



WATER-SKIING : A YOUNG SPORT

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At the end of an audience granted at Castel Gandolfo in 1964, Pope Paul VI addressed these words to the participants in the European Water-Skiing Championships: "You are special people; you must be happy and blessed, for you walk on water as Jesus did." * It was a historic sentence for a fairly new sport that is developing at full speed on the waters of the five continents.

No doubt, water-skiing is definitely a more recent phenomenon; some say it was first created in 1912, others say in 1922 or in 1929. According to the most reliable historians, water-skiing first appeared in 1922, thanks to Ralph Samuelson, an American from Minnesota, who was the first ever to have practiced water-skiing.

From then on, water-skiing developed in such a way that it became a sport appreciated and practiced all over the world and in 1972,

during the Olympic Games, it was first admitted as a demonstrative sport.

Water-skiing is in fact the twin brother of skiing. The skis are just slightly longer and wider than the traditional ones used on the snow. A motor-boat drags the skier along rivers, lakes or sea-waters. The skier holds a rope ranging from 11 to 25 m in length which is equipped with a handle.

This is all an amateur must know to practice it. Competitions are a totally different matter. First

of all, water-skiing is divided into a number of main disciplines: tournament, racing and bare-foot. Each of these disciplines has its own rules as we will see in more detail below, but all of them must be performed with a motor-boat. A new concept has been developed, however: teleski; that is, the skier is dragged along by a special equipment. This new discipline is the greatest hit at present both in the US and in Central Europe. A teleski European Championship has just been organized.

The World Water-Skiing Union was officially created on July 28, 1946 and was called "Union Internationale de Ski Nautique". The founders were two Swiss gentlemen who just loved this sport: Mr. Andre Contan and Mr. Albert Schmit who was elected Chairman of the Union. But it was only on April 12, 1955 that — thanks to the merging of the UISN and of the WWSF — the present World Water-Skiing Union was founded. Its first Chairman was Mr. William Geneux from Switzerland. At that time, 21 Federations were officially recognized!

The World Water-Skiing Union is divided into the following three main groups:

Group 1: American (American Continent).

Group 2: Europe, Africa and Middle East.

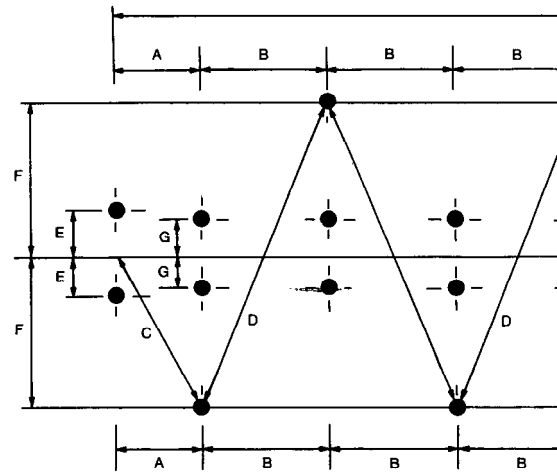
Group 3: Australia, New Zealand and Asia.

The Congress, which is the most important body within the WWSU, meets every two years on the occasion of the World Championships. The Executive Board is formed by a Chairman, a Secretary General, the Chairmen of the three groups and by their respective Secretaries General, as well as by the Chairmen, of the three Technical Committees. The Bureau is formed by the Chairman and the Secretary General and deals with the current matters of the WWSU. At present the Chairman is Mr. Isidro Oliveras De La Piva y Marques from Spain.

The first World Championships was organized in Juan-les-Pins (France) in 1959 and at present World Championships are held every two years.

SLALOM

It is the most popular discipline and, to some extent, the easiest. Slalom is performed along 6 buoys which are located on the right and left hand-side of a central corridor which is the path for the motorboat. The athlete has to pass all 6 buoys on the outside and has to cross the initial



DIMENSIONS

259 m. OVERALL :

A = 27 m.

B = 41 m.

C = 29.347 m.

D = 47.011 m.

E = 1.25 m.

F = 11.5 m.

G = 1.15 m.

TOLERANCES

± ¼ % on 259 m.

± ½ % on A,B,C,D.

± 1 % on F.

± 5 % on E.

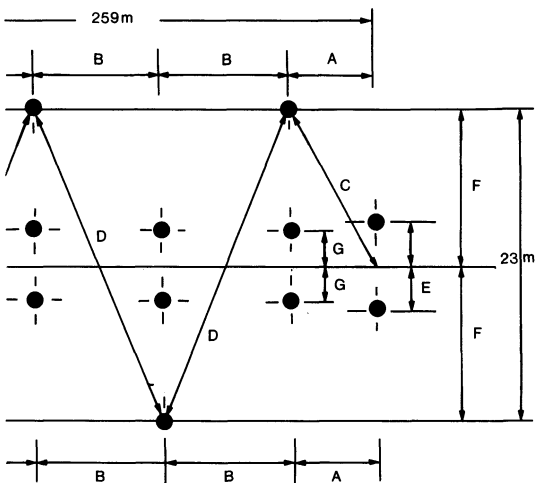
± 10% on G.

Not to scale.

Diagram 1 - Official Slalom Course

and final limits of the path. The initial speed of the motorboat must be 58 km/h for men and 55 km/h for women. The rope length is 18.25 m. Once the athlete has gone through the whole path, the rope is shortened down to 16, then 14.24, 13, 12, 11.25 and eventually 10.75 m.

If the athlete falls, he or she is eliminated from the race. No athlete has ever succeeded in finishing the last trail, the physical stress is too much. Bob Lapoint from the US holds at present the world record. He has passed 5 buoys with a 10.75 m long rope. Slalom, which is usually performed with one ski only, is the discipline requiring a particularly developed muscular structure as well as very strong arms; in fact, in order to achieve the best possible position while turning round the buoy, the athlete must hold the rope handle with just one arm. Since the whole body is almost always bending over during the race, strong abdominal muscles are a must.



ALLOWED RANGES ON DIMENSIONS

- 258.353 m. - 259.648 m.
- 26.865 m. - 27.135 m.
- 40.795 m. - 41.205 m.
- 29.200 m. - 29.494 m.
- 46.776 m. - 47.246 m.
- 1.188 m. - 1.313 m.
- 11.385 m. - 11.615 m.
- 1.035 m. - 1.265 m.

TRICKS

Outstanding characteristics of this discipline are both promptness and speed.

The race is performed over two 20-second passages of the motorboat in front of the judges. The athlete has to do as many tricks as possible within the time allocated. The need of performing very accurate tricks is in contrast with the requirement of doing as many as possible.

If the athlete falls, the time available for his performance stops immediately; that is, the athlete will be awarded the points he gained up until when he fell. The highest score is gained with a backward or forward jump which is worth 50 points! The average score for a trick is 400 points. The world's record is held by Patrick Martin, a Frenchman, who has gained 10,130 points. This means that some athletes can perform more than 20 tricks over the allocated 40-second time span, that is, a trick every two seconds.

JUMP

The jumping area is 1.80 m high (1.50 m for women). Athletes must jump as far as possible. A distance exceeding 60 m can be reached in some cases. In fact, the world record belongs to Glen Thur from Australia who has reached a distance of 61.50 m.

The athlete who achieves the best result out of three passages over the jumping area wins the contest.

The motorboat speed must be 57 km/h (48 km/h for women). If the athlete falls he will still have two chances and will not be eliminated straight away.

RACING

This discipline first appeared during the '50's and is limited to some European countries (particularly to Belgium) and Australia where a popular contest called "Bridge to Bridge" is organized yearly. A similar race called the "Catalina Race" is organized in California and recently another race called "Giro del Lario" has been organized in Italy. The first World Championship was organized in the United Kingdom in 1979.

BAREFOOT

Barefoot is one of the five disciplines which are basic in water-skiing. It is practiced with no skis on. This requires a remarkable effort by all the muscles as well as very good balance. Therefore, it is a very tiring discipline. The athlete must wear a special coverall, very similar to those used by divers, with shorts that, in the event of a fall can protect from the water impact.



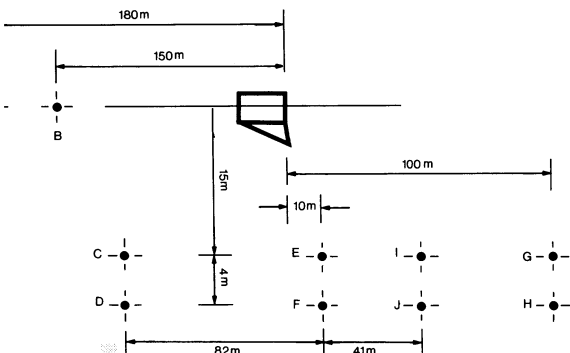


Diagram 2 - Official Jump Course

During contests, such as tournament and jump, the skier begins wearing just one ski (called slipper) which is then abandoned before actually entering the racing path so that the athlete can save his energies as much as possible. The first world's championship was held in Canberra (Australia) in 1978.

SKIS

Four different types of skis are used for water-skiing: two skis, a single ski, skis for jumping and skis for tricks. A number of different materials are used to manufacture them: wood, fiberglass, aluminium or a combination of all of them. All skis must float on the water surface. The skis usually worn by beginners are made of wood and their length varies from 1.50 to 1.80 m whilst their width ranges from 15 to 18 cm.

They are slightly curved at the end and have a stabilizer underneath the rear section. The single ski is different in that it is more curved at the end and has a bigger stabilizer underneath in order to guarantee a better performance. For very skilled skiers there are skis which are very curved in order to make it possible to turn around the buoy in a very bent position but still keeping one's balance. Skis used for jumping are remarkably longer and wider than those used for the other disciplines and stabilizers are reduced to the minimum. Skis used for tricks are totally different in shape! They are in fact very short, very light, almost always flat with a slight curve on the center and with no stabilizers.

BINDINGS

Usually made of soft material (rubber or neoprene), they are already mounted on the skis. The foot must be tight enough to guarantee the possibility of driving the skis but they should not be tightened too much.

ROPE AND HANDLE

The length of the rope varies according to the discipline. In fact it can be as short as 10.75 m for slalom and as long as 25 m and more for racing. The rope is made of polypropylene and has a

diameter of 6 mm. The handle is made of the same material and is 1.50 m long with a 28 cm section held by the skier made of either wood or aluminium coated with neoprene.

LIFE JACKETS AND PRESERVERS

It is always advisable to wear soft life jackets which, in the event of an accident, allow the skier's head to remain out of the water. Belts can also be used. Inflatable jackets are not suitable.

MOTOR BOAT FOR WATER-SKIING

Several kinds of boats are suitable for water-skiing (as far as racing is concerned, the situation is totally different). Well known boats are Master Craft and Correct Craft manufactured in the US and the Swiss Boesch boats. Some other well-known brand names are the French Savoy Marine and the Italian Abbate and Mostes.

Boats must comply with the technical standards set by the World Technical Committee and must be approximately 6 m long and 2 m wide. They must be almost flat and no specific restrictions are set for engines.

These motorboats are specially manufactured to be used in very calm waters. Because of their rounded "V" structure they have a rough impact on the waves. The rear sections of these boats are almost always flat in order to not cause any difficulties to the skier. These characteristics of their shape as well as an almost horizontal movement relative to the water surface, favour the skier's performances as much as possible.

B.T.

* The Pope was referring to Chapter 6 of the Gospel according to St. Mark: "When they saw Him walking on the water, they thought He was a spirit and were frightened".

