

# One Design Course Racing Concept – Exocet Kona

By Darrell Staight

The development of the new Exocet Kona is now slated to become the new budget One Design for windsurfing. Many of you will probably never have met me but may have heard of me making rumblings for years about a subject that is very near and dear to my heart, that of One Design Course racing. Perhaps more appropriately I should say the current complete absence of One Design racing (for boardsailors) in South Australia. It is a subject that really frustrates me as it is a fantastic sport and many of us grew up with it and now we have nothing. I have analysed the reasons why this once popular and accessible sport for families and experienced sailors alike, has faded into complete obscurity within our state and it is a problem easily rectified. I will not go into it in much detail in this article however anyone who cares to discuss the matter with me, feel free to email me at [darrell.staight@windsurfing.org](mailto:darrell.staight@windsurfing.org) (please cc: to [windsurfingsa@windsurfing.org](mailto:windsurfingsa@windsurfing.org) )

What I wish to discuss is the exciting opportunity that is presenting itself thanks to the current staff at Exocet who see the need for supporting a long term budget One Design package (much like used to be achieved with the Old Wallys). Exocet have completed their new board, the Kona, which is very reminiscent of some of the better longboards from the 80's and yet has a few modern features too. As we speak discussions are being held in order to try and finalise what the One Design sail will be and at this stage it appears likely that a 7.6 non cammed sail will be chosen. I have had some discussing with those in marketing at the company about the possibility of developing a OD 5 m sail for use in development of Junior sailors and use in Junior racing, but haven't had an answer on that one yet. It is indeed exciting that once again in the near future a simplistic package, for an affordable price (in complete contrast to the ridiculous prices for Formula, Prodigy, RS:X and IMCO) may be available again. Any person may be able to get into the sport as a complete novice and progress to club/state or international level without the need to spend a fortune on equipment. One Board. One Sail. No changes to the equipment allowed whatsoever – you race it out of the box. It's that simple.

As you may have gathered I am not a fan of Formula for amateur racing. For Pros who earn a small fortune, then no problem, they are in a position to replace and update their equipment on a regular basis. For the other 90% (the silent majority it would seem) we can't afford it. It's as simple as that. Some people will say that it's progress. I would say progress is a point of view and 20 years ago there were several active windsurfing clubs with large fleets that raced in South Australia. Now there are none!!! The truth is that in this day and age with inflation and financial pressures, even established keen boardsailors take a big gulp at the thought of paying much more than \$2,000 and who can blame them. For the person who has never set foot on a board it is a bit much to expect them to walk into a shop and hand over \$3,000, \$4,000 or \$5,000. I believe the target retail price should be kept close to \$2,000 and it seems that the Kona will be marketed brand new (complete with sail) for only a bit over this. It's all very good to produce a new rocket of a board and sail but if nobody can afford it and nobody races them as a fleet then what is the point. New and improved 'hot rod' boards and sails will always be built and many of us will want to own one just for fun, however there should be a basic and affordable One Design board and sail package (much like the Windsurfer One Design used to be) built for many decades without any changes whatsoever in order to preserve a sport that most of us grew up with and loved. In order for this concept to work it MUST be supported by 1. the Manufacturer (and Exocet seem very keen to do this) and 2. the retailers (this remains to be seen, but hopefully they will see the sense of releasing this board and sail at a budget price too, in order to facilitate more people into the sport).

There seems to be somewhat of a misconception that the short wide boards are vastly superior to the more traditional long boards. In sub planning conditions less than 5 knots I have received vast correspondence as to how poor they perform and when you finally can plane you need a huge sail in order to make it work. Again I come back to accessibility into the sport. No matter how modern the

sail designs are these days. 9 metres is still 9 metres in anyone's language and you absolutely can't put a novice on one. It takes an experienced sailor to sail one.

20 years ago, boards were sold as packages more often than not with a One Design 6 metre sail. Bigger is not better, it just prohibits a lot of sailors from sailing on them. There are some that can't bare the thought of not hanging on to dear life on an 8 metre + sail, for the other 90% of us we think course racing is about strategy and tacking duels and close racing and travelling at 30 knots is not that important. For those who must then fine, Formula exists, enjoy. For the rest of us we just want a simple and affordable way to go racing on a board with a nice feel (it doesn't have to be a high performance epoxy rocket ship)! Take for example the Windsufer One Design or Mistral Competition in the 1980's. A family with no experience could buy one and all members of the family could then learn how to sail and those who wished could progress to racing at a club level or higher, without the need to buy more gear. The sport was accessible to all. Finally we have the potential for that again and I urge all sailors to get behind it.

I currently live in Whyalla and have just got the position of Youth Officer at the Police Station here. Through this position I will have many responsibilities but I am hoping in 2007 to develop a windsurfing programme for both youth (through various avenues including the education department) and senior or experienced sailors (by forming a Whyalla Windsurfing Club at the Yacht Club here). These plans are still on paper at the moment but with the development of the Kona as a One Design package, we may have the best opportunity since IMCO to re-ignite interest into the sport.

At the same time I can only hope that the various locations in Adelaide which are infinitely well suited to course racing including Somerton, Semaphore, Westlakes, Goolwa, Milang, Meningie, Barmara, Port Lincoln etc will become homes to the colour and excitement of Course Racing at weekends again.

The Exocet Kona could be the future of amature course racing...  
Watch this space.

More about the Exocet Kona:

<http://www.exocet-original.com/newspaper/05Nov21/longboards.asp>

<http://www.exocet-original.com/products/kona.asp>

