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Fishing for Dorado in the
Sea of Cortez



Discovering the Neuse River • J/70 World Championship
The Palm Garten • Deer in the 'Hood • Holiday Shopping in Charlottesville
The Huntsman Matthew Cook • Hurricane-Proof Lighthouse Homes

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STAFF: Publisher *Virginia Outdoor Media, LLC*, Editor *John Shtogren*, Copy Editor *Dail Willis*, Equine Advisor *Jane Porter Fogleman*, Advertising *Anne W. Coles*, *Wendy Jensen*, *Anita Vere-Nicoll*, *Michelle Scott*, *Jill Kavanagh*, Cartoonist *Jerry King*.

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Sea of Dreams

2017 Audi J/70 World Championship
Costa Smeralda, Sardinia, Italy

Story by Louay Habib
Photos by Kurt Arrigo/YCCS



237 Peter Duncan (USA)
Relative Obscurity





Thirty-knot winds brought a dramatic climax to the world championship.

223 Diem Klaus's (AUT) *Pfander* at full speed



World championships in the sport of sailing are numerous but never in the history of the sport has the yacht-racing fraternity witnessed anything as extraordinary as the 2017 Audi J/70 World Championship, hosted by the prestigious Yacht Club Costa Smeralda on the stunning sailing grounds of the Costa Smeralda, Sardinia. In all, 161 J/70 teams from 25 different countries formed a record fleet for a sportsboat world championship, racing in spectacular conditions.

The story of J/Boats is a classic entrepreneurial tale. Rod and Bob Johnstone went into business 40 years ago, building their first sailboat in Rod's garage. *Ragtime* was a 24-foot sailboat designed for racing by the Johnstone family. In 1976, Everett Pearson, the owner of Tillotson Pearson, Inc, a highly respected boat builder in Warren, Rhode Island, was quite taken with the design and agreed to produce the boat on spec in return for the

U.S. building rights. Display ads in *Soundings* got the word out. That winter they set up a makeshift factory in an old textile mill in nearby Fall River, Massachusetts, and began making J/24s. In 1978, 20 boats entered the first J/24 One Design event in Key West, Florida. The simple yet highly competitive J/24 design proved so popular that, by 2009, well over 5,000 J/24s were produced, racing in every corner of the world. Since those early days, J-Boats, which is still run by the Johnstone family, has produced a range of yachts that has made the company a multimillion-dollar leading light in the industry.

The J/24 is still raced to this day the world over. However, the phenomenal success of the J/24 looks likely to be superseded by the J/70. The class is only four years old; however, more than 1,400 J/70s have been commissioned, making it the fastest growing one-design class in the history of yacht racing.

The 2017 Audi J/70 World Championship was the fourth edition, raced on the Costa Smeralda off the north-east shore of the Italian island of Sardinia. It has deep, ink-blue water and a rocky



178 Charlotte Braun (GER) surfing at top speed

(Below) Close racing at every mark rounding

shoreline, carved into jagged shapes through years of erosion by the fabled Mistral Wind. It is widely acclaimed as one of the world's best race sites.

Twelve teams made the long journey from the United States to compete, including the reigning J/70 World Champion Joel Ronning (Wayzata YC, MN), racing with America's Cup winner, Olympic silver

medalist and multiple world champion John Kosteki; Darden & Hillard (Fort Worth BC, TX), racing with Olympic gold medalist Jonathan McKee; Peter Duncan (American YC, NY), racing with Etchells World Champion Judd Smith; reigning J/70 U.S. Corinthian Champion Brian Keane (Beverly YC, MA), racing with three-time Olympian Stu McNay, and U.S.





Audi J/70 World Champions: *Relative Obscurity* (USA) (L-R) Peter Duncan, Victor de Leon, Willem Van Waay and Jud Smith. (Photo courtesy of J/70 Italian Class)

J/70 Class President Henry Brauer (Eastern YC, MA), racing with J-Boats' Stuart Johnstone.

"It was an extraordinary feeling leaving the harbor this morning. I was thinking back to the golden days of the J/24. I was filled with family pride, seeing so many sailors going out there to enjoy a spectacular day of sailing," commented Stuart Johnstone after the first day of

action. "Out on the racecourse, we could recognize the depth and talent of the fleet. If you fell out of the top tier, it was very difficult to claw your way back.

Downwind, the classic post-Mistral conditions meant there were big lulls as well as big puffs, which is very challenging. Packs of boats kept passing each other with sometimes 50 percent difference in boat speed."

The Mistral blew for the entire regatta. Emanating from the French Alps, the northerly breeze is energized by the warm waters of the Mediterranean, blasting crystal clear wind over flat water to deliver phenomenal warm-water sailing conditions. The J/70 is designed to surf downwind, providing thrilling racing, where harnessing the power and staying in control reaps the ultimate rewards. The best of the best had gathered in Sardinia for the biggest showdown in sportsboat history. Among them was Claudia Rossi, representing the host club, Yacht Club Costa Smeralda, ITA. As the reigning European champion, Rossi's team was among one of the favorites to win.

By the last day of racing the tension was too much for some to bear, with numerous yachts starting too early. There were several general recalls, and the black flag came into play, meaning instant race disqualification, if a boat was over the start line before the gun. The conditions were nothing short of spectacular. With the wind speed close to the class limit, the Costa Smeralda was raging, white foam and breaking waves appearing right across

J/70s under spinnaker on the beautiful coastline of Sardinia, Italy



the race course. The Audi J/70 World Championship had a thrilling climax to remember for years to come. The world's largest championship sportsboat fleet enjoyed a fantastic finale.

It would have been a Cinderella story if Rossi had won the championship. However, her *Petite Terrible* team was judged over the line before the start of the last race and disqualified, ending the Italian dream. Brian Keane of the Beverly Yacht Club Marion, MA., was runner-up for the regatta, a wonderful achievement in a boat chartered just for the championship. There was no doubt about the winner. Peter Duncan's team, representing the American Yacht Club in Rye, New York, scored an impressive three winning races in the six-race series to win the 2017 Audi J/70 World Championship.

"Awesome! Top of the world!" Duncan said. "It is a great feeling. I have sailed with some great guys, we had a great event and everything seemed to go our way. It was just one of those weeks. It is hard to put into words how I feel right now, but this was just exceptional. This fleet has some really great talent, and the organizers, and the yacht club have done such an amazing job. Most of all I want to credit the crew, Victor, Jud, Willem, they have been just fantastic."

The 2018 J/70 World Championship will be hosted by the Eastern Yacht Club, Marblehead, Massachusetts, Sept. 22-29, 2018. www.j70class.com/index.php/event-calendar/2018-j70-world-championship/

Louay Habib is a freelance journalist and broadcaster with 30 years of experience. Based in the United Kingdom, he writes for some of the most prestigious magazines and clubs all over the world, including the Royal Ocean Racing Club and the New York Yacht Club.



J/70 East Coast Championships

The J/70 East Coast Championships were held at Fishing Bay Yacht Club in Deltaville, Virginia on Sept. 30-Oct. 1, 2017. The venue offers racing that can be held outside the mouth of the Piankatank River in the Chesapeake Bay itself or, alternatively, inside the more protected waters of Fishing Bay. Wind velocity, although not quite "epic" in comparison to some days at the Worlds, was enough at 17-20 knots to drive steep, choppy seas that caused the Race Committee to take the racing inside the beautiful Piankatank River.

Competition was extremely close, as the entire fleet was rounding nose-to-tail at many windward mark roundings. Marginal planing conditions as puffs came and went kept crews busy reconfiguring sail plans and moving weight back and forth to maximize speed, while the shifts in wind direction were dramatic as is often the case when sailing where land masses interrupt wind flow.

Day one saw a different winner in each of the four races, with Blakely Kimbrough on *Nostalgia* taking the first race, Latane Montague in *Full Monty* in race 2, Henry Filter on *Wild Child* in race 3, and Matt Braun in *E.L.E.* taking the fourth win.

The day two forecast was for even more blustery conditions and after a good-faith try to set up a course outside, the Race Committee again took the fleet to flatter water. *Nostalgia* was able to sew up the overall lead with a second and two firsts for the day, with neck-and-neck finishes in all three races from the challenging fleet. Filter on *Wild Child* secured second overall with a first and two seconds. The Christchurch Sailing Team aboard *Pied Piper*, skippered by Gannon Troutman, climbed into third place overall, a stellar performance for the young team which had never sailed a J70 together before the event.

Founded in 1939, Fishing Bay Yacht Club ranks among the senior sailing institutions on the Chesapeake Bay.

Lud Kimbrough
Commodore, 2006