

America's Cup topic intro

In 1995, the small nation of NZ won the America's Cup, often considered yachting's most prestigious prize.

They repeated that success in 2000, and then again in 2017. How did that happen?

A brief background to NZ sailing

NZ is surrounded by sea. Maori arrived by sea from Polynesia about 700 years ago, Europeans about 250 years ago. Once here, people travelled, fished, traded and competed on the sea.

Fishermen played part in the popularity of sailing.

Mullet was a popular fish in Auckland at the time.

Fishermen wanted to get their catch to market asap so it was fresh. Mullet boats were simple, fast and cheap, very appealing to the middle classes, who were keen to take part in yacht racing - previously only the preserve of the wealthy.

More people were able to participate, children learned about sailing through their families, their skills developed and ultimately world class sailors began to emerge, among them Sir Peter Blake ...

Blue Water, Black Magic

This gallery was built in Sir Peter Blake's memory. He is considered by many to be our greatest sailor, and was killed by pirates in the Amazon in 2001.

Peter Blake

At eight years old, his father built him a P-Class [example suspended. Not an easy boat to sail, but these little boats teach children excellent skills.

As a teenager Peter, his brother and a friend built Bandit [suspended beside the P-Class].

Eventually he became a successful international and round the world sailor and by 1992 Peter Blake was involved in the America's Cup.

In 1995, with Blake now head of the NZ syndicate, the team finally won the Cup in this boat - NZL32 'Black Magic' - in San Diego.

In the following edition of the Cup - in 2000 - the team won again, in Auckland. They became the first non-American team to successfully defend the Cup.

The background to the America's Cup

It is the oldest international sporting trophy in the world. The original is a little taller than our replica and now has an extra base, as all winners' names are engraved on it. It is currently held not far away, at the RNZYS.

The first America's Cup race was held in 1851 in England. The British Royal Yacht Squadron established the 100 Guineas Cup - a race intended as a "friendly competition between yachts of all nations".

The race took place around the Isle of Wight, and the American yacht named 'America' easily beat 17 British yachts. That result meant the Cup was awarded to the New York Yacht Squadron, where it stayed for the next 132 years. The Cup became known as the America's Cup, after the winning yacht, not the country.

How did NZ get involved?

For 132 years, in spite of valiant efforts by challengers of different nationalities, American yachts kept winning the Cup. During this time it was not really on the radar of NZ sailors as it was perceived as a Northern Hemisphere competition.

However in 1983, the Australians shocked the yachting world by winning the Cup from the New York Yacht Club. As a result they brought the racing 'down under', to Fremantle, near Perth, Australia. Now that it was in the Southern Hemisphere, NZ sailors began to take notice and were keen to take part.

New Zealand enters the America's Cup competition

[Further details relating to this section are in the GG, pp.68-69]

1987

The first entry by a New Zealand yacht was in 1987 in Fremantle [in KZ7, the so-called 'Plastic Fantastic']. They did well for their first try, achieving the position of *top qualifier in the Round Robin races* of the Louis Vuitton Cup challenger series. However, they got no further, and Australia went on to lose the Cup to an American yacht from the San Diego Yacht Club.

1988

In 1988, New Zealand made a hostile challenge (one that is laid down by a qualifying yacht club at any time. A legitimate challenge *must* be accepted by the defenders).

New Zealand entered KZ1, the Big Boat, which raced against the much smaller American catamaran [see photo of the two boats racing and note that KZ1 is on display outside the museum].

KZ1 had crew of 40, but was beaten by the much smaller catamaran, which had a crew of 9. Following such a mismatch of boats, yacht designs were standardised, to even the playing field.

1992

In 1992, Peter Blake was brought in as head of the team to boost their chances. Once again the team did well, this time *reaching the finals of the Louis Vuitton Cup* challenger races, but were then beaten by the Italian team Il Moro di Venezia, who were subsequently beaten by the San Diego Yacht Club in the America's Cup races.

1995

Finally, in 1995, NZ won the Louis Vuitton Cup and went on to win the America's Cup in NZL32 'Black Magic'. It was a *clean sweep, 5-0*, against Team Dennis Conner of the San Diego Yacht Club. Peter Blake became a national hero and received a knighthood for his achievements.

1995 - NZL32 Black Magic

*A few interesting numbers: the boat is **80 ft long**.*

*The mast alone is **110 ft tall**.*

*The total boat weight is **25 tonnes**.*

*The mast and hull weight is **5 tonnes**. As displayed the mast is not full height - a full size spare mast is suspended in gallery downstairs.*

The remaining weight is all in the bulb - 20 tonnes. It is made of lead alloy, though the bulb on display is a lightweight replica. The original is held by Te Papa.

At the time it was a very fast boat, but it is old technology now. With each competition, designs change and the boats become more technically sophisticated and faster.

2000

PB was again head of the team for the 2000 competition, this time held in Auckland. Again New Zealand won in a *clean sweep, against the Italian team Prada Challenge, 5-0.*

2003

A disastrous loss to the Swiss team Alinghi in a clean sweep. The TNZ syndicate had no clear direction and not enough time to test and refine the new boat design - see box for clarification. *Losing 5-0*, including having to retire from two of the races due in one case to a broken mast, was a bitter blow for a team that had achieved such success in the 1995 and 2000 competitions.

2007

The now named Emirates Team New Zealand (ETNZ) *won the Louis Vuitton Cup* to become challenger, but were *beaten again by Alinghi 5-2*, in closely fought racing - the last race lost by 1 second.

2013

For the 2013 challenge in San Francisco, there was a major design change from traditional monohulls.

The Cup holders Oracle introduced the innovative, spectacular 72ft catamarans, fitted with hydrofoils, which meant the yachts could effectively 'fly' over the water, with only the foils and keel in the water.

The race was infamous for its shock result:

Having yet again won the Louis Vuitton Cup, ETNZ became the challenger against the American defender, Oracle.

At 8-1 ahead, ETNZ needed just one more race to win. However part way through, the tables turned and *Oracle won 9-8.*

A big percentage of the NZ public was stunned and devastated, and there were many unfounded conspiracy theories. In reality it was likely that Oracle simply improved its sailing abilities quickly as the racing progressed (quite possibly learning techniques by observation of ETNZ's performance.)

2017

The America's Cup races were held in Bermuda, and all the teams except ETNZ did at least some of their practice and development there.

Oracle had introduced a smaller but faster version of the catamaran design. Far away from the other teams, ETNZ were secretly developing an entirely new alternative to grinders for providing hydraulic power. A few weeks before the competition began, NZ revealed the cycling sailors - 'cyclors' - who could use leg power rather than arm power.

It was controversial and risky (though within the AC rules) and many, including New Zealanders, didn't know whether to take it seriously or not.

However, the new technique proved effective and

ETNZ *won the Louis Vuitton Cup** to become the challengers.

Nervous that history might repeat the San Francisco defeat, New Zealanders were biting their fingernails during the America's Cup races until the boat was safely over the line in the last race, for a *convincing win, 7-1.*

*The Louis Vuitton Cup has been replaced by the Prada Cup, so it is now in the permanent possession of the RNZYS, represented by ETNZ.

2021

The next competition will be held in Auckland in 2021.

The catamaran design of 2013 and 2017 had been contentious.

Traditionally the AC was raced in very large monohulls, but after experiencing the speed and excitement of the 'flying' catamarans, sailors and spectators were divided on what the next design should be.

As defenders, ETNZ has developed (in association with the Challenger of Record Luna Rossa) a monohull with foils, capable of speeds up to 90 kph.

(By early October two teams have launched their first full size test boats: ETNZ and American Magic, representing the New York Yacht Club. Italian team Luna Rossa and UK team INEOS should launch theirs soon. Stars & Stripes Team USA will only build one yacht.)

2003: *Why we lost the Cup -- extracts from the Team NZ report - from NZ Herald article, May 2003*

... the loss of the America's Cup 0-5 can be attributed to a host of specific things not going in the team's favour.

These, however, need to be viewed as the end effects, not the cause.

Our management structure, which consisted of three individuals with specific, self-contained areas of responsibility reporting to a four-person board, did not deliver a winning combination of boat and crew to the start line for race one of America's Cup 2003.

It will always remain speculation as to whether a different management structure would have seen Team New Zealand successfully defend the cup. It may have, but what is clear now, but was not clear at the time, was that the management structure did not pull together sufficiently well the areas of sailing (including sail development), boat design and administration.

A second, significant factor was the structural failure NZL81 experienced in mid-December 2002. The impact this had on the team cannot be understated.

The failure of NZL81 led to decisions being made which severely handicapped the crew and the preparation of NZL82.

MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

It is only in retrospect, and in the last months of the campaign when it was too late to make changes, that the fundamental weaknesses of the structure emerged.

The most critical weakness was that no one had a total overview of where the team was at, and final responsibility for and authority over decision-making.

Note: The departure of the team's leadership in 2000 is not put forward as the reason Team New Zealand failed to defend the cup.

Full article at https://www.nzherald.co.nz/sport/news/article.cfm?c_id=4&objectid=3452961