



Update

Righting one of the Decision D35 catamarans is much like righting a Tornado, these all carbon/Nomex designs weighing in at just 1,200kg.

DECISION D35S – YEAR ONE

Ten months only between the signature of the contract (27.07.03) and the first practice race in Versoix with the six first boats (29.05.04) – what a sprint! Initially the replacement of the previous fleet of 42-footers was planned on a two-year schedule, but the destructive capsize of two boats during the 2003 Bol d'Or left one of the handful of remaining machines so far in front that something new was now needed – and urgently!

'The toughest part,' explains Etienne David, skipper of 2004 series winner *Zebra 5*, 'was to pull together owners who were not naturally inclined to work with one another! But everybody

played the game, and the risks taken by those first owners showed a healthy sporting spirit'.

So under huge pressure we built eight 'prototypes' to our new design, all in a row, taking wild risks relative to the classical validation process (see *Seahorse*, May 2004). What a risk, but building a proper trial prototype, to test before series-production began, would have cost a whole and very boring season.

Thus there was some turmoil when three mast tubes collapsed mid-season, curiously after having been sailed hard many times before. However, this indicated to us that there was not one single cause, but a 'fatal' sequence of minor events,



Though some reinforcing was carried out to the original spars, there were few other teething problems in a very tight building programme

rather as is often found in aircraft crashes (if at the same time a key instrument has failed, there is fog on the runway, the pilot has eaten a bad fish and the hostess has declined his advances, you are already close to the limit, even if none of these factors alone would have been a serious problem).

It is good to remember that these boats are deliberately extreme and the structural safety margins very small: on the old 42-footers this was only 1.25X, increased to 1.5X for this project. But no more! We believe the ability to fly a hull in 5kt of TWS fully justifies these risks.

'Nevertheless', explains Michel Vaucher, helmsman on

Bedat & Co, 'for eight prototypes conceived and built in such a short time, the crews were able to sail hard remarkably quickly, even if the boat is not something that we would propose to every racing sailor – completely the tradition of the Lake Lemman fleet!'

And competition has been tight; during the two biggest races of the season, the Genève-Rolle and the Bol d'Or, several boats were still next to each other after several hours of racing.

And the sponsors have also been caught up in the successful debut of the new boats, best demonstrated by the fact that two more boats are already on order for next season. Roll on 2005! *Sebastien Schmidt, Geneva*