



SKIER
KITEBOARDING ATTITUDE

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North Young Blood Camp

The tough life of pro riders

GEAR 2007

Wave ladies

Manu Bertin and the Atlantic

Identifying different kinds of handlepass

09



A VERY DIFFERENT LIFE THAN YOU WOULD EXPECT!

Outside temperature; 14 degrees, water; 11 degrees, wind blowing from the 'wrong' direction for this place - none of the locals would abide the sick idea of going out kiting here today...!?' - in more than gusty, almost 'unkiteable' conditions. In addition to that, rain and a hell-of-a-lot of excited spectators (in eiderdownjackets !!?), keenly anticipating the performance of the 'stars', the world's best kitesurfers. It's already the 4th day of the event, unfortunately it started raining precisely on 1st day and nothing has happened so far except for the qualifier, which was carried out in stormy conditions with gusts up to 35 knots. Since then: deadly calm. The participants, hungry to show their skills, are looking for shelter in the equipment tents. Spread out in small groups in between all the gear, the riders are killing time by playing with their laptops, others are sleeping on top of kitebags, a few, those who are convinced that no wind would come up no more, are consuming (for professional athletes) inappropriate substances, the rest are chilling out, passing time eating, chatting, swearing Yep, we are all - participants, judges, organisers, etc. - on 'stand-by', we can't move too far away from the event site, in case the wind comes up suddenly. The event would be started immediately and nobody will be waiting for any riders that don't turn up.

This, the World Cup on the small island of Fehmarn (the so called 'Hawaii of Germany') in 2003, was one of my first events and incredibly important, as the two 'top dogs' of North Kiteboarding, my equipment sponsor, were amongst the spectators. They were about to witness my riding for the first time and it goes without saying that I wanted to impress them big time ... dude, I was so nervous!!

I was asking myself, 'why on earth, are we so damn unlucky with the conditions? Only a few days ago, when I arrived on Fehmarn, I was happily cruising around in some 20+ degree warm water, with sunshine, and sweet constant wind ... why did this storm have to pass through, precisely now, in midsummer?'. Back then, everything felt truly jinxed. Today, having been in the 'professional competition scene' for more than 3 years, I am used to the 'Fehmarn 2003' scenario. What we were dealing with back then, was simply a 'perfectly normal competition dilemma' - during events everything seems to turn out completely different than you would expect. Today, I know that in fact, it would have been a way bigger surprise, if we had been blessed with really great conditions....

On the last official day of the event, a light, very gusty breeze set in and the organisers declared the conditions good enough to start running heats. The organizers are usually pushing to get results, because if there aren't any, 50% of the sponsor-bucks go back to where they came from.

Me, in my heat I pretty much went down like a submarine ... Everything happened so fast, I heard the start-signal of my heat and I had chosen the wrong size kite.... Plus, the model kite I had was 'too hot' to handle in gusty conditions - and

PRO RIDER'S LIFE

By Gabi Steindl





"Mhhmmmm, professional kitesurfer ... do you also work?"

the gusts were beating me up badly. I was seriously 'tea-bagged' around, slammed in and out of the water and even before I got a chance to show off my routine that I prepared to impress the judges as well as my equipment-sponsor, I heard the bell another time ... "Whaaat, that's impossible??? Noooooo.....!!!" but it was the sad truth, my heat was over before it had even really started and therefore, for me it was: "Game over".

They barely managed to run all heats of the single-elimination ladder, there was no time and no more wind to start the double and so the majority of riders left the scene with upset faces, disappointed with the conditions, their performance and the results. All the training and preparation, in addition the money spent on travel to be part of the event, expectations, hopes and then.... that....

However, exactly that very knowledge about the 'competition dilemma' distinguishes "pros" from "amateurs" and does not throw them off balance. That competitions only take place at fantastic spots with perfect conditions is only one of many incorrect assumptions of people who are not directly involved in the industry. This article is dedicated to exactly those people and to put right the most common clichés about the life of a pro. Almost on a daily basis I get the same 'Ohhhhs and Ahhhs' as well as

questions when I'm asked about my profession. The most common and typical reactions are:

- Mhhmmmm, professional kitesurfer ... do you also work?
- Wow, dude you're so lucky!! A life on the beach....!!
- Awesome, the whole year travelling, you're on a life-long holiday, yeah?
- Once you're too old for that job, will you still have to work or you've earned enough to finance the rest of your days?
- Mhhhh, what exactly does that mean: that you've got sponsors which pay you to go kitesurfing...?
- and so on

I will now scrutinize the most common, stereotypical ideas (not everything should be taken completely seriously!!):

"All we do is kite"

Kiteprofessional is a job and certainly comprises way more than 'simply' kitesurfing. Without a doubt priority No.1 is: to push the limits of the sport, to invent new tricks, and always be at the highest level of the 'Art of kitesurfing'. There is, however, so much more in addition to the physical work on the water. Marketing, and creating an image, for example, play a vital role. Nobody would imagine, h

ow many hours I spend on my laptop daily (ok, ok, fair enough, perhaps sometimes in some nicer environment than most office workers, but that's traded for tranquillity that an office desk offers). I'm basically a 'One-Woman-Show': professional athlete, coach, caddy, travel agent, sponsor hunter, marketing & PR, webmaster, journalist ... and much more!

Some of the kite-pros are lucky and they can sneak out of many of these duties due to their background. Rich parents and a home at a decent kiting location, certainly makes things easier. In any case, focused, hard practice on the water, a strong will, thick skin, motivation and a gung-ho attitude are, and will always be the basic requirements.

"All expenses paid":

Most pros have contracts like any normal employee, specifying the duties and tasks (I like to call these 'missions') that are expected by the sponsor. Some of us are 'hired' to work in R&D, some are official 'freeriders', most, however, chase after results and exposure in the media. For competition riders, the missions could be for example: participation in a certain number of national and international events; coverage on X number of pages in the press and TV minutes; attendance at promotional events; etc. In order to fulfill these duties we get a salary of \$ X per month. Usually at the end of the year, our achievements are reviewed. Not all 'sponsored' riders are paid. Many 'purely' get equipment provided, with certain conditions.

Obviously the expected results and publicity are hard-earned. Participating in competitions is often quite costly and might result in a loss (salary minus travel expenses = - \$ X,-) if you don't end up right at the top. Trips for travel stories need to be organized (often with very tight budgets), decent photographers found, articles written, magazines contacted ... the most important: Sponsors stickers MUST not be missing from the few things we can fit in on top of all the equipment!!

"Every competition is great jamboree and only the best wins":

Taking part in events is without a doubt good fun. You meet friends and other riders from all over the place, you sweat, kitesurf and celebrate together. However, not every event is just a big party. I mentioned before that not all competitions are held in top conditions and paradise. It is a lot easier to show your best in the bathtub warm waters of the Caribbean, as opposed to the 'just-warm-enough-not-to-freeze' waters of the Northsea for example, or some other cooler event locations in spring and autumn (brrrrrr, I am getting goose bumps thinking about the annual the PKRA in Belgium, in May ...). Earlier on, we have talked about the 'competition dilemma', and that can put a spoke in the wheel of even the best prepared athlete! The World Cup in Sotavento, Fuerteventura in 2004 was a perfect example: Usually a destination with 'suuuuper-strong-close-to-tornado' conditions, where during the summer the wind always blows with an average of 30 knots, pretty much all of the riders arrived with their smaller sizes only. You should have seen the long faces of us participants on the beach in Sotavento in about 45 degrees outside temperature and absolutely z e r o wind!!? Most of the riders didn't bring anything bigger than a 10 or 12m2 in their quiver...

Yeah, the 'competition dilemma' means every



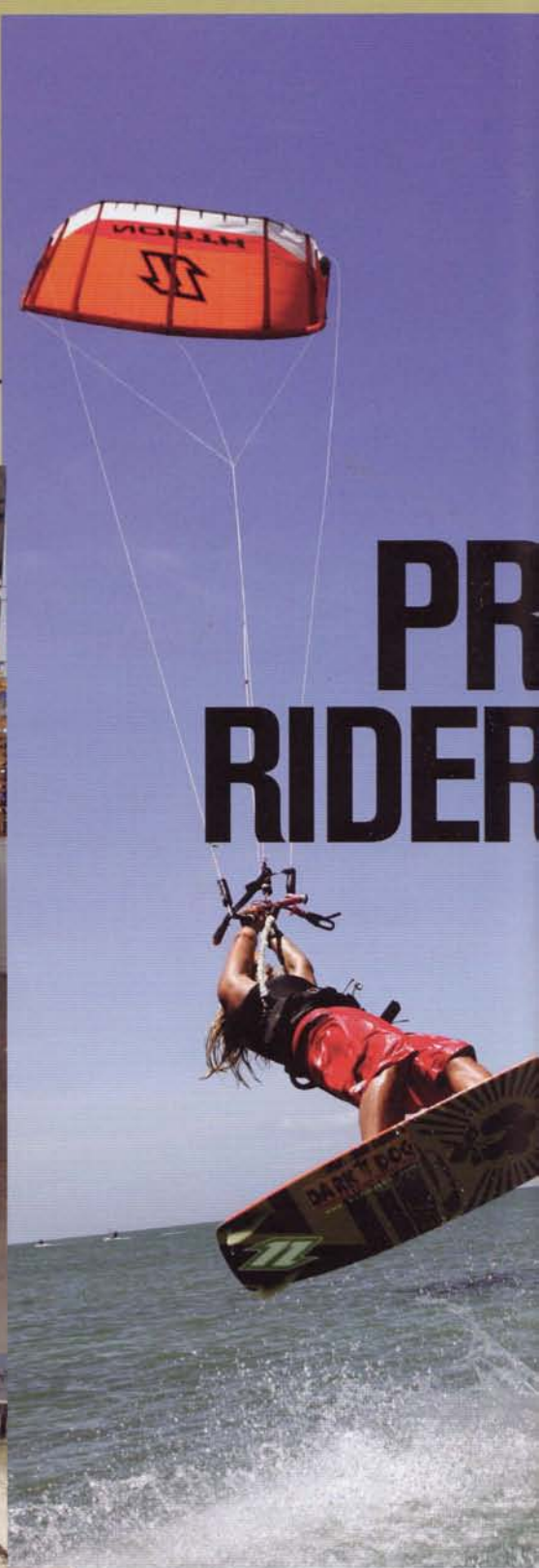
event is a bit like visiting a Casino. Besides talent, you need luck as well to be right up there on the podium and each competition offers a new chance. Weather, equipment performance, nerves, and many, many other factors contribute to success or failure. Simply 'performing' like you would in a fun session on any other day, can quickly turn into a major challenge, sometimes its even impossible to achieve.

"Only 'THE BEST' take part in the World Cup":

Without a doubt, riders ranked in the top 5-10, are the world's best. Below those, however, the ranking would look quite different if every rider had the budget to compete in every event on the tour. Let's take the 'Cabarete Boyz' for example, their standard is extremely high. Due to budgetary restrictions and the visa requirements of certain countries, only a few are blessed with the privilege of fighting for the result (and thus rank) that they deserve. At the other extreme, some riders enjoy a good ranking as they have the financial means to compete and gain vital points at each stop of the tour.

"Sponsored athletes are being discovered as super talents and sent like top models from the street to N.Y., fully supported on their mission as kite professional":

Wrong! No world champ has just fallen from the sky and caught by a sponsor. A contract as a professional rider is hard-earned and everyone has to work his/her way up. Many years of focused training as well as financial investment to be in order to get into the scene and to show skill on



the water. One important prerequisite: \$\$\$ to travel and participate in events - to achieve the aim, in this case, a contract.

"Once on top, staying there is easy peasy":

Wrong again!! No athlete can rest on his laurels. Success in competition is sweet, however, success also increases the expectations of sponsors which might lead to a burden for the rider. Many equipment manufacturers do not have huge budgets for big teams, therefore it is possible that somebody better will appear on the scene and take your place. Contracts are usually made on a yearly basis and the future can look very uncertain at times.

"Sponsored riders get so much equipment that they can give it away":

How many times have I heard the following:

"C'mon, you're sponsored anyway, so please, just leave me your pump/kite/bar ... you can just get a new one."
Veery wrong!! Yes sure, we do get a certain amount of gear, we still need to look after it, though. That is why maintenance and careful handling go without saying and are part of our job like it should be for any other kite-surfer.

"Our entire work out is in the water" or "We do nothing more for our luxury bodies than kitesurfing":

Kitesurfing is definitely a full-body workout. Absolute fitness is vital in order to learn those highly technical manoeuvres. Especially today in the "new school era", with more radical moves than ever before, the risk of injury (mainly shoulders, knees,

ging my quiver along', is part of a perfectly normal check-in-routine. How on earth am I supposed to pay € 11,- per excess kilo, if I j u s t managed to get together the money for the ticket...!!? Thus, travelling can be troublesome and the excess baggage policies of some airlines should definitely be reviewed and amended as they can make life really hard! Long trips, difficult transfers, dude, I could write a book about it! Many times, we don't have much freedom on trips due to our heavy equipment and fun stuff like sightseeing is often not an option ... sometimes, though, it is possible, in the end it all just depends upon the motivation of the person travelling.

"Kitesurf professionals encounter unique people visit unreal paradise locations on our planet":

Oh YES, I can only totally agree on that! In my various missions around the globe, I have definitely seen some incredible places, postcard beaches, I met super lovely



kitesurferpro

and ankles) has increased. That's why most pros realize that it's worth 'upgrading' from a 6-

to an 8-pack and adopt a training-routine with 'dry training' (on land with a trampoline, bar on tree, etc.) as well as working out with weights. Some remote locations, however, do not offer the convenience of a gym and a creative imagination can be an advantage.

"All kitepros are mashers" or "pros have a chick at each spot" or are they kind-a-angels after all...?:

Well, to this one, I would like to abstain from any comment... In any case, check out my team-mate Jaime ... hihihhi ... even on the water he's chasing the pretty girls (remark: the girl on the picture is Jaime's long term girl friend Mireia).

"Traveling pretty much all year, is like a lifelong holiday":

Many of us are not blessed with the luck of a home at a top spot, that's why a lot of pros mutate to "kite-nomads"; a few weeks here, then move onto there, from competition to training camps to photo shoots ... Definitely exciting, that's for sure, if we didn't have to drag about 50kg of gear with us wherever we go!!? A full quiver can be quite a pain in the a\$\$ and a pretty expensive travel companion; whether it be a long or short haul flight, a full quiver means trouble. Saving excess baggage fees by travelling by train or bus, is sometimes a smart solution, but most of the time it is not an option due to distances and travel time. Every time that I go to the airport, I dread arriving at the check-in ... "hopefully this time I'll be lucky and there will be an understanding and kind person at the check-in not a grumpy, frustrated one ...!". Endless discussions over totally unrealistic ideas of the 'price of bring-

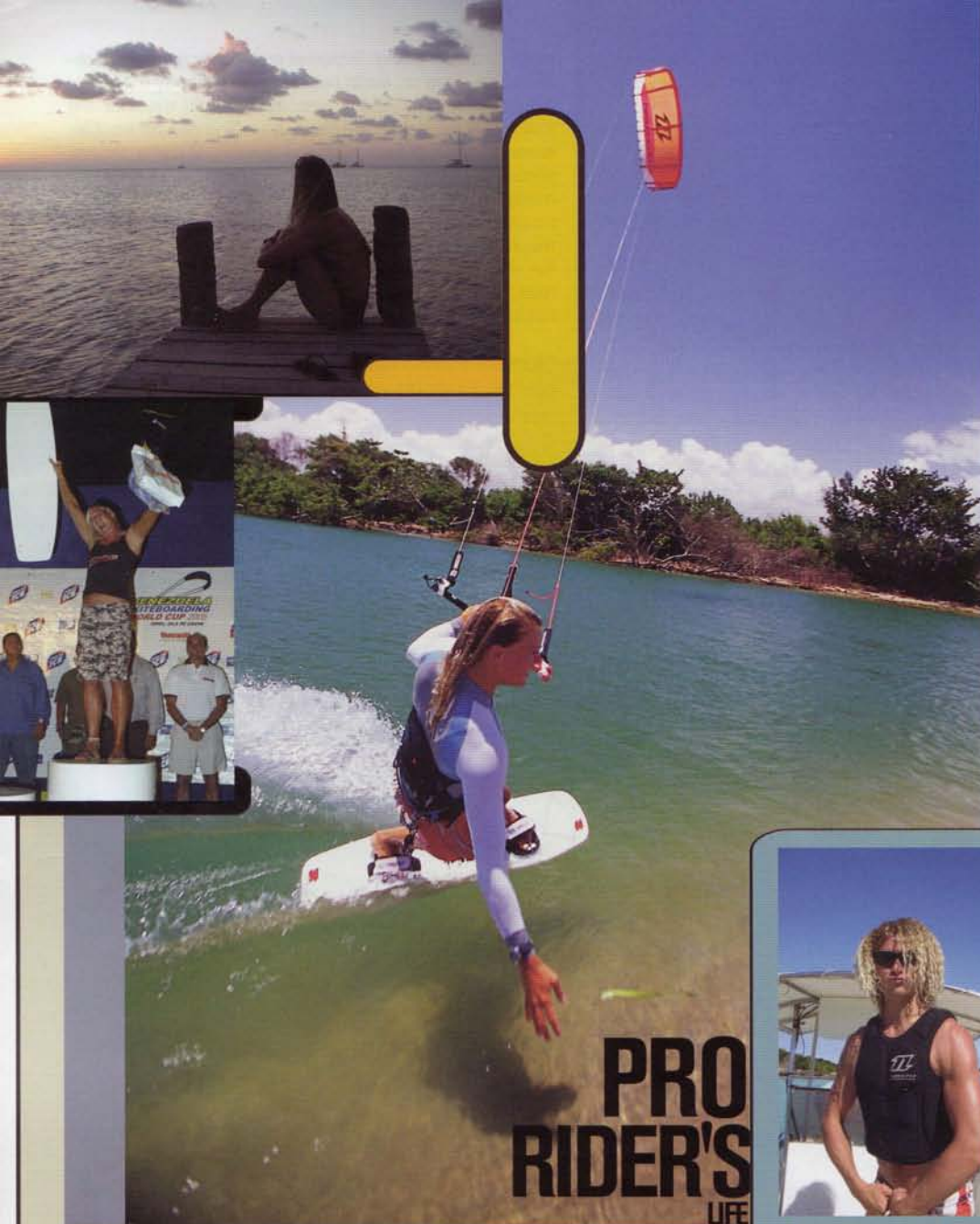
people, and I have made some unusual acquaintances and discoveries. Just recently, on a trip through Central America, I came across Bob Marley's car!!

"Training is always fun":

Not every session is like a perfect day during a kite vacation. A new move has to be learnt, the next competition is coming up soon, all the others can do it already (!!), and I just cannot get it... The body is in pain and sometimes motivation levels are down... That's when one has to be determined and not let it take you down. Pain and injuries are perfectly normal and go with daily training alongside absolutely unforgettable sessions! The boundaries between to 'push' and to 'exceed' one's limits are very small and for me personally, there are some problems distinguishing these... Result: several broken ribs, bruises, muscle strains, sprains and so on... Obviously injuries are an even bigger bummer and particularly frustrating when they happen just before an event. Never mind, that's part of the game!

"All we're interested in is kitesurfing" or "all we're good at is kiting":

...WRONG, complete nonsense! To tell the truth, the whole world in the life of a pro does not revolve around kitesurfing. In fact it might actually be an advantage to have a balance: some interest off the water (other than playstation)! My team-mate and triple Worldchamp Cindy Mosey, for example, is a passionate gardener and hobby-tinker. Cindy and her husband have built their house in New Zealand themselves. The same with their garden! Cindy has planted some 3000 trees herself, everything from apples to avocados, and peaches! In her own words, Cindy, calls kitesurfing "only a small part of her life". All her other interests make up a much bigger part of her life and were essential aspects which were absolutely vital in setting the basis for her success". Or there is Gianni Aragno, alias "GianniMix", Cabrinha team-rider, based in Tarifa, Spain, who is an ardent DJ.



subtitled with "Don't try this at home". Honestly, it should go without saying DON'T try to copy and attempt everything that pros do. The average kitesurfer does him/herself a favor by sticking to moves at to his/her own level - unfortunately, though, that is often not the case...

"We're all a big family and happy campers":

YES, certainly! The pro-scene is a tight community and everyone holds together in the mission to promote and push the sport. I am so proud to be in it... love being part of da family !!

It seems almost surreal that nearly everything that means something to me at this point in my life hinges on something as simple as being pulled by an over dimensional kite on a board out into the water...reflecting upon the sensation I feel when become one with nature, the places I've been, the things I've seen and the friends I've made,

feel privileged having found some-

thing that I believe in so strongly and passionately - kitesurfing forever! "



A PROFESSIONAL ATTITUDE

When Gianni is scratching the decks, the masses go crazy and the chicas faint in sequence!

"The life of a pro-rider is glamorous and "sometimes we feel like top models":

Well, I can't really disagree about that, photoshoots certainly give some kind of 'model sensation'. Just like for top models, however, it can be tough to get exactly the perfect shot! It can mean doing a certain move over and over again ... there's the light that is messing up the pic, then the rider is too far away, too close, ... on top of everything: a big "Cheese" right into the camera if possible!? Autograph signing sessions, photoshoots, etc. can be pretty hard labour, nevertheless, they are great fun and I am already looking forward to the next one coming up!

"Our gear gets tailor made for us":

Many pro-riders enjoy the privilege of their sponsors producing some special, personalized gadgets and toys for them (such as shades, clothing,

kites, boards, etc.). Not always, though, do things work out that perfectly with the individual requests of riders ... check out my team-mate Sky Solbach! The question being: have his muscles grown since he put his order in or is it the fault of the manufacturers in China?

"Endless time to chill" but also "many beautiful moments spent alone":

It goes without saying that some crucial chillin' is also part of our training routine (muscle tissues develop and grow only during periods of rest!). However, the times to relax is not endless. When the office worker is choking on a cigarette and a coffee to chill out, we're taking a rest in the shade of a palmtree, nibbling on some fresh coconut juice. To reflect upon a perfect day with some like-minded people, mhhhhh, what more can you wish for! Many memorable, beautiful moments, one has to enjoy alone, though, on the road between appointments and obligations...

"All pro-riders are an example:

Theoretically 'Yes', some of the stunts that pros perform at times, though, should perhaps be

There is so much more to the life of a professional kitesurfer than most people assume. I hope I have illustrated a little of what is happening behind the scenes. It's a tough and rather uncertain survival but also a very special and exciting one. Everything in life has its price, right!?

I feel really lucky to be one of few people in the world who can proudly shout out 'I love my job!' and I wouldn't trade it for the world. Thanks to my sponsors North Kiteboarding Fanatic Kiteboards, Oakley Eyewear, Dark Dog energy drinks, ION essentials Cult clothing for their continuous support and enabling me to live my dream! Check out my website and send me an email if you have any further questions, feedback, and more regarding kitesurfing, the industry, and so on...

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