

Brian McDowell reports on the action from the second PWA slalom event of the season...

COSTA BRAVA



Cyril Moussilmani

PWA COSTA BRAVA

Costa Brava is one of the pros' favourite Tour stops. Situated on the Catalan coast, where the Pyrenees dip into the Med, the Bay of Roses has hosted PWA Freestyle and Super-X for around 10 years now.

The event carries a great campus-style atmosphere, with everyone staying on site in beachside chalets. Organisers lay on interesting evening outings to local eateries, which in this region means traditional Catalan fish, ham and countless other indigenous delicacies.

A host of no-wind activities such as tennis and swimming – all close to race HQ – mean loads of sailors' wives, girlfriends and families get thrown into the mix to add to the friendly vibe.

Conditions can range from gale force Tramontana wind raging down from the sometimes snow-capped peaks, to lighter afternoon sea breezes caused by the hotter Iberian interior.

This season was the first time the event was dedicated solely to Slalom – a sensible decision really as the wind has often been a bit on the light side for Super-X and Freestyle in the past. Production-only equipment Slalom can be

run in pretty light winds, so long as it doesn't dip under 7 knots at any time over the course area...

Where?

Ballena Alegre Camping and Bungalow Park, St Pere Pescador near Girona, Costa Brava, Spain.

When?

12-17 June.

Prize-money at stake

30k – not a huge sum, but enough to cover Bjorn's bar bill.

Most to lose?

Kevin Pritchard with his early Tour lead after the first event of the season in Korea, and his

podium companions Micah Buzianis and Antoine Albeau.

Nothing to lose and most to gain

Bjorn Dunkerbeck after missing the first event of the year.

Biggest Surprise

Kevin Pritchard crashing out. Arriving as Tour leader, he snapped a mast in race 1, followed up with two poor finishes, and failed to qualify for the race 4 final. He pulled a win back in race 6, but still only finished up 7th overall – and that was with the help of a discard. Did his shock knock-out in Guincho dent his confidence in Spain? It certainly looks like it. →



Buzianis leads Pritchard round the mark



Antoine Albeau

BRITS ON TOUR

Ross Williams – a light wind specialist with bags of Formula and Slalom experience.

Robby Swift – new to Slalom this season, and after two events he's already sitting just outside a top 10 filled with much heavier guys than him. However, his competitive focus and professional approach will probably see him break this as some point. Although known mainly as a freestyler and wavesailor, Swifty started out as a youth racer, and has skirted the podium countless times in Super-X.

Dan Ellis – fast, and famous for his R&D roles at Naish and Fanatic, but sadly also for losing concentration and being one of the most disqualified on Tour for busting the startline too early! Dan's passionate about racing and about making Slalom as big as it was in the '90s.

Mat Pearch – another character known more for his Wave and Super-X appearances who's come up through the ranks as a UKWA youth racer. Pearchy is Nik Baker's tuning buddy and a member of the North and Mistral testing set-up.

RESULTS

Unfortunately, a Wimbledon-esque performance from the Brit pack – Swift 17th, Williams 18th, Ellis 23rd, Pearch 25th.



Dan Ellis

Pressure barometer

An excruciating 9/10 as, after two days of dodgy racing, the chances of wind faded and a classic Costa Brava 'last chance Sunday' dawned to allow Albeau to elbow Buzianis out of pole position.

Time-out

The usual Costa Brava 'summer camp' involved boat trips, free dinners out, BBQs laid on by sponsors, tennis, basketball, football, double-checking and rechecking weather forecasts for signs of hope, and a bizarre yet ruthlessly competitive pastime of spotting 'farmyard vehicles' (saying "tractor" without seeing one means a minus point... doh! Everyone got into it in the end – boredom does strange things to people's minds).

Event summary

A sketchy start with fluky winds, followed by an agonising wait before an epic final day's racing. Antoine Albeau emerged victorious, Micah Buzianis finished second and Bjorn Dunkerbeck third. c



Robby Swift



Ross Williams

ANALYSIS

Ross Williams

Ross can sometimes lack the steely determination that the dominant names have in abundance for dusting themselves off and starting again unruffled:

"Well, I made so many mistakes like being over early at the starts and silly stuff, really. I hadn't trained that much for Slalom beforehand, which might have cost me. Really though it was a mental thing. I should have put the first error or two behind me and kept focus to charge on and perform better."

Mat Pearch

Pearchy was never expecting to cause a shock and could easily have done a lot worse by not qualifying for even losers' finals. Not bad out of a cut-throat fleet of 48.

"I was actually pretty pleased with my result. I got 25th and had hoped to come halfway up the fleet as it was my first PWA Slalom event in five years. Also, I reckon it's a good result to build on over the rest of the season."

Dan Ellis

Dan sometimes just goes for it too much and takes risks that don't always pay off.

"Each season the standard gets higher and higher and it's like all your training just keeps you in the game. But really it does just get more and more difficult to keep up. You can drop places so easily – one minute you can be in with a chance to win a losers' final for a 12th, but one fall and you're suddenly 24th, so you really have to make the most of all your chances or else. That's pretty much what happened to me here, and it cost me dearly."

Robby Swift

Swifty's ability to make finals in Korea didn't carry over to Costa Brava, which must have hurt a little as he knows the conditions here well. Perhaps he got frustrated and lost concentration, but he'll more than likely bounce back and reach his targets as he usually does. It's interesting that he finished the highest ranked Brit regardless of this stutter, and was still in pretty impressive company even down in 17th. Also, Swifty's likely to do every single event, and with an event discard could still register an impressive debut-season result.



Mat Pearch

