



# Intensity, meet insight

Carol Cronin sits down with Pete Commette, the first Laser World Champion, and among the fastest, smartest sailors of true legend that you may never have heard about...

When I first raced Snipes against Peter Commette in the early 1990s his car door lock was programmed to 1976, the year he sailed the Finn in the Olympics. Even then I quickly learned to listen in whenever he began a story, trying to absorb even a small portion of all that knowledge and intensity – while simultaneously vowing to avoid his occasional but complete loss of perspective about the importance of winning.

Once I became an Olympic hopeful myself Peter was kind enough to share – among many other kernels of wisdom – the log sheet he filled out after each sailing day. He would always get to the Snipe boatpark before anyone else, and long after the rest of us had showered and beveraged he could usually be found still in wet sailing clothes, tweaking his boat – no matter how well his day had gone.

It's been a few years since Pete last sailed

Snipes, and I've missed his stories. But when we sit down for this interview he starts off with his biggest regret.

## Sailing himself to sleep

Peter's first sailing memories are in a Bulls-eye on New Jersey's Barnegat Bay 'crewing' for his father. 'I was four years old and what I loved to do is go up in the bow and go to sleep. It's the most wonderful feeling in the world to be rocked to sleep like that, and to hear the waves hitting the hull. That eased me into sailing.' But only a few years later, 'I told my dad I wouldn't crew for him any more – because he always lost.

'That was a terrible thing. He seemed to recover pretty well, but I don't think I ever have. I still wish I could go back to that day and take it back and understand what a wonderful thing it is to have a father and a son together out there on the water. It was a terrible mistake. It indicates what a jerk I am about trying to win.'

In the 1960s Duck boats were Mantoloking Yacht Club's junior doublehander. After crewing for three skippers he still calls friends Peter started steering – and his career almost ended right there. Laughing,

he says, 'Did you hear my story about the first time my father stuck me in as skipper of my brand new Duck boat? Six years old. I've been crewing for two years now.' Copying the successful landing of the day before (when the breeze was from the opposite direction), he crashed downwind into the dock hard enough to send his new crew to the hospital. At that point Peter decided that 'I'm done steering. I'm crewing for the rest of my life.'

Instead, he gave skippering another try, and before long he was trying to beat Billy Brecht, 'the John McEnroe of our Duck boat programme; loud mouth, brazen – he was my hero.' (And the first of many fierce rivalries.) Peter also mentions several adult mentors, including Runyon 'Runnie' Colie. 'The Holy Grail back then was an opportunity to crew for Colie,' he said, in the seven-time E-Scow and Penguin champion's Hall of Fame bio.

## Book learning

'I got my dream job as a 12-year-old,' Peter says now, adding that before the E-Scow season started Colie required him to read three books: Arthur Knapp's *Race*



**Opposite:** way better than YouTube... mid-1970s and the recently crowned Laser World Champion Pete Commette gives it everything during the St Francis YC's Heavy Weather Laser Slalom on the Bay, run directly in front of the clubhouse terrace. Tacking and gybing upwind then down in pairs between two rows of tightly spaced buoys, the Laser Slalom was one to win. In peak-wind Slalom years it was common to see some of the best Cup and Olympic sailors racing each other using reduced Laser sails rolled around the mast.  
**Above:** that same 1970s vibe as Peter Commette checks Finn rake during a fraught – but ultimately successful – 1976 Olympic Trials

*Your Boat Right*, John Oakeley's *Winning*, and 'Stuart Walker's first high-performance book' (maybe *Performance Advances in Small Boat Sailing*). Of all the knowledge he absorbed that winter Peter best remembers his troublesome jib telltales. 'I didn't know there was a right place or a wrong place, so I put them way too close to the leading edge. The entire summer I'm always bearing off trying to get the windward telltale to work. That was a year lost.' Never one to blame his equipment, Peter decided he was just a bad upwind sailor.

When his father purchased one of the first Lasers in 1971 the stated goal was for his mother (a gifted golf and tennis player) to learn to sail. But it 'was a little tippy for her, so I got to sail that boat, number 246'.

Peter and another teenager spent the whole summer reaching back and forth across Barnegat Bay, 'the most fun thing ever. And that was all they were good for! Nobody was racing them.'

It wasn't until they heard about a big regatta that they decided to 'see what these boats are like upwind. So we go upwind on a heavy-air day, for maybe three minutes.' He rolls his eyes, remembering how quickly they decided that 'these boats are too hard to sail upwind! They'll never catch on.' He laughs. 'So we just went back to reaching.'

But it was the Laser that would make him realise he wasn't a bad upwind sailor

after all. It would also launch him to international recognition when he won the very first Laser Worlds... by more than 30pt.

### College choice

Peter is four years younger than that other Jersey kid, Gary Jobson. 'I thought he was so cool; all I wanted to do was sail in my Topsider moccasins so I could be just like Gary Jobson! He had a lot of swagger, and he won too.' So when the time came to apply to college Peter asked Jobson – then a midshipman at the Kings Point Merchant Marine Academy – where to go.

'He knew that I would not appreciate the opportunities that were given to me by a military school. I'm sorry he was right, because I ended up coaching at Kings Point where I learned that I'd missed a great opportunity.' Instead, Jobson suggested Tufts University, because 'they had a great A-division skipper, Manton Scott, and all they needed was a good B-division skipper' to win a national championship. (Note the lack of academic priorities.)

'So I went up to meet the great Joe Duplin and Manton Scott and to test-drive Tufts,' Peter remembers. 'And Joe just blew me away. He had a great philosophy: "You will be an All-American all on your own, with all of the competition that's given to you over the four years. I will turn you into a world champion and an Olympian." And it's like, whoa, this is incredible; he really knows me!

'So I choose Tufts, Tufts chooses me. And when I get to the first day of practice I go, "Hey, Joe!"' When it quickly became apparent that Joe didn't remember him in the slightest. 'Everybody was "Hey, babe!" I don't know if he ever remembered my name the entire time I was there...'

But by sophomore year the famous coach definitely knew Peter, if not his name. After Manton Scott was killed, when his aluminium mast touched an overhead power cable, Peter learned to steer his friend's 470 – only a few months before the Worlds that Scott had been expected to win. Thanks to an intense training schedule and Duplin's coaching, Peter and Mike Loeb finished only one point behind first at the 1973 Worlds. 'The whole idea was to try to prove that Scott would have won, which we did – at least in our minds, and in Manton's parents' minds. Because if I could lose by a point he would have won by many.'

A year later Duplin would tell a reporter that Peter was 'the most talented young man I've ever worked with...' who also 'works harder than anybody I know'.

### The less I like you

Peter and Augie Diaz were both 19 when they first sailed against each other at the 1973 Laser Midwinters. Reading about this kid who'd won a silver medal at the Pan Am Games crewing for his father made Peter 'want a piece of this guy.'



**Above:** in town for the 1968 Atlantic Coast Midget class championship... Two of this young trio are smiling; one will be champion. **Right:** Commette steering a Duck boat at Mantoloking YC in 1965 and (far right), having moved on a little in the following 10 years, and surviving a controversial USA selection series, he sets up his Vanguard Finn at the 1976 Olympic Regatta in Kingston, Ontario

'Everybody has different ways to motivate them, and I'm more motivated the less I like you.' But after a fifth at the Midwinters, four places ahead of his new rival, 'Augie comes up to me and goes, "Oh, that was really good, you did a great job. You want to come to dinner at my family's house with me?"

'This isn't fair! I'm like, I'm going to like this guy.' Four months later he still managed to beat Augie (and everyone else) at the next big Laser championship, the US Youths. (Recalling a 2008 victory over his lifelong friend and rival brings an even wider smile.)

But 'I did stupid things back then,' Peter continues. On the last leg of that Laser Midwinters he tacked under Ding Schoonmaker – then in his 40s. 'I remember looking at him and Hans Fogh and thinking, now these guys have great names, but they're old.' He admits to yelling at Ding, 'Now we're gonna find out who's in better shape!' before shaking his head at his young self. 'What a jerk. Yeah, of course I was in better shape. Boom! I left him in the dust. But what a stupid thing to say. A stupid way to think, but that's the way I thought.'

### World champion

In 1974 Peter dominated the first Laser Worlds in Bermuda (109 boats, 24 countries). In *Yacht Racing* reporter and world champion sailor Bob Fisher's regatta report attributed the victory to 'a new technique in dinghy racing... using quite violent movements of his body, mainsheet and tiller to claw his way upwind and to drive the boat harder on the reaches'.

Despite only one earlier race win (and an unexplainable 73rd), going into the seventh and final race Peter had built up a 24-point lead. 'One might have expected Commette to sail a steady race,' Fisher wrote, 'instead of attacking from the word go. A little too heartily initially...'

Even after an over-early call that forced a restart Peter rounded the weather mark fourth – and then planed over the top of the first three boats. Crossing the line 40 seconds ahead of second place was 'a fine finish to the series for a worthy champion... He trained hard for the event and was well rewarded'.

It was the first Worlds victory for both Peter and Tufts University. That autumn a *Boston Globe* reporter claimed that the name Peter Commette was now as well known internationally as Ted Turner, Ted Hood and Huey Long.

### The Laser generation

For Peter the Laser provided an outlet for his intensity – fuelled by rivalries with the few sailors who met his high standards. Asked by Dick Tillman (for *The Complete Book of Laser Sailing*) what separated those sailors from the rest, Peter replied, 'They never roll over and die. They always come back at you, they can always recover when they are in the tank and you really have to sail your best to beat them.'

In 'The Laser Generation Turns 30', a feature in the October 1985 issue of *Yacht Racing*, Nat Philbrick tried to explain the 'long-haired kids who had reinvented sailboat racing'. Though he also named fellow Americans Carl Buchan and John Bertrand, he called out Peter as 'the man at

the centre of this phenomenon... How the "Laser Generation" torqued and two-blocked its way into the history books.'

Ed Adams, another worthy Laser rival, told Philbrick about a temper tantrum Peter threw after not getting the gun at a finish (because he was over early). 'He stood up in his boat, stomped up and down, then pulled out his immaculate daggerboard and smashed it against the deck as hard as he could. That was when I realised you had to be an absolute maniac to really sail a Laser.'

Perhaps partly because of all that memorable mania, Peter's impact lasted long beyond his results. In the 1990s a youngster at a national sailing conference (who obviously didn't recognise him) asked Peter, reverently, 'Did you sail Lasers in the Commette era?' Afterwards Peter told me, 'I didn't know whether to laugh or cry.'

### Olympic fever

Long before Peter was internationally recognised his goals included pro sailing and winning a gold medal at the 1976 Olympics. The question was: which class? At 160lb his best choice looked like the Flying Dutchman (the boat Augie Diaz was sailing). But after starting an FD campaign with 'lots of hoopla, I fell flat on my face and didn't perform to others' expectations or my own. Turns out I was not as good as I thought. And the FD, turns out, wasn't for me or my pocketbook.'

Already committed to sailing full-time through the Games, he decided to try out the Finn. 'It was the only boat available that I could jump into. One of my



childhood heroes, Carl Van Duyne, was an undersized champion in the Finn. I figured, I'll just carry all the weight that you're allowed to carry, 44lb then. And maybe I can hang in there.'

But after all that FD 'hoopla' he wanted to keep a low profile. A deep dive into equipment research led him to Finn constructor Peter Harken. 'I told Peter that I wanted to order a boat but didn't have that much money... Back then it was "I'll sail your boat if you give me a deal".'

The builder agreed to sell him the boat show model – but not until late September. So Peter spent that summer checking out his competition. 'I literally went incognito to a bunch of Finn regattas. I'd rent a little motorboat, have a hat on and sunglasses and sneak out on the course.' For the Pre-Trials at Association Island he remembers renting 'some boy's little aluminium fishing boat' from a cottage around the corner from the regatta venue. Watching who was fast taught him which mast to order, though it must have been a frustrating summer for such an uber-competitive guy.

He didn't even share the new plan with his parents – which might be why his father decided to go to the Newport Boat Show. 'He knows his son is floundering; going to take the year off school, Flying Dutchman didn't work out. What's he going to do?'

At the Vanguard booth his father saw 'this nice boat called a Finn that this nice young man Peter Harken is showing – and, you know, my father fully figures there's a boat show discount. So he says, "What about this boat right here?" And Peter Harken says, "Oh no, this boat's already been sold... [to] the Laser World Champion, Peter Commette." And my father goes "Well, that's interesting, he didn't tell me – and I'm probably gonna have to pay

for it!" So that was the beginning of my Finn career.'

After taking delivery of his new boat Peter went out to Minnesota to train (and work) with sailmaker Gordy Bowers. 'What an incredible championship environment,' he says now, before laughing about his embarrassing lack of knowledge. Despite totally immersing himself in sailing, which included swearing off 'all media and dating' (a promise to himself he claims he broke only once), 'things didn't go well during that winter. It was a tough learning curve; those guys were good sailors...

'There were times when it looked like maybe there was some potential, but every day it was like, Why am I doing this? This is so hard. This is a dream that isn't going to come true. It would take me an entire weather leg to loosen up and to feel like maybe I could get through the race.

'So I learned to sail an entire weather leg before the races started, hard.' Once competitors noticed they assumed he was figuring out the favoured side of the course. 'They didn't know it was so I could actually sail the first leg and not be in pain.'

Another realisation? Downwind, 'I was just a whole lot faster than everybody else!!'

### Desperate to learn faster

Upwind, though, his speed in his new Finn was frustratingly mid-fleet. He remembers talking to class veteran Tony Hermann, who 'was on his last Finn Olympiad. Back then I would wonder, why do old men like him even sail? Now I know why.

'So Tony says, "Your learning curve is a little too steep for the time you have left. But if you come up and train with me I'll teach you how to sail upwind if you teach me how to sail downwind." So Peter headed north to wintry Wisconsin for



three weeks of daily line-ups. 'I was desperate, so I go sail with this old guy...'

That old guy's training group happened to include John Bertrand of Australia, who would go on to win a bronze medal and was 'designing all the Finn sails for North Sails – what an opportunity. While Tony was working during the mornings I'd go over and hang out at North. Bertrand was very free with his knowledge, and I learned so much from him... what the fast sail was with the mast that I was using.' By the US Trials, 'I knew exactly who was going to be fast and why.'

### Only a pretend Finn sailor

On the water Peter calls the training group 'certifiably nuts. I was the little kid, and we would go literally over the horizon, sailing against each other. They'd wait for me and then tell me what to fix.'

He remembers one afternoon session that continued long after sunset. 'We can't even see the city when we start sailing back, and it's cold. It's nasty. It's early March. It's Wisconsin for chrissakes.'

When the yacht club's launch tracked them down and offered a tow, 'I'm the only one who said yes; the others said they'll sail in.' Back on shore, boat put away, 'I'm probably 40 minutes in the shower thinking I will never get feeling back in my extremities, and I finally see sails coming in. That's when I realised that your brain needed to go to another level of toughness to be a good Finn sailor.

'They were real Finn sailors; I was a pretend Finn sailor.'

Peter was also still too small. 'I was looking to get to 205lb, and I just hadn't been able to do it. With working out every day I might get the weight up there at night, and then it just wasn't there to sail



**Above:** filling in another detailed Commette post-race ‘debrief sheet’ during the first Laser World Championship in Bermuda in 1974 which the young American sailor would win comfortably with a 30-point margin to 2nd. A snapshot of one of Commette’s rigorously maintained data sheets (*opposite*) is just one of several pages for each race, not only recording conditions, use of weight and sail trim etc, but also a breakdown of how his close rivals performed and, where possible, what they were doing differently, good and bad. *Opposite, clockwise from top left:* a fine haul after winning the 1965 Midget title; already thoughtful, Commette seen heading down to the dock in 1961, aged 7; debrief; more silver and 4th at the 1989 Snipe Worlds with wife Connie – after winning the US Nationals together in 1996 Commette raced with each of the couple’s three daughters with a best result of 3rd at the 2007 Worlds with Sheehan

with.’ Fortunately, a timely west coast trip taught ‘the value of ice cream’. He laughs. ‘When I did finally get to the Olympics I had a good 195-200lb of muscle. But my last five were all the California boys pushing me over the precipice.’

Next he headed to Boston to work with Joe Duplin. ‘It was too cold for him to put a boat in, so he coached me from the dock.’ When Peter would come in to ask what he’d done wrong he remembers Duplin’s reply: “Oh babe, you’re just not cutting the mustard.” Peter shakes his head, still wondering what that meant. ‘OK, let me go [back] out and see if I can cut the mustard.’

But once they reached the Trials site Duplin – who’d spent his own money to get there – was far more definitive. ‘Joe said, “You’re as fast as you’re going to be, so you’re done with the speed work. All we’re going to do is short course racing to get your tactics and your thought process going quicker.” He was a big believer in your body clock, so he said, “We’re not going to go all day; we’re going to start when the racing would start. We’re going to finish when the racing would end. And we’re going to take lots of breaks.”’

Other competitors had showed up early as well, and several eventually joined what today would be called a ‘coach’s regatta’. ‘We had some really good short course stuff,’ Peter remembers. ‘And then we started the Trials...’

### **Incredible mayhem**

Peter has saved a lot of the press coverage from his sailing, and the most entertaining and alarming article is about the 1976 Finn and 470 US Olympic Trials. F Gardner Cox wrote pieces for *SAIL Magazine* that described drinks-fuelled ‘interviews’ with Charlie Streber, a fictitious reporter/ friend he nicknamed The Sharpshooter. ‘Gardner would interview Charlie,’ Peter explains, ‘about something “sharp” that occurred in a regatta.’

‘Charlie always was: (1) incensed, because this was further than he would ever go, (2) incensed, because he had gone further in his day and never received proper credit, or (3) incensed, because he never thought of that.’ (And the prose was ‘always outstanding’.)

Cox usually disguised sailors with a nickname (though ‘you always would know who it was’), but this time he used Peter’s actual name – perhaps too ‘incensed’ by the hours of ‘solid harassment and intimidation’ that Peter received from a couple of his competitors before the final race of the Trials.

‘I already had my throw-out,’ Peter explains, before describing the agonising approach to an earlier finish when he (once again) realised he’d been over early. Instead of raising the gun PRO Ken Legler’s ‘got his arms crossed. And I’m going, “Alright, Kenny, pull out that shotgun... I’m getting closer, you don’t want to be late... I want you to get this right on

time... come on, Kenny!”’ Instead, Legler ‘puts his head down. Sure enough, I cross, no gun. That hurt,’ Peter admits. What we now call OCS was then a Premature Start, and ‘I was known as the PMS king!’

Going into the final race, Peter – regatta leader – couldn’t afford another bad result. That set the stage for what he now calls ‘incredible mayhem’.

The Sharpshooter takes up the story: ‘After Peter left the dock late because he had to reset his mast rake (which had mysteriously moved six turns overnight), two other sailors hounded him all the way to the startline. They continued to hound him through an hour-long postponement, preventing his trademark pre-race sail up the course.’ All while yelling the kind of abuse that nowadays would get them kicked out of the regatta.

But instead of letting the pair intimidate or distract him Peter yelled back. ‘Of course, maybe they would have stopped but for the nasty things I was telling them!’ Then one of them got so mad he tried to jump into Peter’s Finn – and ‘he was so much bigger I was not having any of that.’

Says the Sharpshooter, admiringly: ‘At the perfect moment Commette yanked hard on the tiller, moving his bow to starboard. This opened up a vee of water between the two boats and Sprane stepped overboard right into the vee. All the guys nearby in the 470 fleet and quite a few of the Finn skippers stood up in their boats



PERFORMANCE: At the Start: <i>upbeat - not much better</i>		At the Finish: <i>OK</i>	
On the Wind: <i>Carl Van Dyke</i>		On the Reach: <i>Linton</i>	
Sail Handling: <i>Carl &amp; Davey (with Linton)</i>		Downwind: <i>Carl &amp; Davey</i>	
ADJUSTMENTS, TENSIONS, & SETTINGS:			
Main Halyard:	Jib Downhaul:	Lower Stays:	
Main Downhaul: <i>Light</i>	Jiblead Pos:	Jumpers:	
Outhaul Pos: <i>Light</i>	Jiblead Angle:	Spreader An:	
Main Cunningham:	Spi. Halyard:	Spreader Lo:	
Boo vang: <i>Light?</i>	Spi. Lead Pos:	Mast Step P:	
Main Traveller: <i>Light?</i>	Mast Heel:	Rake:	
Which Battens?	Boom Pulley Pos:	Sidestays:	
Main Sheet Tens:	Mast Bend:	Centerboard:	
Jib Sheet Tens:	Backstay:	Rudderblade:	
Jib Halyard:	Upper Stays:	Sail Tellta:	
CREW & WEIGHTS: No NOB-			
WHAT WENT WRONG: <i>Lead broken - lost work. In some situations crew pulled lead further down by using lead around head &amp; back stays of boom to get lead back up.</i>		REPAIRS OR MODIFICATIONS: <i>practice, new mast</i>	
POSITION OF CREW (FORE & AFT):		HEEL OF BOAT:	
Reaching: <i>Lead</i>		Spwind: <i>slight</i>	
Downwind:		Reaching: <i>slight</i>	
		Downwind:	
PERFORMANCE OF LEADING COMPETITORS & GENERAL COMMENTS:			
<i>Carl says to work on endurance for team. Start with intensity then, do more practice.</i>			
<i>Carl was open for some with about hiking stick. He was Davey.</i>			

and cheered.’ (Peter adds that the swimmer ‘came up fuming.’)

Whether it was all that harassment or just his own preparation and talent, ‘I won that race in the heaviest air, my finest achievement in the Finn class.’ That qualified Peter for the Olympics in Kingston the following month. Second-place Gus Miller went along as his training partner, though ‘Were I to have listened to my inner self I would have chosen Carl Buchan.’

Fifty years later Peter blames his disappointing 11th place on a fatal mix of youthful error and five-rings-hassle: changing his equipment right before the regatta, and not having his favourite coach onsite (the federation would not give Duplin a credential).

After a disappointing start with two finishes in the 20s, Peter’s dad begged Duplin to come up to Kingston. ‘My father doesn’t know anything because he’s not a racing sailor, but he tells Joe “I’ve never seen him sail like this.” And Joe gets up there, and my dad gives him [his credential]. Now my dad’s five foot eight, 160lb. Joe is six foot two or three – to me he was a giant – and 250lb. And he comes in wearing my father’s ID, they let him in, and things got better.’ Peter’s next three finishes were all in the top five.

‘But at that point I had a mast on that I wasn’t used to, a sail on I wasn’t used to, and I was pressing way too hard.’ One race he started a full minute early. ‘The first

times I ever screwed up in international competition were always bad timing,’ he concludes. ‘I lost to guys I’d never lost to, before or after.’

The entire experience – Trials and Games – left him disillusioned with the sport, he says now. But after graduating from Tufts the following year he was still convinced that pro sailing was his future.

**Career choices**

What Peter didn’t do much of in college? Studying. ‘I majored in history and economics, and – another one of those wishes if I could go back and do it over again – I should have studied harder. Only after the Olympics, after the people that I looked up to as sailors turned out to be even bigger assholes than I was, only then did I think, gee, maybe I should do what my father has been harping on at me to do: keep my options open.’

So he applied to law school, and while they considered his less-than-stellar transcript Peter took over from Gary Jobson as head coach at Kings Point. In those days there were three routes to earning money in sailing, which Peter ticks off on his left fingers: ‘sailmaker, boatbuilder, coach.’

‘I loved coaching. It was an absolute dream job, with fantastic kids.’ But once he was accepted to what is now the University of Illinois law school, he revised his career plan. ‘And only then did I really study to learn.’

In 1980 he jumped back into the Finn and won the North Americans – the last regatta before the Olympic Trials. It was on the drive up to Newport RI that he heard the bad news on his car radio: Carter had announced the boycott. ‘So I just took a left-hand turn [literally, toward Chicago] and went back to law school. And that was the end of my career as a seriously training sailor.’

**Life lessons from sailing**

But it wasn’t the end of his sailing accomplishments. In 1991 he and Tarasa Davis won Snipe bronze at the Pan American Games. Alongside building a successful law practice and raising a family that now includes grandchildren, Peter continued to sail at a high level internationally until just a few years ago, mostly with family crews. He and Connie Suddath finished fourth at the 1989 Snipe Worlds, married in 1993, and won the US Snipe Nationals in 1996. And once their three daughters were old enough he introduced each one to the front of his Snipe; with middle daughter Sheehan he finished third at the 2007 Snipe World Championship in Porto, Portugal.

However... ‘The cherry on top of the frosting has been, as a singlehanded sailor, to learn how to sail with the people you love... and not to scare them out of the boat,’ Peter says, then adding that ‘it was a long process. But what a joy to be able to compete with your wife, your daughters, and then my pseudo daughters and a couple of pseudo sons – but mostly pseudo daughters.’

He met most of those not-quite-relatives at Lauderdale Yacht Club. ‘My childhood memories are now inextricably intertwined with the philosophy I’ve tried to follow in building our junior programme here, which is making it really fun without any requirements when you start out.

‘We’re working in a different generation, so it is put into play a little bit differently.’ (Going to sleep while crewing is probably not part of the curriculum.) Over the years he has helped create a pipeline that has launched several Olympians and internationally recognised pro sailors.

Since Covid Peter’s been too focused on work and family to prioritise sailing – but that’s obviously given him more time to reflect on both mistakes and victories. What he calls his biggest life lesson from the sport shows how much perspective this self-described ‘jerk’ has achieved after five decades of setting new standards.

‘Maybe the most important thing that I learned is the value of a person who is not a winning sailor. I’ve taught everybody who’s ever sailed with me that we are going to speak with everybody off the water, because they all have value beyond where they finish in the fleet.’

Long after all of his many stories are lost to time Peter will continue to be recognised as an era-defining inspiration: proving just how far intensity and focus can take any of us. □