

PWA Scotland 2007

How is a Wave Competition Run?

Brian McDowell talks us through the judging, scoring and general operation of a wave competition...

A wavesailing contest takes a seeded entry list of up to 48 riders and attempts to put them through a competition process called a 'double elimination'. This is in two parts:

1. A pre-seeded single elimination – a straightforward knockout ladder with competitors' current ranking points determining where they are initially placed in the draw.
2. A second – or 'double' – elimination. After the 'single' is completed, the finishing order allows a second 'double' ladder to be drawn and completed with the seedings based purely on the single elimination finishing positions. This format allows anyone who hasn't advanced very far in the single elimination another chance to claw their way back up the finishing order. The highest finishers from the single await them in pre-determined slots, meaning anyone staging a fightback via the double must eliminate them one-by-one to meet the single elimination winner. In the case of someone achieving this and beating the single elimination winner, which does happen fairly frequently, the rules stipulate that they must then duel it out one final time in a re-sail to decide the overall event title. Some of the most famous victories in PWA history have been won this way, and it certainly adds to the drama!

If there isn't enough wind or waves to complete even the single elimination, the competition is deemed to have produced a result if there have been enough rounds to reduce the fleet to the final (top) 16, who then all get equal first, and an equal share of the prize purse.

The Judging & Formats

To ratify results to official PWA standards, the competition is run by an official Head Judge who oversees a panel of highly experienced, internationally sourced adjudicators. The Head Judge decides the



competition format for each session based on the conditions at that time, which – due to factors such as windstrength, direction and tide all being extremely variable – can mean changes are frequently made to adjust the format to remain as suitable and fair as possible. In Tiree this will be no mean feat, and requires the Head Judge to be on his toes even more than usual to keep abreast of shifting wind, swell direction and tide factors.

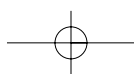
The Head Judge Decides:

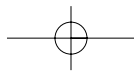
- **The heat duration** – anything from 6 minutes to 30 minutes.
- **How many jumps and rides will count** (e.g. each rider's two best waves and three jumps, etc). The judges will score every manoeuvre a sailor makes, but only include the top scoring moves in their final decision – see later.
- **Whether the scoring is weighted more to jumping or riding**, using 'multiplication factors' that will apply to the judges' individual scores and affect their totals. For example, if conditions favour jumping he'll multiply the wave scores by a high factor to encourage riders to score 'level' with the jumping bias for their skill in difficult conditions, and *vice versa*. The amount of


waves he will count in relation to the jumps is also an indication of how the competitors can then approach the heat. So, using our example of conditions favouring jumping, he may opt to count three jumps in different categories to test the range of skill the entrants must display, but only count their best two waves. These weighting factors mean that the sailors have to know exactly what the judges are looking for, and ensure they sail their heat as tactically as possible to maximise their scores. Thus, if only two waves are being scored, for example, you may well see sailors waiting for a very long time to ensure they get two really good waves, rather than charging around all over the place riding lots of average ones. For this reason, the 'overall impression' of the viewer (*i.e.* sailor X did lots of stuff!) may well differ from the judges' decision as to who actually won.

The Scoring

Judging is done in an extremely precise fashion, and the scoresheets are available for inspection by the sailors after the heat, so everything is highly accountable. In the early rounds, two heats are run in tandem to save time and maximise conditions. That means four sailors are on the water being marked by two panels











Corona Extra PWA World Cup

The Isle of Tiree, Scotland Saturday 6th - Saturday 13th October 2007

comprising three judges. Each panel will have a senior judge in the middle to decide on issues such as when waverides officially start and end, and whether someone is still in the designated contest area (usually marked by a diagram on the notice board and some flags on the beach and/or markers out to sea). The semi-finals and finals are run with just the two relevant competitors at a time and a panel of five judges.

Waverides are scored out of 10, but exceptions can be made to stretch the scale to 12 if necessary. Jumps are also scored out of 10, and can also be extended to 12 for an exceptional manoeuvre. There are official published guidelines on which jumps are generally

wet it will be marked lower than a less difficult or cleaner example. Contestants can add to their scores by adding variations of difficulty such as jumping one-handed, one-footed, performing grabs, etc.

2. **Forward rotating jumps** – such as forward loop, air-chacho, switch-stance forward loop.

3. **Backward rotating jumps** – such as push loops and back loops. Push loops are generally considered to be easier, although if a competitor pulls a push loop that is higher than a previous back loop and lands it cleanly, it can outscore the technically more difficult trick.

of spray thrown out during the turn will tend to indicate the severity of the directional change.

Cutbacks will be scored considering the vertical aspect of the approach, the proximity to the critical section of the wave, how deep inside the lip the turn is made, and the speed and power with which the manoeuvre is executed. The sailor who is committed deep into the face of the wave will score more highly.

Aerial manoeuvres will enhance the score, but there should be clear differentiation between simple hops after riding straight down-the-line and aerials that are performed by turning back up the face and blasting airwards from the actual lip. Aerials should be executed



➤ One-handed back loop

➤ Aerial off-the-lip

accepted to be more difficult than others, but exceptions are made according to the conditions. The individually counting wave and jump scores are added together and multiplied by their relevant factors, and a total is derived.

Once the scores are added up a winner is decided by a majority, such as a 3-0 decision or a 2-1 decision, or in the finals a 5-0, 4-1 or 3-2 verdict. In the rare event of a tie there are rules on tiebreaks that apply according to past encounters and a whole list of pre-agreed factors to separate the two competitors.

Jumping

Jumps are broadly placed in four categories and then scored on their height and degree of difficulty relative to that day's environment, cleanliness of execution and degree of difficulty. The categories are:

1. **Straight jumps** – such as regular chop-hops, high nose-first landed jumps, tabletops, and ninja kicks. A high jump will score a few more points than a lower one, but a crashed high jump won't score more than a lower, cleanly landed jump. A 'tweaked' jump will score more than a regular jump of the same height and cleanliness – but once again, if it's crashed or landed

4. **Combinations.** These sort the men from the boys! Tabletop-forward loops, double-forward loops, pushloop-tabletops, pushloop-forwards, double-pushloops. Enough said...

If the Head Judge decides to count, say, three different jumps, the riders will be scored on their three highest scored jumps from any three of those four separate categories.

Riding

Waveriding is scored according to clear PWA guidelines, which in turn embody the commonly accepted principles of good surfing, and are fairly clear in themselves.

PWA Waveriding Guidelines

Competitors will be judged primarily on the fundamental principles of good waveriding – speed, fluidity, power, and their proximity to the critical section of the wave. In general a more vertical approach to the lip, initiated by a committed, powerful bottom turn, will score more highly than a more horizontal 'down-the-line' style of ride.

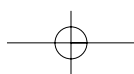
Directional changes will be assessed on the degree to which direction is changed, and on the speed and fluidity with which this change is achieved. The amount

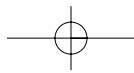
in a controlled fashion, and a manoeuvre that is cleanly 'tweaked' shall score more highly than one that is ragged or twitchy in the air. The sailor that uses the wave and hits the lip to create the aerial will score more highly than one who simply hops off the top of the wave.

To gain maximum points sailors should demonstrate as wide a variety of different skills as possible. A sailor who performs both cutbacks and aerials should, in general, score more highly than a sailor who performs the same move repeatedly, as should a sailor who includes frontside and backside riding and any number of other manoeuvres during the ride. Sailors who simply blast down-the-line and perform one big move will not be scored as highly as those who really ride the wave, but only if the turns and manoeuvres performed are of a high standard. In general quantity should not be scored more highly than quality.

While wave selection is a factor in scoring, it should only influence scoring between two equally well-ridden waves. In general, a well-ridden smaller wave will generate a better score than a badly ridden big wave.

Sailors who take risks and perform more radical manoeuvres should be rewarded more than sailors who play safe, provided that manoeuvres are completed in a reasonably controlled fashion.





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➤ Tweaked tabletop

Notes

One-handed manoeuvres enhance difficulty and score, but the difficulty of the basic manoeuvre should be taken into account. A sailor who performs a much more difficult manoeuvre should be more highly rewarded than a sailor who simply removes one hand during an average manoeuvre.

To encourage progress in wave manoeuvres, new moves will be scored highly, but only if executed in a controlled fashion.

If it is difficult to clearly determine individual waves, then the entire sail-in may be scored as one wave. Sailors will be informed of this at the skippers' meeting or at the check-in.

If a sailor is on a wave when the red flag goes up to signify the end of the heat, that wave will continue to be scored until the sailor exits the wave.

Generalisation of highest scoring wave manoeuvres

1. Off-the-lip back loops
2. Off-the-lip 360 (takas, goitas, etc.)
3. Off-the-lip forward loop
4. Tabletop aerals
5. Off-the-lip aerals
6. Forward loop in the chop
7. Bodydrags
8. Chop-hops

About the Head Judge

The PWA Head Judge of choice for Wave and Freestyle events is Britain's own Duncan Coombs, one of the UK's most successful competitors on the world stage in the early days of pro windsurfing and still a legendary and stylish wavesailor to this day.

His instantly recognisable 6'6" lanky frame is no stranger to Tiree, having visited its wild beaches for over 20 years. Indeed, Duncan actually won the Tiree Wave Classic back in 1986, and has also run contests here as the Contest Director for the UKWA circuit

many times before, so his knowledge of the beaches here and at all the international venues – and empathy as a former competitor and judge – is second to none.

Dunc's day will consist of scouting and running teams to constantly recce and remain aware of the changing environment, plus being ever mindful of maximising the conditions for the best possible places to compete at for the sake of fairness, challenging the competitors, and pleasing the crowds and media. Needless to say safety is at the top of his mind, and, along with his lifeguards and crew, he'll be ever watchful of who is, isn't, should and shouldn't be on the water at any one time.

He'll also post and stick to a schedule of official announcements, deem where those will be made and at what intervals, oversee all the rolling clocks and timing staff who man the flags and sound signals, decide the heat durations, multiplication factors, rest periods, oversee the scoring and tabulation, and ensure the ladders are completed accurately. This is a major management task when you throw in wind, rain, mud, cold, and limited visibility on top of trying to get the most out of the day without exposing competitors to the elements longer than necessary.

Flags and Timing

The competition is coordinated via a set of coloured flags on the mobile event HQ, which tells the competitors (and spectators!) when heats start and finish. The red, green and yellow flags are just like traffic lights, and are run in a sequence according to the heat duration. For example, if the heat duration is 10 minutes with a two-minute transition period, the flags indicate where in that continually rolling 12-minute cycle we are. (Unless the heat duration is changed, all the competitors set their watches to a rolling countdown of 12 minutes. If the heat duration gets changed to eight minutes with a two-minute transition they'd set their watches for a rolling 10-minute countdown, and so on.)

Here's a summary to help you stay abreast of things:

- **No flags up** – it's the last minute before the heat starts.
- **Green means go!** When the green's up the heat is on.
- **Yellow flag up** – it's the last minute of the heat.
- **Red flag up** – heat over. We're in the first minute of the two-minute transition period. Next flag change is no flags up, and back to the start of the cycle...

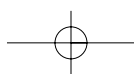
On the water

The competitors attach streamers to their sails to help the judges identify them. There will be up to four different colours on the water at any point in time. Competitors' streamer colours are posted next to their name and sail number on the elimination ladder notice board so you can tell who's out on the water.

The sail numbers identify which nation the competitor represents. Great Britain's official prefix is K, so look out for Britain's best such as Nik Baker K-66, John Skye K-57, and Robby Swift K-89 (below). F is for France, US for the USA, BRA for Brazil, E for Spain, and so on.



➤ Push-loop



A Guide to:

Wavesailing Competition

Wavesailing is perhaps the king of windsurfing's disciplines, and arguably the most spectacular to watch or perform. Unlike racing or freestyle, wavesailing is what defines windsurfing, being exactly that – surfing-with-the-wind in its purest possible sense. In terms of competition, the discipline is broken into two categories – jumping and riding.



as many waves as they can, they will turn back to the shore and commence their waveride – either by turning onto the wave of their choice, or waiting 'out the back' for the right wave to come along. Obviously they want to find the biggest, most well-formed wave possible. The ride starts at the 'drop-in' and lasts until the rider either exits off the back of the wave or wipes out.

Waveriding follows the principles of good surfing, namely style, speed, wave selection, and proximity to the most 'critical' or steep sections of the wave. (The sections near the steepest, fastest, breaking 'walls' adjacent to the breaking white-water.)

How well riders intuitively link the wave's breaking sections with smooth flowing turns, the power of their turns, how vertical they get as they turn back up the wave towards the top, how cleanly they exit from one turn into another, and the overall execution of their rides are what the judges are looking for. Turns are everything in waveriding, and the more tuned-in a rider is to getting the most out of the wave the better.

In windsurfing, just as in surfing, the waves are either ridden 'frontside' or 'backside'. With the wind limiting what angles a rider can turn in relation to the breeze (bear in mind no-one can sail directly into the wind), rides are either made with one's 'backside' to the wave (usually towards the prevailing wind), or with the front of the body attacking the wave in a downwind, 'frontside' approach.

It can be easier to ride frontside or backside in some conditions than others, so the extent to which front or backside riding – and indeed some types of jumps – are rewarded are measured relative to that heat's conditions. (See the *Judging* section for more on scoring and how the competition is run.)

At the time of going to press Tiree is the last confirmed wavesailing event of 2007, which means that you could well see the 2007 Men's Champion crowned here. So all in all, it's an extremely significant event in a landmark year for the PWA World Tour, which has already visited two other new wave locations this season, and really broadened the spectrum of conditions in which these dedicated athletes have competed. An amazing new Tour stop in Cabo Verde absolutely pushed the boundaries of wave size and power ever seen on the PWA scene, and all the regular World Tour locations in the Canary Islands and Portugal have enjoyed epic conditions and bloodthirsty battles to date, while the other new venue in Brazil also delivered a fantastic competition. 2007 has also witnessed a power shift in the fleet, with the younger generation of radical freesailing hotshots now fully getting to grips with the pressures of competition sailing – a very different environment indeed. This has certainly put pressure on the more established players, many of whom have been brushed aside this season and are lying uncharacteristically low in the rankings.

As we enter the autumn leg the struggle for the crown appears to be between Kauli Seadi of Brazil and Victor Fernandez of Spain, and it will be fascinating to see if these amazing talents can cope with Tiree's brutal conditions, which are much colder than they're used to. Or perhaps an experienced head will prevail, or a Brit on home turf, or perhaps both combined in the form of someone like Nik Baker, fresh from his second place in Brazil?

Whoever ultimately wins, it's going to be a superb competition...

JUMPS

Jumping is the satisfying and spectacular result of blasting full tilt towards the natural ramps the waves provide. For the first 15 years of windsurfing, sailors were content simply to jump high. But then someone worked out that it was possible to get more creative, and since then the sport has developed in (literally) leaps and bounds. You'll see competitors pull off mind-boggling backward and forward loops, double-loops and combinations of loops. Some leave their loop till as late as possible after take-off to gain maximum height and points for bravado, while others go for pure height or cleanliness of landing and execution. Others will try to 'tweak' their manoeuvres, extending their legs, arms or twisting their body further during their flight to add extra dimension to the move.

You'll also see competitors get air on the way in, but that's called an 'aerial' and is scored as part of the overall waveriding score rather than as an individual manoeuvre itself like a jump. (See below for more on that.)

RIDING

Once the competitor has sailed out to sea, jumping off

