

# POSITIVE PASSION



Our ratty writer **Brian McDowell** is blinded by the light during a feeble attempt to darken coaching messiah Jem Hall's door with a dour and dastardly interrogation...

I'll be frank. Jem Hall really annoys me. As the most positive and upbeat guy you'll ever meet, he manages to grate my cynical psyche in excruciating fashion. It just defeats me where he gets all his energy from to keep that optimistic fire burning so incessantly. And as I'm a shallow, cowardly figure, what infuriates me even more is how I can walk up to the guy, receive a barrage of free tips on my sailing style – whether I like it or not I might add – and then, when I've finished feigning polite appreciation with a sprayed-on grin throughout, I walk away feeling sickeningly fake and false.

But then things often go from bad to worse. Like when some cheerful fool walks up to ask what I'm rigging. (A sail you moron! A frickin' sail, would you not guess for yourself what size

if I wasn't here?) Or perhaps asks what it's like out there. (Windy! Are you blind?) All of a sudden I find myself overflowing with uncharacteristic and infectious outward friendliness and yearning to be helpful. How dare this shining force brighten my day and blow the storm clouds away? If my sailing wasn't better as a result of his tips, I don't think I'd ever forgive him.

## Rough Diamond

I've bumped into Jem in many places over the years. Sometimes when our paths have crossed there have been odd moments in between his loud and buoyant boomings on the beach where we've snatched a quieter minute or two over a pint of Black Stuff in the corner of a Dingle bar, or in a gloomy kitchen at some party

or the other, to delve deep into his past and investigate what drives the man so intensely into pushing people out of their comfort zones.

A big clue to Jem's chirpiness is that he's a typical cheeky Pompey chappy. The mean streets of Southsea can put a strut into any self-respecting Portsmouth geezer's step, and it was down in the Langstone harbour mud ghetto where our Jem took his skills from the street onto the water way back in '85.

Some experiences from those early days burst onto the surface to indicate what moulded Jem into what he is today. "There was a wicked crew of us from Southsea surf shop", reminisces Jem. "The owners, Pete Newman and Trevor Leppard, really helped us out when we were kids. We cycled down with our gear

on his slappable shiny swede, Jem eventually earned his Level 5 wings courtesy of good old Harty (Peter Hart). Now, at his age you'd think Harty would be a bit more gruff and grumpy with such a lively young spark, but in fact the oldest swinger in town remains a close friend and mentor of Jem's to this day. And with the help of some "seriously focused instructors" such as Jez Wilmott and Windy Jon, Jem bagged his first big personal goal in 2000 – to become a [Neilson] centre manager – by scoring a gig as head honcho at Vass before preparing himself for his next big challenge of hitting the cutthroat competition scene.

beach about the lifelong learning habits they'd picked up on Jem's courses.

### Testing Times

With the Witterings being a haunt of BOARDS editorial staff, sprightly sailor Hall was soon press-ganged into becoming a member of the magazine's famously fastidious test team, and spent a five-stretch lugging tons of gear around the world's airports before pushing it to within an inch of its life on the water. "It was a pivotal moment for me to make the test team", says Jem. "I got so much experience and knowledge from it, and of course being in the magazine

## “ BUT THE ENERGY! WHERE DOES THE DRIVE COME FROM? IS HE HYPERACTIVE OR SOMETHING? ”

But the UKWA campaign didn't go Jem's way in terms of a big-time win or ranking. Okay, okay, so I sound pleased about that I know, but his lack of success on the British circuit actually paved the way for what was yet to come for the lucky git. A juicy sponsorship deal with JP/Pryde isn't something you'd normally keep without hot results, but Hall's potential had already been spotted by his sponsors. "Chris Martin [the UK Brand Manager] had this belief in me, and wanted to help me to become a coaching guru. So I worked with the then distributors Ultra Sport, and really started to realise that my strengths – and a chance at having windsurfing as a serious career – lay in helping other people with their sailing rather than trying to win contests."

A spell as a fitness instructor and an opportunity from Simon Basset at 2XS at West Wittering to teach more one-on-ones proved the perfect springboard for Jem to brew his own blend of crucial coaching elements. Soon he had clients banging on the door for more, and, perhaps more importantly, waxing lyrical at the

provided the necessary promotional platform from which to launch my clinics. But working with the test team also taught me how to accurately measure boards, and critically, how to tune them to their maximum potential. It was all a real challenge, and I just lapped it up and loved every minute of the hard work and being part of a team again."

The big breaks started rolling in, and next up Hall was offered his first 'celebrity' clinic in Prasonisi by Sportif, which went so well that they waved a wad of venues at him over the following seasons, which were all pretty much booked-out by repeat customers. By 2006, armed with a winning formula and happy, smiling punters getting what it said on the tin, the word just spread like wildfire. So, obviously, feeling kind of groovy, it was time to make a movie. Yep, with the market hungry for self-help coaching flicks, Jem and Lars Petersen's collaboration on the *Beginner to Winner* DVD was a sell-out success and completed the transformation of our man from geezer to guru. →

and were eventually allowed to store it there. My passion for the sport grew and grew with their help; I wanted to pass on what the guys had given me, and it was there that I started teaching beginners. But as we were all virtually self-taught on crap equipment it took me a while to improve with no coaching and shit kit, and that's a big reason why I'm so hell-bent on encouraging people to take coaching at every stage of their windsurfing lives."

Of course, while the rest of us slaved away in dull offices or grey and freezing building sites, jammy old Jem went on to do several seasons for Nielson holidays, experimenting in his teaching methods in hotspots such as Bitez, Rhodes and Cabarete (not that I'm bitter or anything, obviously). Surviving serious sunburn





## “ I’LL BE FRANK. JEM HALL REALLY ANNOYS ME... ”

### A ‘Learning Organism’

It goes without saying that I don’t buy into any old wishy-washy, airy-fairy stuff, and so my prolific and particularly bushy eyebrows were raised significantly when Jem once described how he saw himself as a “learning organism”. Now seen as some sort of Zen-master, he was naturally positioned to become a private coach to the stars. Amazingly, his methods also worked wonders with World Tour journeymen Skyeboy and Audsley, who, using the techniques normally reserved for average Joe, suddenly found themselves hitting the top-10 on the world stage and seriously threatening PWA podiums. Team FakeFish swum successfully together for several seasons to put the seal on Hall’s wonder-working mindset.

Being an upstanding figure, Jem isn’t shy about saying what drives him. “If you ask any of my clients what my best qualities are as a


coach they’ll say it’s my passion and commitment, and the fact that I am totally dedicated to their development. You can’t fake that! From teaching beginners to giving someone a free tip on a beach, to coaching top pros – you’re either committed and want to add value to people’s lives or you don’t. I add value and aim to exceed expectations. Basically, some people just want to help others. I am competitive of course, but I really just love getting people better at windsurfing, personally and in their fitness. It’s a joy to give and I don’t do it to receive back either. Seeing someone improve because of your input and their hard work is amazing. I truly believe everyone has potential, and I coach everyone so they can take the sport as far as they want to go. In a way I’m giving it back to the sport I love; the sport that’s given me everything – passion, belief, my amazing girlfriend Sophie and a whole bunch of life-long friends.”





PHOTO: BRENDAN PYATT

built in light winds. The sailors who do the most work in Force 2-3 on their tacks, non-planing gybes, clew-first sailing and basic freestyle are the ones who move forward the most and the fastest. If they do their light wind drills and light wind homework they will improve. It's just a fact! I know you of all people won't believe me, but I have been miserable once or twice before. Back in '04 I suffered a prolapsed disc in my back and I was in agony, but I had to keep working to pay the bills. I couldn't even put my shoes on or uphaul, let alone sit or stand for long periods. I wouldn't wish the pain I had on anyone. In the end surgery, self-belief and extensive rehab cured it. Some of the best things in my life have come from my worst experiences. There's always an upside. Even my latest injury has taught me to savour every freesailing session and to push my windsurfing further. Right now sprinting at full speed again along Southsea seafront, after tweaking my knee late last year, has me given me such a feeling of freedom. From bad to good, it all balances out and everything that happens in life happens for a reason."

What can I say to that? I admit it. I'm defeated. Focus. Believe. Enjoy... 

## “SEEING SOMEONE IMPROVE BECAUSE OF YOUR INPUT AND THEIR HARD WORK IS AMAZING...”

In fact, aside from a coaching career, the sport has also gifted him a shot at the business side too, with a recent role as Brand Manager for SeaSprite Sports, who've been his long-time sponsors with RRD and Ezzy gear. It comes to no surprise to me that he's more than a little influenced by some heavy-hitting thinkers in the 'self development' world, too. Yep. I knew it. He's a bleedin' life-coach, dammit! "Ha ha yes!" chortles Jem. "Tony Ford – one of my best mates – and I are guided by the world's leading personal development coach, Tony Robbins. He's the man who helped me work at expert communication skills and neuro-linguistic programming. My clinics and coaching are about relating with people, empathising with them and finding the key to

### Focus. Believe. Enjoy

But the energy! Where does the drive come from? Is he hyperactive or something? He's just not the sort of bloke you can ever see with his feet up watching the telly for more than 30 seconds at a time. But the answers are clear to see and, in stereotypically life-coach manner you can see he's not a man to surround himself with pessimistic or sceptical personas like mine. Jem's warm fuzzy feelings are clearly focused and channelled in a predefined way. "Focus. Believe. Enjoy." These are his watchwords and, although I'd never admit it of course, if uttered daily as you look yourself in the eye each morning in the mirror, they might just nudge your performance on inches (if not more) at a time. "The key thing is", explains

## “FOCUS. BELIEVE. ENJOY”. THESE ARE HIS WATCHWORDS...”

unlock their potential. When I got injured back in '04 I took a course in becoming a life coach, which really helped me as I'm always looking for ways to develop both my coaching and myself, because I'm a sponge and I value feedback hugely."

Jem, "that if you limit your beliefs, you're actively choosing not to achieve something you probably desperately want so much – like landing that first forward or making a planing gybe. It's putting in the hard hours that count. The biggest improvements in windsurfing are

