

# TREVOR BAYLIS – WIRED (2001)

It is very unlikely to find a more accomplished sailor than Trevor Baylis. What makes this even more impressive is that his successes have come as crew. Crew? That lowly, afterthought? The guys who do the dirty work, but rarely get the credit? Well, in this case he gets much credit and it is much deserved. His resume spans four decades, and it is impressive. Nothing however, and we mean nothing, can beat his most recent accomplishments. It's certainly one thing to win the I-14 World Championship with straight bullets. It's quite another to follow that up just a few weeks later by winning the 18 Footer World Championships. Yet that is exactly what he did. We thought it most appropriate, in this day and age of strutting, overpaid Rock Stars, to talk with someone who gets it done better than most of the Stars do, and from an entirely different perspective.

Here's Trevor Baylis:

**Trevor your list of accomplishments as a crew is almost unmatched. How did you come to be known as a good crew as opposed to a skipper?**

TB:

I've pretty much always been a crew when I sail on small boats. I think it started when I was a kid. I was always big, and since if you wanted to go fast back then you sailed single trapeze boats, and the big guy usually ends up crewing. Then when I first sailed skiffs it was on other peoples' boats and you get known for your crewing and it just keeps going from there.

You know, it's strange, I quit sailing boats about 17 years ago out of frustration, because I didn't feel I had enough control of the boats I was crewing on. I then windsurfed for about 12 years, racing, developing products, as well as working in the industry. When I got back into sailing, I was stoked because I could actually afford to own a boat, and run the show, and the 49ers had been invented. The next thing I know I'm crewing, first a bit for Morgan Larson and then for my wife, Tina, and I was right back to being a crew again.

Another part of it is that on most of the boats I sail on, I am very involved in strategy and tactics. This is true of many of the top dinghy crews. Instead of what most people think of as a traditional crew, I share the role of skipper. Another one of my strengths is tuning and changing gears and this is usually better done by the crew than the driver.

**Do you have any skippering aspirations?**

TB:

If you mean driving aspirations, then the answer is yes. I love to drive sailboats. Usually it's in offshore big boat stuff, not so much in small boats, although I do have a Laser to keep me tuned up. I'd like to do some skippering as well, but that never seems to work out.

**At 42, you're not the kid that everybody assumes a winning I-14 or Skiff world champion crew would be. Are there real physical shortcomings that 42 brings, and how do you overcome them?**

TB:

When I was sailing 18 footers in my early twenties I would have told you that there was no way a 42 year old could have done it competitively. But now, obviously, I think you can do it.

There are two things that make it possible. First, at twenty you have really quick reactions, but the problem is that you are reacting to stuff, not anticipating it. I think my ability to anticipate what's going to happen next has increased much more than my general physical skills have degraded.

The other side of the coin is that you're not afraid to change stuff to make your job easier. When I last sailed 18's in the eighties they were about the same width they are now, but we sailed with a 1:1 jib sheet. The sheet really, really pulled hard. We dealt with it by working out systems to have two of us pull the last little bit. It absolutely ruined your hands and back! But to change it would have meant doing something different than the rest of the boats. Last year when I started sailing on the 14 with Zach, his boat had 1:1 jib sheets which made it hard to trim accurately as well as pretty tough to get out of the cleat, so I just changed it to 2:1, and learned how to deal with all the extra sheet. I remember mentioning a 2:1 to the Aussie's in the eighties for the 18, and being shamed into not changing by a quick "Mate, don't be a wanker," now- I'm not afraid to tweak or change anything.

Actually, there is another advantage to being older as well. I now have the common sense not to do something if it's going to injure me. In the old days I'd keep struggling at something until something in my body went pop. I have a lot less aches and pains now than I did at 25.

**You Baylis kids (brother Will, sister Liz) are an accomplished bunch. How did you three happen to get this good?**

TB:

The obvious answer is that we are our father's children, and he was a hell of a great sailor. He raced 16's and 18's in Sydney, where he grew up, then sailed the world as a hired hand, racing all over the place. He raced Transpac, the Fastnet, Cowes week, etc. He sailed on boats like Spirit, Baruna, Orient, and Kialoa.

Then he essentially built a 34' boat (Molly B) single-handed in our backyard when we all were growing up. He even built the winches himself, they were prototypes designed and built for Bariant. We all sailed a lot with him after it was done.

Sailing was a big part of our family when we were kids. I think every houseguest was some sort of sailor, and sailing stories were normal in our home.

It funny how things go in cycles, in the seventies Will and Liz, were my brother and sister, then Will did his Olympic thing (3 World championships and the Silver in Korea crewing for Kosteki) and Liz and I were his brother and sister. When I got back into sailing in '96, Will and I were definitely Liz's brothers. And now with Will in NZ at One World Challenge, Liz and her team ranked #8 in the world in woman's match racing, and me with my skiff titles, we're all doing well at the same time.

**Tell us what goes into preparing for and winning something as intense as an I-14 world title.**

TB:

The 14 project was cool. I was coming off of sailing 49ers, where you can't really change anything, and then started on the 14 where you can essentially change anything you want. So we spent the season refining the boat, rig and foils as well as figuring out the boat-handling techniques.

For example we worked with Jay Glaser at Ullman Sails on a series of jibs, trying to get the sections and twist patterns right, as well as using higher tech materials and panel layouts. We ended up with a very versatile jib that was very stable and fast. One of the things we changed was flattening out the leading edge which made the sail faster but less forgiving. It was a bunch faster if the driver really concentrated on steering, and didn't look around as much.

It was really fun for Zach and me to work with a bunch of talented people like Larry Tuttle at Waterat, Jay Glaser at Ullman, Dave Alexander at Alexander Sails, Paul Beiker at Riptide Design / Oracle Racing, as well as the West coast 14 fleet. And I should probably mention that we practiced quite a bit, especially for 14s.

The funny thing was after doing all that work the racing wasn't that cool. It was a bit like Team NZ at the last America's Cup—we were so much faster that as long as we didn't mess up we were probably going to win.

**Then you follow the I-14 title a few weeks later with the 18 Foot Skiff World Championship in Australia. How in the hell did you accomplish that?**

TB:

The 18's were a completely different type of deal. We luffed across the finish line of the last race, snapped our heads back to sight the line, and saw that we'd beaten Bell Associates by about two feet, (not much in an 18, which are about 30 feet long,) and whooped it up. As we sailed in we kept saying "I can't believe it." Actually I was talking to Howie last week, and he said it again, "How'n the hell did we win?"

The deal Howie and Mike have with the League is that they're supplied a "stock" boat, including sponsor, for the regatta. What this means is no development, you race what you're given. It's like a really complicated Laser. So...we practiced once in October and then showed up a week early to practice. I hadn't sailed 18's in about twenty years, but Howie and Mike had done the last five or six Worlds and had it pretty dialed. We weren't the fastest boat, but we were usually pretty close and sailed a good solid regatta, and we were lucky as can be.

How's this for luck, in one race, we're second coming down the last reach/run to the finish and we push a lay-line a bit hard to cut out a jibe, and we have to hot it up around a point and I dump the chute and when it fills it breaks the top three feet off the top of the mast. I mean we break the mast and we STILL get second in the race! I learned when we got in that you're supposed to ease the cunningham off down wind, else you can break the mast, doh. Luckily, the next day is a lay-day, and we get a new mast rigged up and are fine. That could have been a total disaster. Another race, we're in second going into the last leeward mark and we flip, right the boat, and then hook into a private mysto-shift and pass the leader up the beat to win the race. Lots of sheepish grins after that one.

The one thing that both those regattas had in common was that I was sailing with really good people, which always makes everything easier.

**Are you a professional sailor?**

TB:

Nope. May be soon if I can work out how to do it and keep having fun.

**How do you fund your sailing?**

TB:

Like most sailors I'm richer than the average person, but you'll notice that I sail on other people's boats most of the time, and that I mostly sail on small boats, and that's a lot less expensive than lead-mines. My sailing expenses are not that high, it's nothing like owning a small racing keelboat.

**Any big boat sailing for you?**

TB:

Yeah, probably. I'm going to keep trying to sail on the Maxi-Cats, Cam Lewis's Team Adventure is an awesome beast, although it's busted right now, and I've talked to Steve Fossett about joining his team on the ex-PlayStation.

I've got a real problem with sailing on boats that you face out on, so that limits the options fairly dramatically. So, long distance sailing/racing on the Maxi-Cats and maybe some Sled racing, those TP-52s look pretty cool, too.

Actually, here's one for the people on your forum- I think the reason keelboat racing has taken a hit is that it's not any fun any more. The thought of racing on a 24 footer with four or five people is ridiculous, what does every body do? Sit around downwind and face out upwind. I think there has to be a move towards enhanced stability (water ballast, canting keels, multihulls, etc) and less people on the boat so the sailing is fun and active for everyone sailing, not just the driver. At least in the old days it took three people to sail a 24 foot keel boat, now with the sprit-boats it really only take two, but they seem to sail with a gazillion. Basically, being ballast alone does not make for not fun sailing.

**What is next for you, sailing wise?**

TB:

See the big boat stuff above, plus small boat stuff with my wife Tina. Some Laser sailing, too as well as some more Skiff sailing. The 18s are coming to the City Front in September- that should be scary as hell. In the old days the 18s had four rigs, and you always used the smallest in the Bay. Now they only have the two middle rig sizes, which should make for some interesting situations.

**When you're not sailing what do you do?**

TB:

Currently an under-employed custom furniture maker and a new dad.

**Thanks Trevor, and best of luck with everything.**