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# BRUCE WYLIE: BRINGING THE THRILL BACK

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Bruce Wylie is a wind surfer through and through. From his formative early days on the water with his parents and older brothers, to his current role as Chief Commercial Officer at COBRA, wind surfing has always been an integral part of his life. It will come as no surprise to anyone who knows him that he is passionate about grassroots windsurfing, and that he's spearheading a new type of board that is already being rapidly adopted by associations around the world.

*“Through our design and development approach and our forward-looking view, COBRA has almost always managed to be in the right place at the right time”*

“My earliest memory of water-related activity is sitting in the family dinghy in the living room with my mother,” he says. “Yacht racing and lake-side camping was what my family did. We were always on the water in the boats my parents and brothers built, and as the youngest I just had to get on with it and join in the fun. It was a way of life for us and eventually windsurfing became my passion.”

So much so, that at age 18, Bruce won a gold medal in the Windsurfer Demonstration Class at the 1984 Olympic Games and went on to win the World Championships later that year.

“I felt like I had conquered the world,” he says.

#### Ambassador

Following this victory, the Australian company who manufactured his boards asked him to become a brand ambassador, putting him through public speaking and human relations courses and sending him out into the market. It was an influential period in his life he credits with preparing him for his business career.

While still enjoying being on the water, Bruce was eventually drawn to product development and subsequently started work for Mistral, a company pioneering windsurfing in the 1970s. He and the Mistral team would design and build prototype boards, shape and test them and then send the master to COBRA for series production.

It was when taking a prototype racing board to a Mistral championship event in Thailand that he met the COBRA team in person.

“I'd been living in Hawaii for 17 years and was ready for my next challenge,” Bruce says. “COBRA asked me to join them and the rest is history.”

His first role at COBRA, back in 2003, was in design and development, prototyping boards for customers and making samples. It was a hands-on role that enabled Bruce to bring his personal experience and flair to the products. From there, he moved into overseeing the production of boards, and is now responsible for sales and distribution as Chief Commercial Officer.

Technology, Bruce maintains, has always been fundamental to COBRA's success.

#### Versatility

“From the outset, COBRA has stood apart from the competition through applying advanced technology concepts and processes to series production,” he says. “With a more versatile set-up than most manufacturers, we are able to quickly respond to customer requests and changes, and high quality is retained through the superior processing technology developed over many years.”

COBRA has also managed to be in the right place at the right time throughout most of its history, he adds, primarily due to commercial and technical continuous development.

Diversification of products has been crucial – not only into other watersports such as kite boarding, kayaking and SUP sailing, but also into transportation, architecture and furniture. The company's design and development centre has been central to the mastery of new materials, processes and products.



*“Stakeholders need to come together and combine efforts to sustain the windsurfing industry.” ~ BRUCE WYLIE*



Bruce (centre) at COBRA International in 2017

**Sustainability**

“Customers can draw confidence from the fact the COBRA team is always working on the next generation product and has a firm belief that technological advances never end,” Bruce says. “One area where COBRA has very much led the way is in the adoption of sustainable materials, which is also very much the focus of our CEO Danu Chotikapanich, who has put in place a sustainability strategy which amongst other things, aims to reduce the company’s carbon footprint and increase efficiency. Many of our customers are by nature out in the elements and have a passion for doing what’s right to protect the environment, so this makes perfect sense.”

**World of Windsurfing**

As alternative watersports became more popular from 2000 onwards, the windsurfing industry took a dip, and Bruce has been looking at ways to reinvigorate the market.

A number of years ago, COBRA was instrumental in the founding of the World of Windsurfing, a body set up to encourage newcomers to the sport and to unite industry members around the world. After a period of stagnation, Bruce has been hands-on over the past six months getting the organisation going again and ready to be a vehicle for reaching a wider audience.

“Stakeholders need to come together and combine efforts to sustain the windsurfing industry,” he says. “World of Windsurfing is one way to do this.”

**Windsurfer LT**

Two years ago, Bruce began working on the development of a new board that would encourage new entrants to windsurfing.

“The industry needed a mass market board that was good for beginners, good for light airs windsurfing, and could also be used for stand-up paddling – a versatile,

multi-purpose board,” he explains. “So I put myself back on the factory floor and set to work.”

The result was the Windsurfer LT – a lighter and easier-to-sail version of the incredibly popular Windsurfer.

At the 40th Windsurfer Australian Championships in 2017, Bruce was able to make a convincing case for the new board and it is now being adopted in Australia, Italy and Japan, with trial boards in use in the US and Europe. Many associations are phasing out the old-style Windsurfers, with class races starting to adopt the new board.

“Foil windsurfing is going to be the next big thing,” Bruce predicts, “but the boards for this are specialised and unlikely to become a mass market product. Nevertheless, foil windsurfing is exhilarating to watch and this is creating a

renewed sense of excitement around the sport and encouraging beginners. That’s where the Windsurfer LT comes in. It will support newcomers and hopefully create a whole new generation of windsurfers.”