmm... Tough call. Let's just wait and see.

2008 Prediction: **8th**

Peter Volwater (H-24)

Nation: **Holland** • 2007 Ranking: **7th**

Voltmeter's been a long time at it, but he's a very old fox and still has what it takes to hustle with the best. Pete's one of those complete windsurfers who's performed at every discipline going, and I think slalom is suiting him perfectly as he grows older. That said, there are some big names to deal with and he'll need more than a bit of luck at this level, as no one is going to just roll over. But all in all Volwater's a true predator, and if an opportunity comes his way he'll pounce on it.

2008 Prediction: **7th**

Cyril Moussilmani (F-71)

Nation: **France** • 2007 Ranking: **8th**

When the long distance races get thrown in then here's your man. 'Nice-one Cyril' is a true all-rounder and manages to get the most from his equipment at all times. A calm and composed character, he rarely makes a mistake and that's why he's usually in the top 10. But there's some hot talent snapping at his heels and I think he'll find this season a whole lot harder.

2008 Prediction: **11th**

Ross Williams (GBR-83)

Nation: **Great Britain** • 2007 Ranking: **9th**

Roscco's got something extra to him at the moment that I've never seen before. We know he's always hated losing, but he's developing into a dependable finisher, and with the experience of past PWA Formula success and Euro Cup victories he knows how to seize a chance and put a race to bed. At super strength Pozo last season, Ross – who's one of the lighter riders in the top flight – notched up a series of race wins and gave an exhibition of turning skill amongst the traffic to carve out a truly impressive finish. There's a lot more to come from Williams, and just you watch 'cos it's gonna come soon.

2008 Prediction: **6th**

Patrik Diethelm (ITA-456)

Nation: **Italy** • 2007 Ranking: **10th**

This bloke's something of a conundrum. He's a top shaper, a production speed record holder, the right size and shape and definitely fast enough to compete, yet he's missing something vital. I'm not sure of his background enough to know if he's got any pedigree in tactics or not, or whether he's just cruising and having fun. I know

he's got potential, but maybe it's his other job for F2 that hinders him from climbing the rankings. He's got everything it takes, but it just doesn't add up to me why he's never ranked higher.

2008 Prediction: **12th**

MOVERS AND SHAKERS – THE BEST OF THE REST

Jimmy Diaz (ISV-11)

Nation: **US Virgin Islands**

The PWA chairman is my number one tip for a return to the top. The US Virgin Islander missed out on a bunch of events last season due to knee surgery, but as the king of consistency he's sure to feature on the leader board once again.

2008 Prediction: **5th**

Ben Van Der Steen (NED-57)

Nation: **Holland**

Despite a second consecutive sail sponsor change Benny boy is a beast of a racer and is skilled enough to make it all the way. He's suffered from irregularity in the past, and has been a serial offender for jumping the gun with early starts. But Van Der Steen is showing signs of a more constant focus now which, to be frank, is all he's missing.

2008 Prediction: **9th**

Julien Quantel (F-421)

Nation: **France**

'Ze Poodle', with a particularly frizzy hair do, made his debut on the Slalom Tour in 2007 and finished in the top 16, which is more than a little impressive for a youngster. He's destined to go even further too, but might not have the size or strength to take a podium for a while yet. Quantel's used to being a winner though, as he's collected world titles in both Formula and junior events, and with good quality sponsorship and Albeau as mentor/friend, he's got a full armoury and no excuses if he doesn't deliver.

2008 Prediction: **10th**

Cedric Bordes (F-91)

Nation: **France**

Another Frog with a future, Bordes, who scored 17th overall last year, is going through that transition from top amateur to full time pro. He's gaining extra backup sponsorship-wise, which will take the pressure off somewhat, and I fully expect to see him feature highly in the future.

2008 Prediction: **Top 16**

Gabriel Browne (BRA-50)

Nation: **Brazil**

'Brawzinho's' younger brother has been gifted a great opportunity from MauiSails and Mistral, and is undoubtedly a hot tip for the future. At just 17 years-old he's got time to make a name for himself, and is already the Brazilian champion. His best PWA result so far is 23rd, and he ranked 28th after only turning up to four events last year. He's not exactly making finals yet, but is definitely worthy of being placed on the fast track.

2008 Prediction: **Top 20**

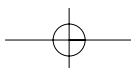
WILLIAMS

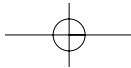


DIETHELM



SWIFT





PWA WORLD TOUR 2008

Josh Angulo (CV-1)

Nation: **Cabo Verde**

Another new signing by MauiSails, Angulo is a danger as he showed with a notable 12th at his one-off attempt at Sotavento last year. As Angulo (the company) isn't a registered Formula 42 brand or producer of racing boards, Josh will need a board sponsor to cut it consistently, and by the time the season kicks off he might just have something sorted. When asked what was on the cards, he simply said "I'll use anything I can get my hands on". Sounds like someone ought to take the opportunity to me as, casual as he sounds about it, Angulo's not exactly going to turn up for fun, and is experienced, fast, financially motivated and competitive.

2008 Prediction: **Top 16**

DA BRITS...

Robby Swift (K-89)

2007 was a good debut year in racing from Swifty, although it was an expensive exercise as he missed out on the prize money at most events. (Only the top 16 get a share the purse, but Robby did finish 15th overall in the end.) Hopefully his feelgood factor from a positive start to the season in the waves might carry over

to slalom, but he could just as well be distracted by it too. Swift's a born winner though, and although he might lack the size to mix it up with the big boys he's strong as an ox and never likely to give in.

2008 Prediction: **Top 16**


Dan Ellis (GBR-52)

Dan ranked just 28th in 2007, but had a bad back and a bad start. In Turkey and Lanzarote he showed us he's got great talent and can win finals and finish highly. With the MauiSails' chequebook still smoking from a post-Pritchard spending spree, Phil McGain just couldn't resist splashing out on Ellis for his new look team. I think it's money well spent, as Dan will only get better and is clearly resilient enough to keep at it as his fulltime relocation to Maui proves.

2008 Prediction: **Top 16**

Mat Pearch (K-16)

Pearchy might surprise a few this season as he's been drafted in more and more by North and Mistral and is pretty much a full-time tester now. Baker tells me he's been impressed with Mat's progress in terms of speed as well as what he's achieving with the gear, and so it'll be interesting to see if it pays dividends.

2008 Prediction: **Top 20** 



WOMEN

It would give me great pleasure to give you a detailed breakdown of the women's scene, but in truth it's just a two or three horse race between Karin Jaggi, Valerie Ghibaudo and Verena Fauster. The scoop is that Frenchie Ghibaudo's arrival is great news for the women's sport as she's really pushing Swiss legend Jaggi hard, opening up the title race, and making it much, much more interesting to watch. Basically Ghibaudo is faster, but Jaggi has the timing and starline skills, and so the women's heats are often more exciting than the men's as the lead changes more frequently during the race. Fauster is good enough too on her day, but has suffered injury and not showed up at all the events.

The entry lists are full enough, but there's a massive gulf in ability between the top three and the rest. Back in 2006 Ozzie Allison Shreeve gave an exhibition on how to race to all these girls, but then turned her attention to the RS:X, although she's since lost out on an Olympic place and taken up a gig as a TV host in Sydney. I'm not sure if Iballe Moreno or even Daida are planning on giving slalom a go this year. Iballe showed she's a major danger when she entered the event in Sotavento last season, and Sara Quita Offringa put her youth racing background to good use there too.

Sadly, since the departure of Lucy Horwood from the Tour, there are no British girls regularly on the entry lists so let's hope that Bryony Shaw wins gold in Beijing and then turns to the PWA for a competitive fix!

