

BMW Yachtsport

Press Information

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„BMW provides a huge advantage“.

An interview with ORACLE TEAM USA Performance Director Ian Burns.

Munich/New York. On the technology side, you would struggle to find anyone who has been involved for so long and so intensively with the design of America's Cup yachts than Ian "Fresh" Burns. As Performance Director of ORACLE TEAM USA, he is responsible for making sure that the Defender's catamarans are capable of winning again in 2017. In an interview, the Australian discusses the challenges faced during development, the valuable contribution of Official Technology Partner BMW, and the never-ending fascination of the America's Cup.

What does it mean having BMW as a Technology Partner?

Ian Burns: "Working with BMW provides us access to leading edge technology in the automotive industry and people with deep experience in their fields. This allows us to leverage a massive resource into our project. AC campaigns are like startups – there is a high emphasis on time to market and developing, producing and repeating the cycle as many times as possible. This doesn't always involve deep technology from the world's best engineers and scientists. Having access to these resources is where BMW provides a huge advantage."

How are BMW engineers integrated into the design team?

Burns: "There are many areas of overlap between America's Cup design and automotive design. For each of these areas we have direct contact between BMW's leading engineers and designers and their counterparts at ORACLE TEAM USA. Together they identify technology transfer projects that will benefit our team and in some cases help BMW."

How important are aerodynamics in modern AC cats?

Burns: "Just like modern high performance cars, top speed of an America's Cup Class catamaran is limited by drag and how much power they generate. Not only is the aerodynamic drag of the whole America's Cup platform a large percentage of the total drag, the horsepower for the boat is all generated through aerodynamics. It's fair to say that the engine and the AC wing are direct analogues."



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In which way can automotive expertise help defending the America's Cup?

Burns: "America's Cup Class yachts have many rule defined components. This makes the differences between the boats and crew performance the defining contributors for success. Having the advantage of access to the best technology can make a difference – it can add up to better performance across the board and hopefully a match winning advantage."

Could you give an outline of the catamaran? In how far is it a highly sophisticated example of modern engineering?

Burns: "The America's Cup Class foiling catamaran encapsulates the pinnacle of high technology sailing. The boats are the most efficient and the highest power to weight fleet racing yachts in the world today. They are capable of straight line speeds of up to 50 knots, yet able to perform radical manoeuvres, whilst flying above the water. Although America's Cup boats have only been foiling for 3-4 years, already the technology has evolved to provide accurate dynamic computer modelling and advanced composite structural components, running at their limit. At the same time, the crew is operating at their highest level, making split-second decisions while physically providing all the energy these powerful boats require to sail."

What are the technical details that give you an advantage in relation to your competitors?

Burns: "In the America's Cup you never know your competitor's technology level until after the Cup is over. You can only take the very best technology available to your team, refine it and package it to generate as much advantage available, then measure your success, improve and improve again. It's fair to say that the boat with the best aerodynamics, best hydrodynamics, and best sailing team will win. Our extensive use of aerodynamic modelling, using BMW's wind tunnel and other computer modelling techniques, our performance modelling and long hours training on the Great Sound of Bermuda, and our technical team's use of the latest composite analysis and construction techniques will give our team a great boat. To aid the sailing team, we try and deliver the most efficient systems to take their physical exertions and turn them into control motions that shape the wing and tune the hydro surfaces. Finally, providing instrumentation and information technologies that allow the crew to make better decisions and sail faster than their opposition are all areas where we work together with BMW to beat our opposition."



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What set of skills does it take to win the America's Cup?

Burns: "Over the years the America's Cup winners have often been very different. However, they do have some traits in common. These traits include: Dogged determination to focus on the most important things and ignore the background noise. Incredible resiliency to bounce back from adversity, as seen in the last America's Cup when ORACLE TEAM USA overcame an 8-1 deficit to win 9-8. The ability to get the very best from every individual in the team – as the America's Cup is won by the hard work of many all performing better than their opposition in every area, but it is lost by one single error, mishap or miscalculation."

What – to you – makes up the appeal, the joy of competitive sailing?

Burns: "The America's Cup and yachting in general has captured the imagination of the most successful people in the world. Success in business, politics or other walks of life don't guarantee success in the America's Cup – the Cup has repeatedly proven itself to be the hardest trophy in the world to win. Pursuit of excellence in every area has been a fertile ground to produce heroes and destroy legends. This intense competition, along with the natural environment in which we sail, combine to make sailing a lifelong addiction for most who try it."

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Press contact:

BMW Sport Communications

Nicole Stempinsky

Tel.: +49 (0)89 – 382 51 58 4

E-mail: Nicole.Stempinsky@bmw.de

Internet: www.bmw-yachtsport.com

