



BMW Oracle's challenge for the 32nd America's Cup was waged from USA 98, its boom adorned with Girard-Perregaux livery. In commemoration, Gino Macaluso's loyal watch brand has launched a whole range of USA 98 watches this year, updating 2005's USA 76 and USA 71 range, first seen in QP Issue 16 ('The 18th Man').



No Second



Winning is everything in the America's Cup - without a doubt the most difficult trophy in sport to win. In over 150 years since the first race, in English waters, only three nations other than the United States have won. The associated prestige has proven irresistible to no less than six luxury watch brands at the 32nd America's Cup finals in Valencia this year, meaning QP has found itself plunged into a world of glamorous marinas, F1-spec boats and baffling race regulations. At the time of writing, Hublot's Italian Luna Rossa team is pitched against Omega's Team New Zealand in the Louis Vuitton Cup Final. It's anyone's guess who will challenge fittingly Swiss defender, Alinghi (or rather, Audemars Piguet), but many - Girard-Perregaux excluded - are simply relieved that the America's Cup has stayed out of American hands for another four or five years. QP climbs aboard.

Nicholas Foulkes

"Say, signal-master, are the yachts in sight?"
 "Yes, may it please your Majesty..."
 "Which is first?"
 "America."
 "And which is second?"
 "Ah, your Majesty, there is no second."

Rather like the encounter between Stanley and Livingstone, this vintage, perhaps apocryphal Victorian exchange has entered history and legend. It was the summer of 1851 and Queen Victoria was in one of her favourite places, the Isle of Wight. Her Majesty should have felt good about life; loved by her subjects, happily married to her Prince Consort, the power of her empire waxing all the time. The prestige of Britain had never been higher.

And then, on August 22nd 1851 in the seas around her beloved Isle of Wight, the global supremacy of her people took a hit. A hit where it hurt most: on the waves.

The nation that had seen off the Armada and triumphed at the Battle of Trafalgar had been humbled just off the South Coast, in front of the monarch. And the worst part was that it was America, a former colony, that had humiliated the world's maritime superpower. One could forgive Queen Victoria for not being particularly amused.

It had started earlier that summer when the New York-built yacht *America* sailed over to England for a spot of racing against the old country, the sole foreign entry among 15 vessels. It was

expected to be a very English affair; even the cup - a particularly over-the-top ceremonial ewer executed in typically maximalist Victorian style - had been presented to the Royal Yacht Squadron by the Marquess of Anglesea, who had bought it at Crown Jeweller, Garrard. What had been known as the Royal Yacht Squadron's '100 Guinea Cup' was carried off in triumph to New York, where, renamed in honour of the winning boat, it stayed for well over a century, until it was carried-off again, not by Britain, but by another of its former colonies, Australia.

Tea and timepieces

Queen Victoria is long gone, as is her empire, but that over-decorated jug from Garrard continues to encapsulate the emotion of an evocative sporting event that predates such striplings as the modern Olympic Games and the competition for the Football Association Cup.

After being trounced by the *America*, the British tried to win the Cup back, but every attempt for more than 130 years ended in defeat for the challenger. Perhaps the most beautiful age of the sport was the so-called Lipton era, which ran from the end of 19th century until 1930, during which tea magnate Sir Thomas Lipton mounted five challenges for the Cup with a series of yachts called *Shamrock* and became known as such a good loser that a special loser's cup was made for him. Made of solid gold and distinctly less flamboyant in style than the Garrard original, it came with a donor's book in which one wag had written: "Possibly the world's worst yacht builder but absolutely the world's most cheerful loser."

But then Lipton could afford to be a cheerful loser, literally. He may not have gained sailing's ultimate trophy, but he garnered incalculable publicity for his eponymous brand of tea and it could be argued that he introduced sponsorship to the America's Cup. This year, over a century after he first started losing America's Cups, it is - amongst many other products - timepieces rather than tea that benefit from the introduction of sponsorship.

Over the course of the competitions leading to this America's Cup I have been offered the opportunity to sit as 18th man on, as far as I can remember, three of the challengers. The rules state that while a boat may have 17 crew members, all trained to a frightening degree of fitness, it must also carry a passenger. It is apparently the sort of thing for which salty seadogs would kill and here I was being offered the opportunity in triplicate. Given the prestigious nature of the invitation, and my own reluctance to feel like a spare part on a boat with about as much to do with the yachts I actually enjoy as an F1 car has to do with a Rolls Royce, I felt it wise to pass the opportunity to someone who would actually be thrilled by the prospect of slicing through waves on tens-of-millions-of-quidsworth of hi-tech sailing boat.

The reason I found myself in this enviable position was of course the involvement of so many watch companies with the 12 competing teams. Modern luxury watchmaking has a strange *zeitgeist* and from time to time is gripped by sudden urges: a few years ago it was tourbillons, then it was watches made for car brands, this year it is the America's Cup. A neophyte when it comes to sailing, I find it easier to remember the teams by their watch sponsors. Thus it is that the Girard-Perregaux team is better known as BMW Oracle Racing; Audemars Piguet supports America's Cup defender Team Alinghi; TAG Heuer is involved with the China Team; Hublot has made a Big Bang to mark its involvement with Luna Rossa Challenge; Omega is the horological partner of Emirates Team New Zealand; while Admiral's Cup stalwart Corum has made a last-minute appearance with Sweden's Victory Challenge team. Six major brands battling it out in a competition that focuses the minds, not to mention the wallets of some of the world's richest men.

Upping the Cup

Girard-Perregaux's Gino Macaluso is something of an America's Cup veteran. His first contact with the trophy came in 1983. "I worked to put together the different companies that had supported the syndicate backed by Karim Aga Khan and Mr Gianni Agnelli." Among the sponsors at the time was Cinzano whose Chairman, Luca di Montezemolo was an old friend of Macaluso. "Compared to today it was totally another planet. For a start, the campaign was different in terms of rules; during that period, it really was a national team. You had to design and build the boat in the country and the crew had to be from the country as well. At that period, it was more amateur and more gentlemanly; today it is an extremely professional activity. It is so sophisticated and the pace of change is so fast that this challenge has nothing to do with the past, even the America's Cup of 2000."

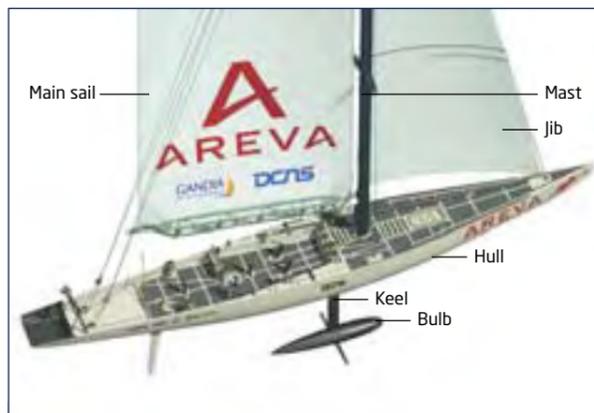
And it is these changes, particularly in the technology used that has attracted many watch brands to the sport. One of the great America's Cup watches is Girard Perregaux's 3,000 metre Sea Hawk II tourbillon; a bravura example of horological *jeu d'esprit*; an astonishing technical feat, and something that I have described as being about as spectacular, practical and extreme as landing a Ferrari on the Moon. This year it's G-P's Laureato range that gets the nautical treatment, complete with a flying tourbillon, now 'only' resistant to 100 m.



(Opposite page) A behemoth: the latest and greatest watch to result from Audemars Piguet and Team Alinghi's association, started in 2002. This flyback regatta Royal Oak Offshore (£15,050) is distinctive for its ultra-light 'forged carbon' case, made by forging carbon fibres. The arrangement of the fibres in the die ultimately determines the pattern of the semi-iridescent case, making each piece unique.

(Top) Crew members are often raised up the mast to 'find' wind. In light or fluky conditions, he can see distant puffs of wind on the water and relays this information to the helmsman.

(Above) The 'grinders' in each 17-man crew are the muscles of the boat. The handles they turn are connected to complex hydraulic systems that power operations such as getting a sail - or a man - up the mast, or trimming the mainsail or parachute-like spinnaker.



The America's Cup Class (ACC) Boat

ACC boats have been used for the America's Cup competition since 1992. Each syndicate is allowed to build a maximum of two new boats for the 32nd America's Cup and they must be built in the country of origin of the yacht club the team represents. How well the boat performs depends on how well the designers have traded length, weight and sail area.

The hull is a marvel of material science, built of carbon fibre and Kevlar to be as light as possible. Weight saved here can be piled into the keel for greater stability and speed. The lead bulb hanging from the keel weighs over 22 tonnes, counterbalancing the enormous force on the sails. The mast supporting the latter is critical too, built for maximum lightness and strength. Occasionally, the 32 m carbon-fibre spar fails with spectacular results, tearing sails (limited to 60 per team per regatta) and ripping rigging. A mast can be replaced and the boat made race-ready within a day, though – a relatively straightforward, if expensive process.

Indeed it is the extreme nature of the sport and the hi-tech aesthetic it promulgates that makes it attractive to a brand such as Hublot: rubber, Kevlar, carbon, titanium and advanced ceramics are as much a part of a modern America's Cup yacht as they are of Jean-Claude Biver's 'fusion' brand. "The materials we use in our watches are totally in line with the materials of the boat. We made 1,000 watches and sold them all quickly. The Prada guys [main sponsors of Luna Rossa Challenge] were so happy that they asked us for a new contract when the America's Cup is over to go on with a new edition."

Certainly that has been the experience of Georges-Henri Meylan, CEO of Audemars Piguet, who this year launched an arresting Royal Oak Offshore in forged carbon. "We started in '99 when we had the first Swiss challenger, be hAPpy. It failed completely – the mast broke – and they had to stop because they had no money. But the press coverage was so great that we thought we'd get involved again when Ernesto Bertarelli launched his Alinghi team." And if he thought the press coverage was great before... Well, as sponsor of the defender let's just say I've not heard him complain.

According to Meylan it has introduced its Royal Oak to a new generation that simply was not born when the octagonal icon made its debut. Moreover, they come to AP completely ignorant of the pioneering role of the Royal Oak, so in terms of raising brand awareness, it is sufficiently far removed from the Vallée de Joux both elementally and figuratively speaking for it to have a considerable impact.



(Above) Omega's Seamaster 'NZL-32' regatta countdown chronograph (£2,300) is named after the Kiwi vessel that won the America's Cup in 1995. The boat's colloquial name was 'Black Magic', but this clearly wouldn't have worked with Omega's colourful countdown indicator.

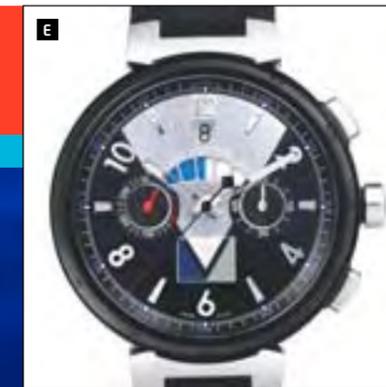
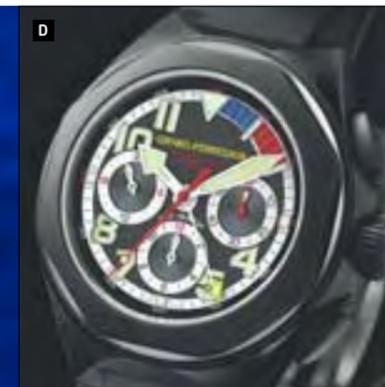
Skipper's needs

There is also a technological impact as Jean-Christophe Babin of TAG Heuer points out. He is keen to stress that Heuer first got involved with the America's Cup back in "the late Fifties, early Sixties", when the Mareograph, which featured tide indications was popular. "In 1967, Jack Heuer decided to step up and rather than just selling the timepieces to teams he decided to offer the Mareograph and become partner of Intrepid as well as timekeeper of the Cup itself. And Intrepid won in 1967 and again in 1970 always supported by Heuer."

Today Babin talks of the sport as something like a development lab. "Specifically the requirements of skippers like Chris Dickson (BMW Oracle) or Pierre Mas (China Team) have led us to come up with innovative functions and movements, from the first regatta countdown systems in 1995 in the 2000 series (first regatta movement with automatic zero resetting of countdown in case of restart), the first regatta with countdown automatically switching to chrono' mode at the start in 2002 with the Link Oracle Regatta Chrono, and the first electromechanic regatta movement in 2005/2006 with the Aquaracer Calibre S China Team, for sale since early 2007. All these products were born out of top skippers' unfulfilled requirements and have been developed, tested, improved together with them before becoming commercial pieces."

Omega too has been busy. "The Seamaster NZL-32 chronograph is named after the boat that won the America's Cup in 1995," explains Omega President Stephen Urquhart. "It was developed in collaboration with Omega Ambassador and Team New Zealand's skipper, Dean Barker. Particular attention was paid to the key needs of the skipper and his crew during a regatta."

Like AP's Offshore, G-P's Laureato range, TAG's Aquaracer and, if you count principal Cup sponsor, Louis Vuitton, the stylish Tambour XL LV Cup, the NZL-32 has a regatta countdown – an understandably popular feature for the America's Cup special



editions. The dial distinctly highlights the crucial ten minutes preceding the start of a regatta. The first five-minute stage is indicated in blue, corresponding to the time the crews have left for final information exchanges with their teams on shore. Blue turns to red as the final five minutes commence – 'pre-start' – when all external assistance is forbidden and the two boats approach the line. Judging the time and distance of this final approach to hit the line at full speed as the gun goes represents one of the most sought-after skills in an America's Cup helmsman, and his watch plays a key part in his decision-making.

What is heartening is to hear Urquhart reel off over a decade's involvement in the event for his brand. "Omega's association with the America's Cup began in 1995 in San Diego with our support for Sir Peter Blake. His success in San Diego paved the way for the brand to become official timekeeper for the America's Cup 2000 in Auckland, where Sir Peter and Team New Zealand successfully defended their title. In 2003 Omega again served as official timekeeper of the America's Cup."

It is heartening because although there are six major watch brands involved, as Queen Victoria discovered there is no second place, let alone third, fourth and fifth and it would be good to see modern watchmaking continue its link to this exciting sporting event, even if there is only one winner. Gino Macaluso seems to have the right attitude. A true sportsman, he learned that his bid was knocked out of the competition towards the end of May by Luna Rossa Challenge, who go on to face Emirates Team New Zealand in the Louis Vuitton Cup final to determine who faces Alinghi in the America's Cup Match. "We will continue to enjoy the America's Cup, entertain our guests and we will also be throwing a party, though we did not win," Macaluso says philosophically. "But we want to say thank you and hope to see you next time." It would seem that in Macaluso, Sir Thomas Lipton and the spirit of the cheerful loser has found a worthy heir. ○

Further information: www.americascup.com

A Girard-Perregaux's Laureato Regatta Tourbillon (£151,000) is limited to 32 models and features one of the clearest 10-minute countdown read-outs of all the America's Cup watches. Interestingly, it is also a monopusher chronograph. **B** Hublot's 'Luna Rossa Challenge' Big Bang chronograph (£6,950). **C** Latecomer to the America's Cup watch crowd, Corum sponsors the Swedish Victory Challenge team. Its commemorative Competition 48 'Victory Challenge' (£4,500) watch will be limited to 250 pieces, updating the 48 mm Competition 48 model launched last year at Basel as part of Corum's ongoing association with the other big yachting fixture, the Admiral's Cup. **D** Girard-Perregaux 'USA 98' DLC-blackened titanium chronograph (£7,500), named after the latest BMW Oracle Racing yacht. Flyback function allows the chronograph to be restarted instantly once the 10-minute pre-start countdown has finished. **E** Louis Vuitton Tambour XL LV Cup Regatta Chronograph in glossy black steel (£4,050). Louis Vuitton is principal partner to the 32nd America's Cup Valencia, having first supported the Challenger Series in 1983. In 2007, the challengers will once again race for the Louis Vuitton Cup, but a series of Acts beginning in September 2004, and continuing in each year leading up to the main event also carry the Louis Vuitton title. **F** TAG Heuer's Aquaracer Chronograph Calibre S 'China Team' with regatta countdown (limited to 2,000 pieces; £1,495). First presented as a prototype in 2005, TAG's Calibre S is a revolutionary quartz movement that displays all watch and chronograph functions with the same hands. To switch from time mode to chronograph mode or regatta countdown mode, you just press the crown once or twice respectively.