RACING How The Worlds Were Won At the Etchells World Championship in Miami, the lead pack broke out early, with the eventual winner making its move in

the final race.

By Dave Reed | August 8, 2023

77 AON Veracity put up an impressive string of top-10 finishes at the AON Etchells Worlds to win the title. *Nic Brunk* hours before and after a day of racing. In the saddle, he doesn't listen to music. Instead, he's simulating racecourse

in April, a race executed alongside his teammates on John Sommi's Veracity.

To earn the title on that light and shifty last day of the Aon

leader and past world champ Steve Benjamin and his all-star

crew on Tons of Steel, but there was a lot to it. Hedging a one-

race day, Diaz de Leon hatched a plan: "I knew it would be

thinking we just have to have a good start, assess where -

The others were Jim Cunningham's Lifted, tied with Veracity,

"We started near the favored pin end in a tight lane, but held

on long enough that when we tacked to port, we were strong

on the fleet. When we tacked, Benji was a few lengths below

us, slightly bow forward, and it turned into a real speed thing

to get strong on him and get ahead of him. When we finally

recognized Jim and Luke's teams were deep, it was us and

Problem was they were 1-2 at that moment and both were

"launched." "If we won and they got second, that wouldn't

work," Diaz de Leon says, "so we decided to start playing

Veracity slowed its rival as much as they could on the

starboard layline, allowing a few boats to get ahead and

"Playing backward downwind is very risky," Diaz de Leon

On the second beat, Veracity herded Steel deeper into the

do it as early as we could," Diaz de Leon says. "We were

conscious about not getting too close or ever slower than

them, but there was less tacking than I anticipated. They

happy with that too as we were sailing into the fleet. The

magic number for us was they had to finish 22nd or worse."

A jibing duel down the next run continued the skirmish, -

pushing Steel ever deeper to beat them around the course

Champagne and plunges, but once ashore there was the

business of two protests lodged by Benjamin's tactician Mike

Olympic medalist and national judge. The situation involved

an attempted luff on a windward leg, and the way the veteran

Veracity's owner and skipper, 65-year-old John Sommi, from

Darien, Connecticut, got his first sailing world title, and as is

always the case, this win was a high-caliber team effort. On

the bow was Beccy Anderson, who is also *Veracity*'s boat

captain. It was Anderson who deftly identified *Lifted* and

Cruel Jane in the lineup of identical boats and white sails

during that last race, empowering Diaz de Leon to promptly -

Tactician Victor Diaz de Leon, coach Morgan Trubovich, bow and boat captain

Ryan, who won his Olympic 470 gold medal in Tokyo and his

year, a syndicate that formed when Sommi, a successful Wall

silver in Rio, is the team's speed maestro, and Sommi is, of

course, on the helm. They'd been sailing for more than a

Street executive and father of four young adults, found

himself with an empty nest and a desire to get back to

sailing. Sommi campaigned a J/88 and a Melges 20 before

diving into the deep end of the high-stakes Etchells class.

"The goal was to go sailing and play at a high level," says

Diaz de Leon, "and I remember John saying that he just

wanted to sail well and be respected—or something like

championships last year. "We were sailing really well," Diaz

de Leon says. "And then one day, Will said, 'Someone has to

With a supporting cast of top-shelf coaches that included

Veracity teammate Tom Dietrich, sailmaker Chris Larson,

Etchells whisperer Jud Smith and pro-sailing legend Morgan

Trubovich, Veracity established itself as the team to beat by

winning the first of three Miami Winter Series events that

were each essentially pre-Worlds regattas. As a result of a

collision before the second event, Veracity's mast was toast,

and that's a big deal in Etchells sailing because rig tune on

"All the tuning numbers and the characteristics of the rig

didn't suit our style," Diaz de Leon says. "That was difficult,

They then dispatched Larson to the Selden Mast factory in

perfect spar. Larson bend-tested several spars and picked the

best two he could find. "We weren't as fast as we were [with

the old mast] initially, but we got better and better," Diaz de

Veracity's results at the Miami Worlds speak for themselves,

from the development of their sails with Smith to their many

never slow and, aside from the match-race discard with Steel,

12th was their highest finish over eight races in the fleet of

65. A review of *Veracity*'s tracker replays paints a picture of

racecourse. They never once started at an end, they worked

the middle left on the first beat, middle right on the second,

and worked the center of the course on every downwind leg,

"Most of the time when I start a race, I don't know where I

open and decipher during the race. By starting toward the

the race committee to call the boats there. Working with

committee's style during the general recalls. The race

want to go," Diaz de Leon admits. "I like to leave my options

middle [of the line], there's lower density, and it's harder for

Truby (Trubovich) in our debriefs, we got a sense of the race

committee [on the signal boat] was more aggressive calling

boats than the pin boat, so I figured I might as well move a

They were also geared up for every start, and Diaz de Leon

buoys in the starting area in the morning, which *Veracity*

would use for three practice starts as part of their pre-race

Zealand who has enjoyed a fruitful career in the grand-prix

world, is also representative of the level of coaching in the

mortals. He brings all the tools to the table, as well as an

de Leon says was magic to the team.

Etchells class today that makes winning impossible for mere

attention to technical detail and a sense of humor that Diaz

"He just brings such a great positive energy, and his debriefs

example: For the Worlds, he sent me out to Best Buy to get a

bigger TV for the hotel room because the one we had was too

small. He told me the model we needed, and I came back with

this huge cinema TV, and it really did help see the footage

better from the GoPros we have on the boat, his stuff from

outside the boat, all the data, speed, heading, and we have

microphones on so he could hear how we interacted with

In these debriefs, Diaz de Leon says he realized how hard he

down his intensity. "But John never once complained, he just

grinds away and is completely focused, and works his ass off

to correct any weakness. He's been so successful in life, has a

beautiful family and, as a young guy, I very much look up to

him as a role model. I remember him telling me once that in

work, and that's the same commitment he brings to the team.

After our practices, he was always the one asking for 10 more

tacks, or jibes or more starts, or whatever. His dedication is

Veracity established itself as the team to

beat by winning the first of three Miami

Sommi's focus on the helm, Diaz de Leon says, is what

allowed them to be so strong in the first few minutes off the

start, surviving and climbing off competitors in lanes so thin

and seemingly impossible to hold. But it wasn't just Sommi

that made Veracity's tactician look smart all the time—full

"He's the best sailor I've ever sailed with," Diaz de Leon says

of the Australian medalist and decorated world champion.

sometimes think I can feel the boat better than most-and

I thought, 'Man, this guy is feeling things that I don't even

feel at all.' He's an animal and has a crazy ability to focus

"He said something to me once that I thought was really

cool: He said, 'We've earned this privilege to race under

Ryan is a disciple of the 470, and Diaz de Leon says: "His

understanding of how the rig works, how all the jib controls

work—it's all amazing, and he knows what control to touch

to achieve whatever mode we want to sail. He and John are

now so good at moding the boat that I can look out of the

In the 7 to 18 knots of "Champagne sailing conditions" for

They were honestly fast and sharp under pressure, and

obsession with bike racing and the experience of winning

one the most difficult world championships in one-design

sailing, especially the calculated handling of Steel in that

final race. "In bike racing, when you're in a breakaway, you're

suffering with everyone. You want to keep up, and you might

want to quit, but you tell yourself, 'Hang on a little longer

patient. It's said that everyone has a limited number of

matches, and whoever finishes the race with the most

Such is the mentality of Etchells sailing's breakaway

specialists. It is the same in sailing as it is on the bike. The

fight for every advantage, every inch and every point is fueled

by determination, discipline and a willingness to suffer. As it

was for team Veracity, it's about getting out front and setting

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the pace until the title is firmly in hand.

because they're eventually going to give up.' You need to be

there's a parallel to be drawn between Diaz de Leon's

the Worlds, Veracity—the boat and the team that massaged it

around the racecourse—was collectively true to its namesake.

pressure, so let's enjoy it.' He's just positive, so polite and fun

to sail with. To be honest, I have a man crush on him, and he

I'm not being cocky here—but the first time I sailed with him

"He's insane and has a feel for the boat like no other. I

Winter Series events that were each

essentially pre-Worlds regattas.

credit, Diaz de Leon says, goes to Ryan.

under pressure in the thick of it.

has one on me too."

boat all the time."

his 30 years on Wall Street he never once missed a day of

was on Sommi at times and thought maybe he should dial

are incredible with the technology. Let me give you an

routine. Trubovich, a 16-time world champion from New

says that was all thanks to Trubovich, who deployed his own

which is easier to accomplish with good starts.

their consistent approach to the congested Biscayne Bay

tuning and training sessions of the past year. They were

Charleston, South Carolina, on a forensic search for the

that suited our style were gone, and the next rig we got

and we did the second event with the new mast and we

this tweakable old one-design is everything.

They won both the National and North American

win the Worlds, so why couldn't it be us?"

Beccy Anderson, skipper John Sommi and trimmer Will Ryan. Nic Brunk

Buckley, who invoked rules 11 and 17. To the protest room

Veracity dispatched its trimmer, Will Ryan, a two-time

judges saw it, Benjamin overstuffed his luff and was

with points to spare. They celebrated their win with

were content sailing in our bad air, which made it a bit easier.

They were also reaching a lot to try to get clear air, and I was

fleet, always from a controlling position. "It was important to

says, "because it's easy to get passed. So, I was comfortable

between them. Veracity was fourth to the mark and Steel was

and Luke Lawrence's Cruel Jane 2.0, sitting mere points

hard to make nine points on Benji with only one race,

especially if they had a good race themselves. So, I'm

others are in the race and take it from there."

behind in third.

Benji, and it was on."

down on them."

ninth. Still not enough.

just doing it all upwind."

ultimately disqualified.

execute Plan A.

that."

struggled."

Leon says.

bit left."

each other."

amazing."

Etchells World Championship, Veracity had to beat series

Victor Diaz de Leon often rides his road bike for a couple of scenarios: what was happening on the boat, what the tactical play would be or could have been. "It's a time of meditation; a place where I get ideas," says the Etchells world champion tactician, who calculated a brilliant final-race win in Miami

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