

CLAUDE BENEZIT:
A Driven Man

"I'm not sure that training at a high level is good for your health, but even if it isn't I'd do it anyway because I want to be the best at something in my life."

— Claude Benezit

Although France has had several good K1s in the past, the only Frenchman to win in K1 was Claude Benezit, who did it in 1981 at Bala. This was no fluke, either, since Benezit had been 3rd at Jonquièrre, and won the Europa Cup in both 1982 and 1984. Besides this, he won bronze (1977), silver (1979) and gold (1981) medals in World Championship team races.

It has been said that Claude Benezit was the first to bring to the K1 class in France a large volume of work, consisting in large part of more weight lifting and other out-of-the-boat training. Furthermore, he, like Gilles Zok, is an example of how the French government's subsidy of top athletes has been a resounding success in whitewater. Benezit now works for the FFCK in Lyon and is the coach of national team aspirants who train there. Deeply interested in sports medicine, he also teaches it on an occasional basis at a nearby school.

Many people have said that Benezit is a secretive person, not particularly interested in discussing with others his training methods. Even the French team coaches have very little idea of how he trains. He is courteous and polite but he seldom jokes and one can readily see he is an intensely competitive, serious person who much prefers to work alone.

By winning at Bala, Benezit left no doubt that his high stroke rate of 110-120 strokes per minute was perfect for shallow courses. This was a technique that he picked up from Jean-Pierre Burny. But two years later, he was way out of contention on the much bigger Passer river and this has led to speculation that his technique may not be the best for big water.

Starting Out

Claude Benezit was born in Cusset, France, near Clermont-Ferrand, on September 2, 1955. But shortly thereafter the family moved to nearby Moulins and there he grew up. Benezit is 1.71 meters tall, weighs 69 kilos and uses paddle lengths between 215 and 222 centimeters, with the shorter ones for racing and the longer ones only for training.

Claude's father worked in the post office and neither he, nor his wife were ever involved in sports. Claude has 2 brothers and 1 sister, none of whom were active in sports, either. He is the third oldest.

Benezit started participating in sports at the age of 14, when he started soccer. He stopped playing soccer in 1975. A year later he also started judo and did that until 1977. Claude became quite good at these 2 sports on a regional level. Eventually, however, he gave them up because they started to interfere with canoeing, and in the case of judo, caused him some hand and shoulder problems. Looking back on it, he believes that involvement in soccer and judo influenced his later kayak career in both positive and negative ways:

Soccer gave me a good aerobic base. Although I can't say that it actually influenced my kayak career, I would say that judo was interesting because of the social setting. There was a certain ideology in the judo course: It was almost like a religion. I think it's good for a canoeist to see the sort of friendship between participants in judo that doesn't exist in canoeing. Judo was good for fast reflexes but it also taught me some bad things. Judo gave me short effort power and later on in kayaking it was necessary to change that to long effort power.

Further expanding upon the value of doing other sports besides canoeing, Benezit made these remarks:

I think it's too bad that today paddlers start to specialize so early. They miss out on sports that can give them good neuromuscular benefits. For example, they lack a good sense of balance. You need this for unexpected developments in whitewater. I think young people should do a lot of other sports before specializing in downriver, things that complement kayaking, like running, cross-country skiing, swimming. Kayaking is too incomplete a sport by itself. To be sure, arm exercise stimulates a certain action of the heart and blood system but whole body exercise is better.

Started Canoeing

In 1969, Claude started kayaking through a club affiliated with his school, the "Club Moulins". He started out in a slalom K1 and for 2 summers "stuck pretty much with the slalom boat." It would be several years before he started competition, however.

In 1971, Claude met Andre Liger, who had paddled C1 slalom in the 1955 World Championships and both C1 slalom and downriver in the 1959 World Championships. Liger was to have a pronounced influence on Benezit.

Andre Liger

Andre Liger worked as a wildlife warden and had a great interest in the outdoors. He also had an unusual interest in whitewater athletes.

Liger liked to take on only one pupil at a time, but he gave that one person everything. Before me there had been Claude Flouret, who competed in the 1961 World Championships in downriver C2M, and Philippe Godet, who competed in the 1963 and 1965 World Championships in K1 downriver. I was the last of Liger's pupils.

I think I learned the actual tricks of training from other people later on, like Jean-Pierre Archambot and Jean-Pierre Burny. I learned different things from Liger.

Liger instilled in me the fun of just being in nature. He started me out in the downriver boat. He felt I had talent for K1. He taught me the fun of training, but without any competition in mind. He taught me how to read whitewater and how to handle the rough parts of a river. For about 5 years I saw him almost every day. I worked in a factory and after work I went to see him.

It wasn't really a coach-athlete relationship, more a friend-friend relationship or even a father-son one. I told Liger things I would never have told my real father.

Benezit still keeps in touch with Liger: "I still telephone him from time to time but he no longer gives me advice."

Meeting the Pope

Claude Benezit started competing in 1974 and did both slalom and downriver in the French Championships. That summer, by sheer coincidence, he met Jean-Pierre Burny and was able to train with him for 2 weeks at Burny's home in Belgium.

In 1974 I had a girlfriend who lived in Belgium. One day I went to visit her and dropped in unannounced. She said I couldn't stay at her home but she knew someone else I could stay with — Jean-Pierre Burny. Going to see Burny was like meeting the Pope. He was such a great name in the sport. I was young and impressionable. I slept in a little attic full of medals and paddles. It was the temple of canoe-kayak. That's when I decided to concentrate on downriver. I saw how he lived, how he trained. He taught me a lot. I forgot about my girlfriend.

Burny's Influence on Benezit

Claude Benezit talks about the influence Burny had on his career:

When I first met Burny he was training twice a day for a race and I went with him. He didn't talk a lot; I just watched. He never said, "you should do this" or "you should do that". It was just the way he moved the boat, the way he kept accelerating it. Then there was the idea to train a lot of flatwater, both for conditioning and to keep up basic speed. He didn't have much whitewater around so this was a good method for him. It was also good for me for the same reasons. I learned about the Struer paddles from him. He had learned about them from his flatwater racing. I was the first one in France to use them for downriver. He always experimented a lot. He had a paddling style which I liked. It was powerful and he used his whole body to twist. I didn't try to copy it exactly, but certain things rubbed off. There were also river techniques. For example, there was his way of approaching shallow sections. He kept the boat perfectly flat side-to-side on the approach so he could keep up the glide. Also, he'd place his paddle strokes on the downstream side of the waves, even skipping strokes or taking 2 on the same side to facilitate this. These were all images I had of him.

After the initial meeting, Benezit kept seeing Burny at races and Jean-Pierre would sometimes make a comment, "but only a sentence or two, a well-chosen sentence."

Although we were rivals he was still very friendly. The relationship was that of professor-student but we never went into great detail. He always told me little things, but they added up over time.

After meeting Burny, Claude gave up slalom races altogether although once in a while for fun he would play around in a slalom boat.

Downriver corresponded more to my temperament. In slalom I was always fast but I hit the gates all the time. I just didn't like the idea of a penalty ruining my run that way. Also, there was the problem of bad judges giving penalties I didn't really have.

Jean-Pierre Archambot and Finesse on the River

Claude Benezit may have learned his basic love of training outdoors from Andre Liger and the techniques of race training from Jean-Pierre Burny, but starting in 1975, he learned finesse on the river from Jean-Pierre Archambot. Archambot was in the K1 World Championships every year from 1965 to 1971, and also did the 1975 World Championships. He won a silver medal in the 1969 team race and a bronze in the 1967 team race.

Archambot was a great personality. He used to warm-up standing up moving his arms around and smoking a cigarette. He would stand on the awards platform dressed only in a bikini. He was a little rustic.

But Jean-Pierre Archambot was also the best river technician in France.

He won races on technique alone. He taught mathematics in a school, but he lived near a difficult river, La Sioule, and his sole method of training was to run that river. He could descend the Dordogne, the most difficult river in France, without touching a stone, the first one to do this. My relationship with him was similar to the one I had with Burny: We didn't talk a lot, I just followed him down the river and learned that way. He and Michel Magdinier were the first real K1 technicians in France, but I and Gilles Zok were the first to bring a large volume of training to French downriver.

Claude met Archambot in 1975 after Archambot had done the World Championships in Skopje. Benezit was preparing for the French Championships on the Isere and met Archambot there. "He helped me learn the Isere," Claude explains. "I just followed him down. I learned a lot of things, such as the following:

- * Archambot used eddies really well to turn the boat and cause it to accelerate in places.
- * He steered the boat by leaning it.
- * He used the water to change directions; he turned on the tops of waves.
- * He could keep straight in turns, keeping the stern following the bow.

Benezit won the senior French Championships that year, as he would every year from 1978 to 1981 and in 1984. In explaining this rapid rise — after all, he had been racing downriver only 2 years — he says only, "Well, it was right after the World Championships and a lot of the good people were not terribly motivated. Some of the others had bad boats. I also had the advantage of being an unknown."

Bataillon de Joinville

From 1973 to 1975, Claude Benezit worked in a lathe factory. But in September, 1975, he was inducted into the army and served 1 year in the Bataillon de Joinville where, like so many other French downriver athletes, he was allowed to train full time. Also, in the Bataillon at this time were Herve Madore, Jean-Jacques Hayne and Daniel Jacquet, all future World Champions.

Here Benezit met 2 athletes, Jean-Francois Millot and Gerard Delacroix, who were preparing for the Montreal Olympic Games in flatwater C2, and who coached

him. Since ceasing their competitive careers, both men have become coaches for the French flatwater team.

Delacroix became a friend of mine. He coached me on technique by following me in a motor boat. For example, he worked a lot on my exit from the forward stroke. He kept telling me to lift my elbow more on the exit. For 2 years after this I went to see him to get some coaching. Millot gave me information on physical preparation. I knew the general principles, but was unsure of the application to kayaking.

Benezit's Training 1975-76

Claude's training in this era consisted of the following items, outlined for him by Jean-Francois Millot:

1. September to March: endurance training. This was normally paddles of about 60 minutes at 130-140 pulse rate.
2. Winter: strength. 3-4 times a week weight lifting.
3. After March: resistance paddling. There were 3 types:
 - a. Resistance volume: series of 4-5 mins. with 4-5 mins. rest.
 - b. Resistance intensity: series of 1 min. with 1 min. rest.
 - c. Resistance recuperation: series of:
30 secs. with 30 secs. rest.
60 " " 60 " "
90 " " 90 " "

After this training, Benezit was 4th in the 1976 Europa Cup and 2nd in the French Championships.

Spittal World Championships

In the fall of 1976, Benezit's army stint was over and he returned to the lathe factory. Here he tried to do the same training he had done while in the Bataillon — but also hold down a full-time job. He tried to be in the boat every day whether it was at the noon hour or in the evening after work. He also did some soccer and judo training, but no competition.

I was very young and inexperienced at Spittal. I had been second to Michel Magdinier in the selection trials and thought I could do well in the Worlds. But I made the mistake of changing boats 1 month before the race. I switched from the Match 2 to the Mag 2 (named after Magdinier). There were also problems with the water level being changed all the time. I wasn't very good in big water then because I didn't have the opportunity to practice it, so I needed to have a constant water level to work with. Finally, the

month before the race. I switched from the Match 2 to the Mag 2 (named after Magdinier). There were also problems with the water level being changed all the time. I wasn't very good in big water then because I didn't have the opportunity to practice it, so I needed to have a constant water level to work with. Finally, the boat training at Spittal was very individual. We didn't work together and this prevented me from learning the river as well as I should have. I was 13th in the race. I think that if I hadn't switched boats I could have been in the top 10. In France I had been quite close to Magdinier, but in the Worlds he beat me by 40 seconds.

From this experience I learned that it was necessary to have 1 World Championships under your belt before you could hope to win. You have to be ready for the tension of the Worlds. I was too nervous then.

INSEP

In October of 1977, Magdinier quit the sport and the Federation asked Benezit whether he would like to come to Paris to study and train at INSEP, the physical education school. "My father didn't think it was a good idea because I was putting everything into sports instead of learning a job, but I went anyway", recalls Claude.

For 2 years Claude roomed with Gilles Zok and did exactly the same training as Zok (see Zok chapter for precise details). "The only difference was I did more kilometers in the boat than he did", explains Claude, "about 3-4 more kilometers each session."

Jean-Francois Millot and Marc Moulin were in Paris at that time and served as coaches for Claude and the others. Millot prepared the yearly training plan and "once a week Moulin used the video from the motor boat. He wasn't an expert but he could take times and film us — it was very helpful."

We had lots of time to train. We did 3-5 hours a day. We were really disciplined. We had a great rhythm: We worked really hard together all week, then split up and went away for the weekend to see girl friends or run rivers. Because we were in different events, I couldn't learn technical things from Zok, but he stimulated me to train. We just paddled and studied. In 2 years we never went to the disco, we never got to know Paris.

During the 1978 race season, Benezit finished 4th in the Europa Cup, behind Jean-Pierre Burny, Austria's Gerhard Peinhaupt, the 1977 World Champion, and Germany's Degenhard Pfeiffer. The 3 races were staged at Spindleruv Mlyn, Czechoslovakia (Benezit 4th); Bala, Great Britain (Benezit 6th); and Bourc St. Maurice (Benezit 2nd). At the Jonquiere Pre-World Championships, Claude was 2nd to Burny, 18:26.16 to 18:24.54.

The Jonquiere Worlds

Claude's preparation for Jonquiere occurred during his second year at INSEP. Once again his training was very similar to that of Gilles Zok (see Zok chapter) except that he did more kilometers in the boat — about 3,000 (flatwater only) compared to Zok's 1,810. "After 1976, I always tried to increase the volume of my training," he explains.

The French team arrived in Des Biens on June 20, and the training camp there "was a lot better than at Spittal." While there, Benezit ran the Metabetchouan river in sections, the same way Luc Verger did (see Verger chapter for details).

Fragile Boat

Benezit talks about some boat problems he had at Jonquiere:

I used the Mag for the race, the same boat as for Spittal. But I had a very fragile boat. It was made of epoxy but I had to patch it all the time. This tired me out and took away from training time. So I began to hesitate to risk the boat in training sessions when experimenting with new routes because I didn't want to patch it again. I think I was tired from all this on race day. Also, I didn't have confidence in the boat during the race, didn't dare take any risks. I felt I should be considered one of the favorites for the race because I had beaten Burny back home in a race and had been a close second in another. I had a good race run, but it could have been better. Burny left ahead of me and right from the start had better splits. I had to try to catch up and as a result I made a time error. I think I could have been second had this not happened. I learned from this experience not to have a fragile boat, don't go to the extreme!

Benezit came in 3rd at Jonquiere:

Burny : 18:06.29
Campbell: 18:18.08
Benezit : 18:18.15

After the race while they were drinking beer in a bar, Burny explained his race strategy to Claude:

Burny told me that he had played with me in the race. He felt that because of my youth, if he went out very fast perhaps he could scare me and make me worry about catching up which would cause me to make an error in the waves — and this is exactly what happened.



Benezit finishes third at Jonquiere in the 1979 World Championships. (Photo Courtesy of Claude Benezit)

Studying Harder

In the fall, Claude won the French Championships again and switched schools. He moved from INSEP in Paris to the "Regional Center of Physical and Sports Education" (CREPS) in Vichy, where he would spend the next 2 years.

During his 2 first years at INSEP, Claude had been taking the same course as Zok, the "Brevet d'Etat, 1st and 2nd degree", which would qualify him to instruct canoeing, but not in the French school system. Unlike Zok, however, Claude now decided he wanted to go on, and do another 2 years which would qualify him to teach physical education in the school system.

Here I learned a great deal about how the body works. Jean-Francois Millot was a professor there now. The course wasn't too hard for someone who had already passed the baccalaureate exam, but for me who had not and who had stopped school in 1973, it was very hard. At first I had to do a lot of extra background studying in anatomy and physiology, things I knew nothing about. We had 25 hours of course work a week.

In 1980, Benezit had to do so much studying that he was unable to compete in the entire Europa Cup, doing only the final race, Sort in Spain, which he won. In the Pre-World Championships at Bala, Benezit placed third by 1 second to two Britons, David Taylor and Bob Campbell.

Although he had less time to train now Claude did, however, work hard on getting his stroke rate up. At Jonquiere, it was about 98 on the flat sections, the lowest of any of the top paddlers. At Bala, he would get it up to 115 or so.

Preparing for Bala

Benezit's training now took a great leap forward, both in terms of volume and quality. "It was necessary to adapt the training to the longer length of the course," he explains, "so I did longer intervals in training and greater volume."

This was the first year that Claude started working with Dr. Jean-Paul Eclache, physician to the French team. His views are discussed in depth in the training chapters of this book. In very general terms, however, Eclache believes in intensity in training, not volume.

For the physiological side of training, Eclache recommends 2-3 times a week in the boat paddling at anaerobic threshold for as long as possible — anywhere from 30-90 minutes. In addition he feels that another 2-3 times a week out of the boat (running, cross-country skiing, for example) is needed. This is all the physical training he thinks is necessary. "Everything else is for technique or recovery," he says. Benezit:

I liked the system of training Dr. Eclache proposed. I didn't do everything just the way he said it, but it was pretty close. For example, I still kept doing some general weight lifting for the shoulders and stomach. Also, even though he says it isn't necessary to train 2 times a day, I liked to do it so I did.

Dr. Eclache was also able to follow Claude very closely during this year with VO2 Max tests in the laboratory. In fact, shortly before the World Championships, on the basis of Claude's VO2 Max score, Eclache predicted that Benezit would win — although he didn't tell Claude this until after the race.

You have to see a doctor like this on a regular basis to make it worthwhile. That way you can spot problems in training early enough to do something about them. As a result of tests by Dr. Eclache I began to work on getting my stroke rate up, improving my strength, and improving my VO2 Max. Later in 1983, although I was having problems, I could tell from the tests that they were psychological ones and not physical ones: My test values were in the neighborhood of what they had been for Bala. If I felt that my values were declining sharply, I would have quit the sport after Merano.

The following table shows the number of workouts Benezit did per month leading up to the Bala World Championships. It also shows the number of 3-a-day workouts per month (or more than 3-a-day: there were a few), and the number of rest days:

| Month | Number of | | Rest |
|-------|-----------|----------|------|
| | Workouts | 3-A-Days | Days |
| Sept. | 24 | 0 | 7 |
| Oct. | 43 | 6 | 6 |
| Nov. | 38 | 5 | 5 |
| Dec. | 35 | 0 | 5 |
| Jan. | 39 | 1 | 4 |
| Feb. | 43 | 3 | 3 |
| Mar. | 42 | 4 | 8 |
| April | 41 | 2 | 4 |
| May | 56 | 5 | 1 |
| June | 50 | 7 | 3 |
| July | 21 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 432 | 33 | 46 |

Types of Boat Training

In the analysis of Benezit's training that follows, the specific types of interval training are listed. But the reader should not infer that all the other paddling sessions were just distance ones. Essentially, Benezit had 4 types of paddling:

- * Continuous, long distance, aerobic paddles.
- * Anaerobic threshold paddles, usually of 25-30 mins. duration with a pulse rate of 160-170.
- * Interval paddling with a high lactic acid component, often 3 x 4 mins. with 4 mins. rest.
- * Paddling with a high ATP concentration, such as 2 x (15 secs.; 30 secs.; 60 secs.; 60 secs.; 30 secs.; 15 secs).

The following list shows, by month, how much of each of these Benezit did:

| Month | Total | Aerobic | Threshold | Intervals | ATP |
|-------|-------|---------|-----------|-----------|-----|
| Sept. | 14 | 11 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Oct. | 25 | 22 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| Nov. | 21 | 17 | 3 | 1 | 0 |
| Dec. | 13 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | | | | | |
|-------|-----|-----|----|----|----|
| Jan. | 17 | 11 | 5 | 1 | 0 |
| Feb. | 22 | 12 | 5 | 5 | 0 |
| Mar. | 31 | 20 | 10 | 1 | 0 |
| Apr. | 36 | 13 | 13 | 9 | 1 |
| May | 48 | 33 | 7 | 6 | 2 |
| Jun. | 44 | 17 | 10 | 11 | 6 |
| Jul. | 21 | 9 | 4 | 7 | 1 |
| Total | 292 | 178 | 63 | 41 | 10 |

Month by Month

In September Claude paddled 153 kilometers in 14 boat sessions. Some of these sessions were 18 kilometers long. Claude also did 2 and 1/4 hours of weight lifting in 5 sessions; went running twice for 30-40 minutes each time; played tennis on 2 occasions for about 1 hour each time; and went biking once for 45 mins.

October saw 264 kilometers in 25 sessions (one of them on whitewater); 11 hours of weight lifting in 9 sessions; 8 foot runs, lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each; and a 2-hour tennis session. On a few days Claude would do 3 workouts in one day, for example: 12 kilometers of flatwater (with a 16 minute time trial in the middle of it); run 30 minutes; and 1 hour of weight lifting.

In November, Claude did 236 kilometers in 21 sessions (2 of them on whitewater); four 1-hour weight lifting sessions; six 1-hour foot runs; two 2-hour cross-country ski sessions; three 1-hour tennis sessions; and 1 hour each on biking and soccer.

In December, he did 154 kilometers in 13 sessions; 2 and 3/4 hours of running in 3 sessions; 9 hours of weight lifting in 9 sessions; and 10 sessions of cross-country skiing, each one about 2 hours long.

January consisted of 238 kilometers in 17 sessions (4 of them on whitewater); 9 and 1/4 hours of weight lifting in 8 sessions; 320 kilometers of cross-country skiing in 12 sessions; and 3 hours of tennis in 2 sessions.

In February, Claude's workload went way up. He did 371 kilometers in 22 sessions (2 of them on whitewater). Many of these sessions consisted of 18 kilometers. Sometimes there would be 2 boat workouts on the same day, with 15 kilometers in the morning and 14 in the afternoon — or even 18 in the morning and 18 in the afternoon. Benezit also added 3 interval training sessions during this period: 5 x 5 mins. with 5 mins. rest; 6 x 4 mins. with 4 mins. rest; and 5 x 1 min. with 1 min. rest.

Also in February, Claude did 5 hours of weight lifting in 4 sessions; 7 foot runs of 50-60 mins. each; a 4-day cross-country ski training camp during which he skied 3 hours a day; 2 hours of tennis; and 45 mins. of biking.

BENEZIT 1981
(Training Time in Minutes Per Week)

| Week No. | Date | Total Training | Water Training | Athletic Training | White water | Flat water | Run-ning | Weights | Cross-country Skiing | Other |
|----------|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|----------|---------|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | 9/8-9/14 | 341 | 221 | 120 | | 221 | 30 | 90 | | |
| 2 | 9/15-9/21 | 365 | 230 | 135 | | 230 | 45 | 45 | | 45 |
| 3 | 9/22-9/28 | 168 | 168 | | | 168 | | | | |
| 4 | 9/29-10/5 | 541 | 232 | 309 | | 232 | 25 | 104 | | 180 |
| 5 | 10/6-10/12 | 314 | 164 | 150 | | 164 | 60 | 90 | | |
| 6 | 10/13-10/19 | 450 | 200 | 250 | | 200 | 130 | 120 | | |
| 7 | 10/20-10/26 | 532 | 302 | 230 | | 302 | 80 | 150 | | |
| 8 | 10/27-11/2 | 750 | 400 | 350 | 95 | 305 | 110 | 240 | | |
| 9 | 11/3-11/9 | 620 | 335 | 285 | | 335 | 120 | 120 | 45 | |
| 10 | 11/10-11/16 | 450 | 390 | 60 | 90 | 300 | | | | 60 |
| 11 | 11/17-11/23 | 700 | 215 | 485 | | 215 | 100 | 60 | | 325 |
| 12 | 11/24-11/30 | 625 | 210 | 415 | | 210 | 100 | 105 | 120 | 90 |
| 13 | 11/31-12/7 | 515 | 95 | 420 | | 95 | 90 | 90 | 240 | |
| 14 | 12/8-12/14 | 445 | 205 | 240 | | 205 | | 120 | 120 | |
| 15 | 12/15-12/21 | 520 | 260 | 260 | | 260 | 55 | 60 | 145 | |
| 16 | 12/22-12/28 | 420 | 105 | 315 | | 105 | | 60 | 255 | |
| 17 | 12/29-1/4 | 630 | 450 | 180 | 140 | 310 | | 120 | 60 | |
| 18 | 1/5-1/11 | 735 | 150 | 585 | | 150 | | 225 | 240 | 120 |
| 19 | 1/12-1/18 | 420 | | 420 | | | | | 420 | |
| 20 | 1/19-1/25 | 831 | 441 | 390 | 130 | 311 | | 210 | 180 | |
| 21 | 1/26-2/1 | 527 | 327 | 200 | | 327 | 20 | 120 | | 60 |
| 22 | 2/2-2/8 | 935 | 480 | 455 | 75 | 405 | 155 | 180 | | 120 |
| 23 | 2/9-2/15 | 539 | 259 | 280 | 14 | 245 | | | 280 | |
| 24 | 2/16-2/22 | 745 | 485 | 260 | | 485 | 110 | 60 | 90 | |
| 25 | 2/23-3/1 | 660 | 450 | 210 | 80 | 370 | 105 | 60 | | 45 |
| 26 | 3/2-3/8 | 305 | 215 | 90 | 120 | 95 | | 90 | | |
| 27 | 3/9-3/15 | 665 | 665 | | 150 | 515 | | | | |
| 28 | 3/16-3/22 | 835 | 625 | 210 | 45 | 580 | 45 | 165 | | |
| 29 | 3/23-3/29 | 890 | 575 | 315 | 30 | 545 | 75 | 120 | | 120 |
| 30 | 3/30-4/5 | 161 | 116 | 45 | 116 | | | | | 45 |
| 31 | 4/6-4/12 | 772 | 592 | 180 | 70 | 522 | 60 | 120 | | |
| 32 | 4/13-4/19 | 502 | 502 | | 182 | 320 | | | | |
| 33 | 4/20-4/26 | 490 | 445 | 45 | | 445 | 45 | | | |
| 34 | 4/27-5/3 | 442 | 412 | 30 | 142 | 270 | | 30 | | |
| 35 | 5/4-5/10 | 403 | 308 | 95 | 111 | 197 | 95 | | | |
| 36 | 5/11-5/17 | 635 | 635 | | 510 | 125 | | | | |
| 37 | 5/18-5/24 | 710 | 655 | 55 | 100 | 555 | 55 | | | |
| 38 | 5/25-5/31 | 1085 | 750 | 335 | 30 | 720 | 155 | 120 | | 60 |
| 39 | 6/1-6/7 | 768 | 708 | 60 | 108 | 600 | 60 | | | |
| 40 | 6/8-6/14 | 960 | 840 | 120 | 180 | 660 | 60 | | | 60 |
| 41 | 6/15-6/21 | 675 | 550 | 125 | | 550 | 65 | | | 60 |
| 42 | 6/22-6/28 | 180 | 120 | 60 | 120 | | 60 | | | |
| 43 | 6/29-7/5 | 540 | 540 | | | 540 | | | | |
| 44 | 7/6-7/12 | 415 | 415 | | 295 | 120 | | | | |
| 45 | 7/13-7/19 | 248 | 248 | | 143 | 105 | | | | |
| TOTALS: | | 25459 | 16690 | 8769 | 3076 | 13614 | 2110 | 3074 | 2195 | 1390 |

In March his flatwater paddling soared. He did 477 kilometers in 31 sessions (5 of them on whitewater). He also did: 6 weight lifting sessions of about 1 hour each; 4 foot runs of between 45-60 mins. each; and 1 hour of tennis. There were a few 3-a-day workouts, such as:

- * Run 1 hour
- Boat 14 kilometers
- Boat 14 kilometers

And even one 4-a-day:

- * Run 1 hour
- Boat 15 kilometers.
- Weights 1 hour
- Tennis 1 hour

At the end of the month Claude took a VO2 Max test with Dr. Eclache and scored 70 milligrams of oxygen per kilogram of body weight per minute (ml/kg/min), which is high.

The French team selection trials were in the beginning of April: 4 races, 3 of which Bernard Morin won. In April Benezit did 494 kilometers in 36 sessions (8 of them on whitewater). Now on most days he was doing 2 boat workouts a day, but of 10-12 kilometers' duration each. There was also more interval training — 10 sessions, including:

- * 4 x 7 mins. with 5 mins. rest
- * 3 x 7 mins. with 3 mins. rest
- * 5 x 1 min. with 1 min. rest
- * 10 x 15 secs. with 30 secs. rest
- 5 x 60 secs. with 60 secs. rest

In April Claude also did two 1-hour weight sessions; and 45 minutes of tennis.

In May he did 573 kilometers in 48 sessions (19 of them on whitewater, including 5 days at Bala). He added the following types of work to what he was already doing:

- * 6 x (15 secs. 30 secs. 60 secs., with equal rest)
- * 8 x 15 secs. with 15 secs. rest
- 4 x 30 " " 30 " "
- 4 x 30 " " 60 " "
- 4 x 30 " " 30 " "

* 2 x (15 secs. 30 secs. 60 secs. 60 secs.
30 secs. 15 secs. with equal rest)

* 1000 meter time trial in downriver boat in 4:10.

During May, Claude also ran 5 times for about 1 hour each time; did two 1-hour weight sessions; and played tennis once for an hour.

In June, he did 618 kilometers in 44 sessions (6 of them on whitewater). He did 5 time trials during this period on race length courses (28 mins.) on flatwater and whitewater. He also did four 1-hour runs and two 1-hour tennis sessions. On many days Claude was in the boat twice a day now. One day he was in the boat 3 times:

9 kilometers continuous

13 kilometers, including 6 x 5 mins. with 3 mins. rest

9 kilometers, including 3 x (15 secs. 30 secs. 45 secs.
60 secs. 45 secs. with equal rest)

Usually Claude did only boat workouts during this period but on one occasion he used other exercises to do 4 workouts a day:

Boat 14 kilometers, including one 28 min. time trial
and 2 x 500 meters

Tennis 1 hour

Boat 13 kilometers

Weights

In July he did 256 kilometers in 21 sessions (13 of them on whitewater). He did nothing else whatsoever. Seven of the boat sessions were interval training:

* On 2 separate occasions: 4 x (90 secs. 120 secs.
150 secs. 180 secs. with equal rest)

* 6 x 5 mins. with 90 secs. rest

* 9 x 2 mins. with 2 mins. rest

* 10 x 1 min. with 1 min. rest

* 6 x 5 mins., with 2 mins. rest

* 4 x (30 secs. 30 secs. 60 secs. 60 secs. 120 secs.)

60 secs. 60 secs. 30 secs. 30 secs. with equal rest)
with 2 mins. rest between sets

The last interval training session — 6 x 5 mins. — was done 5 days before the race.

Thus the grand total of Claude's work this year was:

2986 kms. flatwater
848 kms. river
51 hrs. weights
35 hrs. running
37 hrs. cc. skiing
3 hrs. biking
15 hrs. tennis

The Speedy

The downriver course on the Tryweryn was unusual. The first part of it, which went through the slalom course, was of normal World Championship caliber. But the bottom part was very flat and shallow. Complicating matters was the fact that rocks which were often just below the surface, were dark and hard to see, thus making boat damage a real threat. The whole situation favored boaters with very fast, light craft, designed primarily to take advantage of the long easy flat sections. The strategy evolved by the French was to be cautious in covering the first part of the course in their fragile, tippy boats and then to win the race on the bottom part.

For Bala, the entire French team designed boats with very narrow bows. The kayakers came up with the Speedy. Benezit got the boat in October, 1983, and here are the results of time trials he did at the end of that month:

| | | |
|---------------|--------|---------|
| * October 30: | Mag | : 4:50 |
| | Speedy | : 4:42 |
| * October 31: | Mag | : 10:35 |
| | Speedy | : 10:20 |

The Race

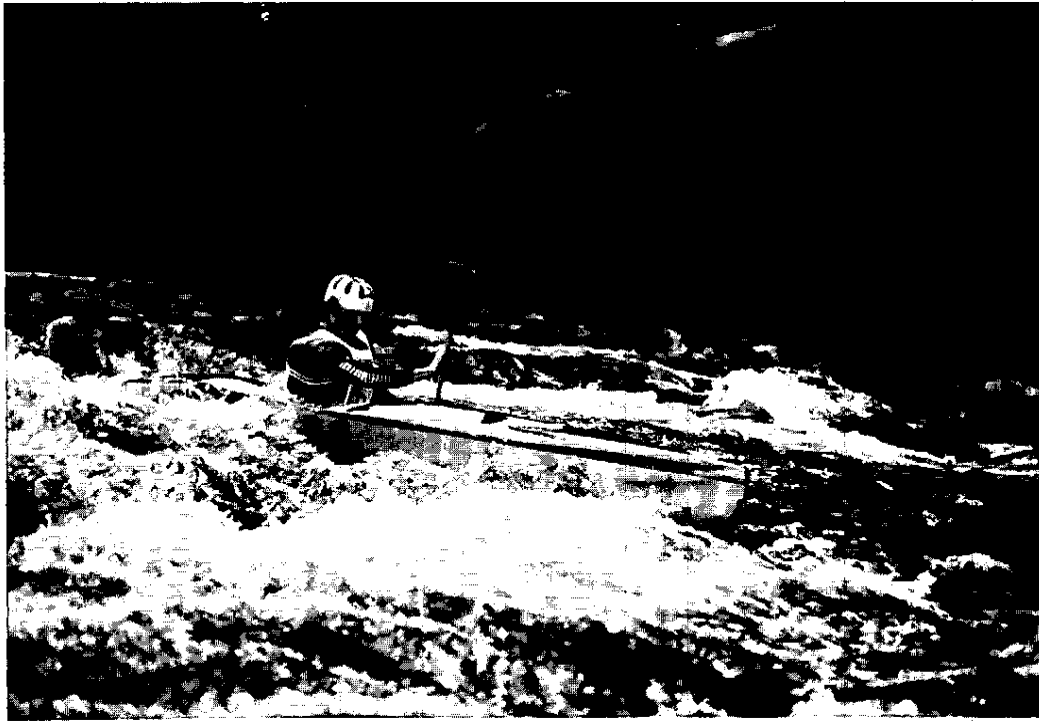
July 17 was race day. There were 73 entrants in the K1 class, the most ever. Observers were wondering whether Burny, who had already won this event an unprecedented 4 times, and who was the current World Champion, would be able to hold off a strong British, French and Italian challenge.

Since racers are seeded in 3 start groups, spectators had to wait for the third group before they could see the really fast times. For a long while France's Christian Frossard, a Group 2 starter, was in the lead with a time of 26:41.54.

Italy's Marco Previde was the first of the Group 3 starters, and promptly leapt into the lead with 26:26.54. Next off the start was Burny. Right from the beginning he looked too splashy, pulling his paddle through the air too much before it was even in the water, thus creating a big back splash. Burny could do no better than 26:45.38, just behind Frossard, in 7th place.

Britain's David Taylor, who ran off with the Pre-World Championships in 1980, appeared to be a strong challenger. He had an astronomically high stroke rate — in the low 130's — but with a time of 26:57.19 fell into what would be 9th place. Next was West Germany's Degenhard Pfeiffer, who nipped Taylor with a 26:51.47 and took over 8th place.

The next starter after Pfeiffer was France's Bernard Morin who had a superb run. Down the course he came with his hands close together on the paddle shaft and his elbows low on the push-through, generating a high stroke rate. Could he beat Previde? No, he couldn't. He turned in a 26:31.20, almost 6 seconds down.



Bernard Morin, on his way to a bronze medal at the Bala World Championships. Note how low his elbows are on the push-through. (A. Campestrini Photo)

Britain's Bob Campbell, who had been 2nd at Jonquiere, started next. But his challenge fell way short, 27:24.00, which got him 13th place. West Germany's Konrad Hollerieth turned in a very fast 26:38.96, but couldn't catch Morin and wound up in 5th place.

Then came Benezit in his specially prepared 7 kilo boat. Using a style similar to Morin's — low hands and elbows — Claude was extremely smooth and accurate down the course. As with all the French, he used short, sharp strokes which constantly accelerated the boat. In the flatwater section at the end, he pushed so hard he was in oxygen debt for many minutes after the race, more so than any of his rivals. Benezit toured the Tryweryn in a blazing 26:18.03, 8 seconds faster than Previde.



*Claude Benezit, poised to start at Bala in 1981.
(Bruno Grange Photo)*

The last boater with a chance to win was Britain's Jeremy Hibble. He roared off the start, looking like a sure winner. His style contrasted to that of the French, however. His hands and elbows were higher than theirs. Furthermore, at the end of each stroke, his paddle was far more vertical than theirs, with his hands crossing over much more. On the upper part of the course, Hibble was ahead, but his early efforts proved too much for him and he could not come on strongly enough at the end. With a time of 26:38.00, his best ever on the course, he slipped ahead of Hollerieth into 4th place.

Claude explains his thoughts about the race:

I felt that leading up to Bala everything was right. I knew the river really well and had a good boat. I had also had really good training. I was in a period when I knew I was at the top all the time. I felt Bala favored me because the course was very long. I started out slowly because I didn't want to take any risks and I knew I had a long way to go. After the end of the slalom course I was behind Previde by 8 seconds. But shortly before the end, I had a small lead. I didn't feel anything in the last 600 meters of flatwater even though I was sprinting hard.



Benexit and Zok, student roommates in Paris, both World Champions at Bala in 1981. "In 2 years we never went to the disco." (Bruno Grange Photo)

After Bala

Benezit also won the Europa Cup in 1982. It was a great duel between Benezit and his mentor Burny. Benezit won the first 2 races and was 2nd in the third one for 4 points, while Burny had a 2nd, a 3rd, and a 1st for 6 points.

But Claude fell apart in the 1983 World Championships, coming in 16th. It wasn't that he didn't train hard, he did. But he reckons now that he made a number of mistakes.

The first one was that he vastly increased the amount of cross-country skiing he was doing, even competing seriously in the sport. "It was folly," he says now in retrospect.

You can't do 2 competitive seasons in one year. I was mentally exhausted before the canoe season even began. Furthermore, while the increase in cross-country skiing may have helped my VO2 Max with my legs, it didn't help much for my arms. In fact, overall, the increase in cross-country skiing probably hurt my VO2 Max. It made my legs a lot bigger and as a result I gained weight — went from 65 kilos to 70. Since VO2 Max is a function of oxygen consumption compared to body weight, the increase in my body weight lowered my VO2 Max score from what it had been at Bala.

Another mistake Benezit says he made at Merano was using a bad boat:

The boat we had, "the Merano" was not good. It moved side-to-side too much with each stroke which didn't allow me to paddle straight ahead as I wanted. The Merano was patterned after the German Delphin '80, which had a flat bottom and not the rounder one we French are used to. I didn't have time during the year to get involved in the design of the boat so it turned out differently from what I would have wanted. Even so, when we first arrived at Merano the water was up and the boat performed reasonably well. The waves were more separated and smoother. But when the water went down, the waves were closer together and every time the boat hit one of them it steered all over the place. I just couldn't paddle without hesitating.

A third mistake, not mentioned by Benezit, but evident to others, was the fact that the rest of the French team was more interested in beating Benezit than they were in winning the World Championships. This was made worse when 3 out of the 4 kayaks were "pre-selected" for Merano, that is, were automatically appointed to the team and did not have to do the team selection trials. Benezit and Morin were pre-selected because they had won medals at Bala. But when Frossard consistently beat them in the many months before Merano, he, too, was pre-selected. Some observers say this created a fantasy for the top KIs; as long as they were ahead of Benezit, they thought they were doing well.

Due to these reasons and perhaps some others, Benezit came in 16th at Merano, the last of the Frenchmen. Because of this he was not even in the team race.

Following this debacle, for many months Claude was undecided whether to continue racing.

For the 1984 season, I didn't put in the same volume I had in the past. In the beginning of the preparation period, I wasn't sure whether I wanted to do it any more. Also I had to spend a lot of time at my job. After those first few months, though, I picked it up. Still, I didn't do as much base work as I normally did.

In September, Claude's log shows only 3 workouts, totalling 40 kilometers of flatwater paddling.

In October, he did 209 kilometers in 22 sessions (6 of them on whitewater). He also did three 40-minute foot runs; 4 weight sessions lasting between 30 and 60 minutes each; 40 minutes of cross-country skiing; and one 150-minute bicycling session (50 kilometers).

In November, Claude did 406 kilometers in 24 sessions (6 of them on whitewater). He also did 8 foot runs, usually of about 60 minutes duration each; 4 weight sessions of 60 minutes each; 2 roller ski sessions, each one lasting 60 minutes; and 1 hour of cross-country skiing.

December saw 283 kilometers in 18 sessions (3 of them on whitewater); two 1-hour weight lifting sessions; four 1-hour runs; 17 hours of cross-country skiing in 6 sessions;

In January he did 235 kilometers in 13 sessions (1 of them on whitewater); two 1-hour foot runs; three 1-hour weight sessions; and 34 hours of cross-country skiing in a 10-day training camp.

In February he did 325 kilometers in 25 sessions (6 of them on whitewater); and three 1-hour foot runs. At the end of the first week in February Claude took a VO2 Max test with Dr. Eclache and found that his VO2 Max was 61.5 ml/kg/min, down considerably from what it was at Bala. Three times in February Claude did interval training: 4-5 x 5 mins. with 5 mins. rest.

In March he did 406 kilometers in 27 sessions (6 of them on whitewater); and four 1-hour foot runs, one of which contained interval training: 5 x 5 mins. with 5 mins. rest. The third week in March, Claude took another VO2 Max test: 60.4 ml/kg/min. The last week in March, Claude went to Britain to participate in a rapid river race and thus did not paddle as much as he would have at home.

BENEZIT 1984
(Training Time in Minutes Per Week)

| Week No. | Date | Total Training | Water Training | Athletic Training | White water | Flat water | Run-ning | Weights | Cross-country Skiing | Other |
|----------|-------------|----------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------|------------|----------|---------|----------------------|-------|
| 1 | 9/26-10/2 | 385 | 245 | 140 | | 245 | | | | 140 |
| 2 | 10/3-10/9 | 470 | 400 | 70 | | 400 | 40 | 30 | | |
| 3 | 10/10-10/16 | 490 | 320 | 170 | | 320 | 50 | 120 | | |
| 4 | 10/17-10/23 | 345 | 190 | 155 | | 190 | 40 | | 40 | 75 |
| 5 | 10/24-10/30 | 338 | 248 | 90 | 68 | 180 | | 90 | | |
| 6 | 10/31-11/6 | 385 | 325 | 60 | 85 | 240 | 60 | | | |
| 7 | 11/7-11/13 | 490 | 340 | 150 | 120 | 220 | | 150 | | |
| 8 | 11/14-11/20 | 545 | 275 | 270 | | 275 | 150 | | | 120 |
| 9 | 11/21-11/27 | 920 | 430 | 490 | | 430 | 220 | 120 | | 150 |
| 10 | 11/28-12/4 | 630 | 270 | 360 | 30 | 240 | 120 | | 180 | 60 |
| 11 | 12/5-12/11 | 850 | 260 | 590 | | 260 | 110 | 60 | 420 | |
| 12 | 12/12-12/18 | 569 | 204 | 365 | | 204 | 60 | 45 | 200 | 60 |
| 13 | 12/19-12/25 | 335 | 335 | | 100 | 235 | | | | |
| 14 | 12/26-1/1 | 638 | 368 | 270 | 38 | 330 | | | 270 | |
| 15 | 1/2-1/8 | 351 | 351 | | 60 | 291 | | | | |
| 16 | 1/9-1/15 | 460 | 400 | 60 | 60 | 340 | | | 60 | |
| 17 | 1/16-1/22 | 685 | 385 | 300 | 120 | 265 | | 180 | 120 | |
| 18 | 1/23-1/29 | 280 | 280 | | 120 | 160 | | | | |
| 19 | 1/30-2/5 | 700 | | 700 | | | | | 700 | |
| 20 | 2/6-2/12 | 499 | 439 | 60 | 80 | 359 | 60 | | | |
| 21 | 2/13-2/19 | 570 | 570 | | 240 | 330 | | | | |
| 22 | 2/20-2/26 | 480 | 420 | 60 | | 420 | 60 | | | |
| 23 | 2/27-3/4 | 324 | 264 | 60 | 104 | 160 | 60 | | | |
| 24 | 3/5-3/11 | 558 | 498 | 60 | 48 | 450 | 60 | | | |
| 25 | 3/12-3/18 | 740 | 600 | 140 | 60 | 540 | 120 | 20 | | |
| 26 | 3/19-3/25 | 990 | 930 | 60 | 80 | 850 | 60 | | | |
| 27 | 3/26-4/1 | 300 | 300 | | | 300 | | | | |
| 28 | 4/2-4/8 | 450 | 450 | | | 450 | | | | |
| 29 | 4/9-4/15 | 709 | 709 | | 139 | 570 | | | | |
| 30 | 4/16-4/22 | 275 | 275 | | 75 | 200 | | | | |
| 31 | 4/23-4/29 | 360 | 360 | | 360 | | | | | |
| 32 | 4/30-5/6 | 275 | 275 | | 115 | 160 | | | | |
| 33 | 5/7-5/13 | 235 | 175 | 60 | 130 | 45 | 60 | | | |
| 34 | 5/14-5/20 | 376 | 376 | | 156 | 220 | | | | |
| 35 | 5/21-5/27 | 405 | 405 | | 120 | 285 | | | | |
| 36 | 5/28-6/5 | 180 | 180 | | 180 | | | | | |
| 37 | 6/4-6/10 | 302 | 302 | | 302 | | | | | |
| 38 | 6/11-6/17 | 180 | 180 | | 120 | 60 | | | | |
| 39 | 6/18-6/24 | 620 | 620 | | 170 | 450 | | | | |
| 40 | 6/25-7/1 | 195 | 145 | 50 | | 145 | 50 | | | |
| 41 | 7/2-7/8 | 465 | 465 | | 465 | | | | | |
| 42 | 7/9-7/15 | 240 | 240 | | | 240 | | | | |
| TOTALS: | | 19594 | 14804 | 4790 | 3745 | 11059 | 1380 | 815 | 1990 | 605 |

In April, he did 584 kilometers in 38 sessions (25 of them on whitewater) and nothing else whatsoever. Only two of these sessions consisted of interval training:

* 3 x (30 secs. 60 secs. 60 secs. 30 secs. 120 secs.)

* 6 x 5 mins. with 3 mins. rest.

The rest of the work consisted of flatwater paddles of 12-14 kilometers and the whitewater sessions.

In May Claude did at least 350 kilometers in 26 sessions (17 of them on whitewater); and one 60-minute foot run. At the end of the month Claude left for Bovec, Yugoslavia, the first Europa Cup race, and 5 days of training are not recorded. But if you estimate 3 runs a day for 4 days and 8 kilometers each run, that makes an additional 96 kilometers in 8 whitewater sessions.

In June he did only boat training; at least 330 kilometers in 22 sessions (12 of them on whitewater). Once again an entire week of training is not recorded, this time at Garmisch. But if you make the same estimate as in May, that means an additional 96 kilometers in 8 whitewater sessions. Claude did two interesting forms of interval training this month:

* 2 x 1 min. with 1 min. rest
2 mins. " " " "
3 " " " " "
2 " " " " "
1 min. " " " "

* 2 x 60 secs. with 30 secs. rest
60 " " " " "
60 " " " " "
120 " " 10 " "
120 " " " " "
120 " " " " "

In July, Claude lists 314 kilometers in 21 sessions (12 of them on whitewater).

Despite the uncertain start to this year, Claude won the Europa Cup in 1984. At Bovec, Yugoslavia, he placed 2nd to Marco Previde. At the next race, Garmisch, West Germany, he had some luck and finished 1st of the Cup Contenders (Germany's Joerg Winfried, who was not entered in the Cup, actually won the race), beating Previde by a few seconds. But a few seconds was enough to put Previde in 5th — and thus effectively out of Cup contention. Previde, who was not able to spend much time learning the river, broached on a rock and lost 15-20 seconds. Benezit placed 2nd to Previde at the last race at Bourg St. Maurice, France.

Claude designed a new boat, the "Baxter", for the Garmisch World Championships and used it for the 1984 season. In the fall of 1984, he started training seriously for the Garmisch World Championships. Now he had no doubts about what he wanted to do.



Marco Previde, second at Bala in 1981. (Kevin Clifford Photo)

MARCO PREVIDE:
The King of the Gypsies

"Whitewater canoeing is a
sport of gypsies."

— Marco Previde

Marco Previde carries a slingshot in his hip pocket. Sometimes, particularly at night, he uses it to take potshots at fences and lamp posts. On occasion he also takes verbal potshots at people in canoeing and this has made him some enemies. A year or two ago he turned off a group of his countrymen with the comment that whitewater canoeing is a sport of gypsies. He may have meant only what all of us connected with whitewater have often felt, that is, whitewater athletes get very little recognition and have to live on a shoestring. But his compatriots didn't take it that way. They took it as an arrogant criticism of them, implying that they did not take the sport seriously enough. One of them said, "If it's a sport of gypsies, then what does that make you?" Previde reflected for a moment and then exclaimed, "the King of the Gypsies!"

Marco Previde Massara (known simply as Marco Previde) is the only Italian ever to win a World Championships in either slalom or wildwater. Not only did he win in 1983, he was second in 1981 and second in the Europa Cup of 1984. For this reason alone his story is interesting; how did this man, not from one of the major canoeing powers, manage to do it? The answer, as we shall see, is in one sense really quite simple: A great deal of work over many years. In this connection, his friends are fond of telling the story of how Marco was working out with Germany's Konrad Hollerieth one day. On and on they dueled, neck and neck throughout the workout. Hollerieth was quite proud of himself for sticking with Previde the whole way — until he saw Previde take a 10 kilo weight out of his boat.

Are there no secrets, then, about how this fellow was able to do what none of his compatriots had ever done? Perhaps there is one: The inner strength he drew from the belief that he had to do it all alone, with no help from anyone. To an extent, Previde did have to do it alone: Since Italy had never even produced a medalist before, there certainly weren't many knowledgeable people available to council him, no tradition such as in France to nurture him.

Previde clearly goaded himself on with the thought that he was surrounded by irresponsible gypsies who not only didn't help, but actually got in his way. A definite "I'll show them" attitude developed. The real truth, however, was more complex than this and Previde certainly had a number of advantages not available to others. For one thing, his parents were relatively wealthy and supported his "habit": Previde has never had to hold down a real job in his life. Be that as it may, the thought that he was at a disadvantage seems to have sustained him in a remarkable way.

Vigevano

Marco Previde was born and raised in Vigevano, Italy. He has lived there his whole life. He was born June 9, 1958, weighs 67 kilos and is 1.72 meters tall. His paddle length is 216-217 centimeters.

He has a brother, Giorgio, who is 2 years older. Giorgio was in 2 World Championships in downriver K1, 1973 at Muotathal (30th place), and 1975 at Skopje (24th place). Giorgio is now an engineer.

Marco's father, now retired, was a bank accountant. Close observers say that he supported Marco financially and morally throughout Marco's career. Marco's father was never terribly active in sports himself, however.

Oh, when he was young he played soccer a bit, that's all. But he was always very helpful to us. I think this was very important because if you don't have the assistance of your parents, at least until you are 18-19 years old, it is very difficult to succeed, to emerge from the group, because canoeing is a sport in which you always need some support personnel to do shuttles and so on.

Before he got into canoeing, Marco was active in swimming, which he did for 4 years (from age 6-10), then track, which he did for 2 years (from age 10-12). In looking back, he says these endurance sports influenced him in the following way:

Swimming was in the same element as canoeing: water. Ever since I was a little boy I have liked water. Even though I trained every day at swimming, however, I never did any races because I didn't like them. Even though I was good at swimming, my father never forced me to enter races. I started track when I was in school. They had organized foot races and I started racing with the other boys in the school because it was fun. Then there were races outside of school. These, however, were not competitive ones. They were 30-45 kilometers long with 3-400 participants. Since I was only 12-13 years old, older people beat me easily.

Started Canoeing

Marco goes on to explain how he and his family got into canoeing:

Close to our house there is the Ticino River. My father loves the outdoors and nature and fishing. One time when we were fishing, we saw some canoeists. After that we got interested in the sport and joined a club (the Canoe Club Vigevano) and bought some boats. First my brother went because we figured that one should learn before the others. So my brother went 3-4 times before I

did. For me, canoeing was a diversion because the Ticino is a pretty tranquil river and it was fun to go out there with other boys and girls. For me it was a game. I didn't do any races; I did it only for fun.

Marco always did K1 downriver. There was no local tradition in slalom because the Ticino was a very easy river, not really suited to slalom. Previde goes on to explain:

I was never very interested in slalom because the Ticino is pretty flat. In downriver, if one trains on flatwater he can still be good on whitewater. But in slalom, if a boater is good on the Ticino he might not be any good when he gets on real whitewater.

In contrast to Vigevano's lack of tradition in slalom, however, there was a tradition in downriver because there were some Italian champions who lived there. There were Augusto and Giovanni Fossati and the 2 Carbone sisters, Gloria and Giovanna. Augusto was national champion in K1 downriver more than once. Both of the Carbone sisters were national champions in K1W downriver. They were also very good in flatwater racing.

From the Carbone sisters I learned how to roll. Then I learned how to brace and the other basics. The Carbone sisters were themselves very young and therefore I had a good rapport with them. On the other hand, Augusto Fossati was 28-30 years old. He was much more serious and it was from him that I learned to be serious. I learned from him that it was necessary to make sacrifices, and not to leave anything to chance. Results don't depend solely upon training, either, but upon the type of life you lead. It's a combination of many things.

One year after Marco started canoeing, he started racing. There were no events especially for children then and usually there would be only 1 or 2 children his age at the start. Sometimes there would be none and Marco had to enter the masters' class.

Training When He Was Young

Marco first had to learn how to paddle the boat, so he was in it a lot. During the warm weather he would spend the whole afternoon on the water with the Carbone sisters. But in the winter he went to the gym with Augusto Fossati and started to work out with weights — at age 12. The weight workouts were very well structured "because Fossati knew what he was doing". Marco still does practically the same exercises to this day although he has added a few new ones.

When I was young Fossati made me use a bar of 7 kilos. He didn't make me use heavy weights. We did the same exercises that I do today: bench press; bench rowing; curls; exercises for the trapezius;

exercises for the triceps; over the head press. I also used dumbbells weighing 3 kilos. With these I did a series of exercises. I also did "Blaho" (an exercise which consists of lifting a bar in the following way: overhand curl it up to shoulders; push out straight ahead of you; bring it back; push above your head; put it behind your head; push it up in the air; bring it to shoulders; push out straight; bring it back to shoulders; let it down. It is usually done as interval training, eg. 60 secs. on, 30 secs. off, etc.) In 1970 when I did this sort of work there were only 2-3 other people who did it. Roberto D'Angelo (now coach of the Italian slalom team) was one of them.

Nowadays at Italian races the following events are contested:

| Name | Age | Race Distance |
|---------|-------|----------------|
| Seniors | 18-34 | 7-8 kilometers |
| Juniors | 16-18 | 7-8 kilometers |
| Boys A | 15-16 | 4-5 kilometers |
| Boys B | 14-15 | 4-5 kilometers |
| Cadets | 11-13 | 2 kilometers |
| Pupils | 8-10 | 2 kilometers |

1974 was the first year that the Boys event (not yet divided into A and B) came into existence and Marco won it at the Italian Championships. In 1975 and 1976 he won the Junior National Championships. In 1976, he also did his first international races — the Europa Cup and the Spittal Pre-World Championships. Marco placed in the 20s in all of these races.

During this period, Marco's training changed somewhat. In the winter it was similar to the weight workouts he had done before with Augusto Fossati, except that the weights were increased. In the spring and summer, however, Marco was in the boat 2 hours a day, 5 days a week.

Marco learned how to train for downriver from Augusto Fossati and Roberto D'Angelo, who was the coach of the Italian team then.

I started with Fossati and then when I was on the Italian team I had Roberto D'Angelo as a coach. I learned some things from him since he was someone who was good at that time. I didn't always do everything he told me, but I always listened to him. After that I started reading books on sports training to learn more. That's how I started making up my own training program which I think is now very good.

Marco learned river technique in these early days by going on the Ticino, which is an easy river. "Then, in 1973 I started doing other rivers," he recalls.

For fun on weekends we went about 100-200 kilometers away where there were some other easy ones. These easy rivers increased my ability bit by bit. Slowly I started to move to bigger rivers. I always went in the downriver Kl, and always with Fossati and the Carbone sisters. After 1975, however, my brother stopped paddling. After 1976, I had to make my own way because Fossati stopped. I trained with some of the people in my club after that, but they were very young. However, by then I had a lot of good river experience.

On the Ticino I learned how to roll, which helped me a lot when I flipped on bigger rivers later. I never swam in a big river in my life. Knowing how to roll was important for me because it enabled me not to fear the water. I see a lot of canoeists who are scared of the water. On a big river, or one they don't know, they'll get out and scout it. For me, it's perfectly natural to run it cold; I'm not scared. Maybe that's because nothing has ever happened to me. To be sure, there are plenty of hard moves you can't practice on the Ticino. But one thing you can practice is balance. I always had good balance.

In speaking specifically about the race techniques he learned at this time, Marco says the following:

I always tried to avoid backstrokes. I always tried to paddle in the fastest current. I got a lot of practice by picking the best routes on the Ticino. It is a wide river and there are a lot of current filaments to choose from and I learned to pick the fastest ones.

In the 1976-78 period Marco worked on his ability to accelerate the downriver boat by using an extraordinarily wide grip on the paddle; his hands were right next to the blades.

Bicycling

In 1976, Previde did 4-5 months of bicycle training. He raced against Giuseppe Saronni, a professional racer who won many races, including the World Championships in 1982. Some people think that when Previde saw that he could not beat Saronni, he decided to give up bicycling. But that is not what Previde himself says:

I gave up bicycling in order to get ready for Spittal. I was ready to go back to bicycling if canoeing didn't continue to motivate me. But after the Worlds I knew canoeing was the sport I was interested in the most and I gave everything to that.

Marco doesn't think that bicycling helped his canoeing much:

I did bicycling only for fun. I didn't like the races because at that time there were too many bad things going on, too much drugs. I wasn't interested in racing but I liked bicycling and did a lot of kilometers. But bicycling doesn't help much for canoeing because you use your legs and the rest of the body does nothing.

Getting Ready for Spittal

In 1977, Previde was in his first year as a senior and he placed 3rd in the Italian Championships. He was also in his first World Championships, where he placed 21st. He explains his training for the World Championships:

In 1977, I did more or less the same type of training that I did in the 1974-75 period but I tried to increase the quantity. Before, I was in the gym 3 times a week. Now I did 4-5 times. Boating was limited because I was going to school. The afternoon was taken up with studying. I tried to do 2 hours of continuous paddling each day until a month or so before the important races. Then I did sprints; I shortened the work period.

Marco explains what happened at the World Championships:

At Spittal we all made a mistake. We did a lot of training at a certain water level. Then, when we came back the week before the race it was still low. But right before the race, they opened a dam and the water went way up. So we didn't know the best routes any more. I remember that just after the start there was a little canal that made a shortcut. We, including Perli, who came in 4th, just a few tenths out of 3rd, all went way around and didn't take the shortcut. When the water was low you didn't notice this shortcut. So it was a Worlds like that. For me it went well, though, because I was young and it was a good experience for me.

One of Marco's most vivid impressions from that time was simply watching the other athletes:

There were some great athletes, Burny, Pech, and for us they were the masters. Given that I seldom raced outside of Italy, I was interested in studying them. I couldn't talk to them because I didn't know them. I could only look at them. At the Worlds, even though the rest of the Italian team was in a hotel, I was in a tent. So I had no contact with anyone. I did what I wanted during the day. So I spent some of the day watching the good boaters and seeing how they ran the river.

Why was Previde in a tent at Spittal when other teammates were in a hotel? Marco won't say much about this, but people who know him say that it was due to

the first of countless run-ins he has had with the Italian Canoe Federation. Previde says only that the Federation didn't make adequate arrangements for Spittal and that is why he had to sleep outside.

Getting Good

After the Spittal World Championships, Previde "had even greater motivation to get good results." He quit bicycling and devoted more time to canoeing.

1978 was the first year I had good results. I won the (senior) Italian Championships and was second at Merano behind Gerhard Peinhaupt (the 1977 World Champion), but ahead of Degenhard Pfeiffer (4th at Spittal) and other really good people.

Now his training changed as he started to increase his volume dramatically.

In 1978 I was in the boat twice a day, even though I was in school. I went in the morning at 6-6:30 and did a workout. In the winter I ran or did weights. In the spring I paddled twice a day.

He followed this yearly schedule:

- * FALL. He did 10-12 kilometers in the morning and the same thing in the afternoon, always by himself. But he did it upstream and downstream. He did 20 minutes downstream and then 40 minutes upstream. "If there had not been any current," Marco says, "I would have been able to do 20 kilometers."

Here are Marco's thoughts on what kind of water to train on:

For training downriver canoeing you've got to have a river like the Ticino which has a current that is not very strong, and which you can paddle upstream against rather easily. This is important because it presents the characteristics that you meet in a race. There are times in a downriver race when you paddle hard and times when you don't paddle as hard. On a lake this doesn't happen because the lake is always the same. On the Ticino going back upstream there are places where the water flows faster and because of this it is necessary to go harder. Then you come to a patch of easier water that is more like the lake. After that you hit another hard spot where you have to go hard again. You can go like this for kilometers. It's like doing interval training or fartlek. Without having to think about it, you get some rest periods. I think that it's more natural like this and I think for downriver training this is very important.

- * WINTER. No boating. He did the same weight exercises as in the past, and with other people. Or he ran. "It was too cold and foggy to be in the boat", Marco says.

* SPRING. From March on, only boating. 75 minutes of sprints in the morning and 1 hour easy in the afternoon.

In July, 1978, Marco finished school, "and after that I had the whole day free to train. I did everything myself. I made up my own training plan, based on my experience of the previous years."

During these years, Marco learned what he could about training from other people who he thought might have good ideas, such as Roberto D'Angelo, Oreste Perri, who was K1 flatwater 10,000 meter World Champion in 1974, 1975, and 1977, and Jean-Pierre Burny. Previde and Burny conversed in English; "even though he didn't know a lot it was enough to understand each other" Previde remembers. "I have always been interested in talking to other people and taking a little bit from each of them."

In 1978, Marco started racing for the Centro Sportivo Club of the Forestali (forest rangers) but he did not actually join the Forestali until September, 1979.

As perhaps the best symbol of his new-found success, Previde started receiving free boats from Toni Prijon, the famous boat maker. Prijon loaned Previde the boats and Marco returned them at the end of the season.

The only thing to mar the 1978 season was that while Previde competed in international races in 1978, he did not compete for the Europa Cup. He says simply that the Federation wouldn't allow it.

Learning the Hard Way

For the 1979 season Marco trained well following a plan which was virtually the same as what he had done in the past. In the past, Marco figured that he had enough speed for a downriver race, but he didn't have enough endurance and gave out before the race ended. By 1979, however, he began to have the endurance to last the whole race.

Unfortunately, 1979 was also the year that he learned the hard way about having good equipment: Equipment probably cost him a medal at the World Championships.

Previde and the Italian team arrived about 10 days before the race. They slept and ate near the lake near the finish. Here is what stands out in Previde's mind:

The river was good and the weather warm so we probably did 5-6 runs a day. We did this for 2-3 days. Then we got tired. We didn't follow any set plan of work. The coach, Mario Di Stazio, wanted us to do 4 runs. But we did 6 because we liked it. It was Carlo Perli (C1) and I. I always ran the river with him because I liked going with him. We did this for several days. Then

we took a rest for one day even though according to the coach's plan we were supposed to have a time trial. But we weren't interested in doing one. I didn't go hard on the non-stop. And then I did the race.

Previde comments on the race itself:

At that time I placed less importance on boat design. This was a defect that remained during much of my life. I had good equipment but I used old equipment in races — a boat that leaked or a beat-up paddle. At that time I never paid a lot of attention to equipment. It was all the same to me. I just wasn't interested in it. In 1979, I had a boat made of carbon which was too fragile. And in the last kilometer at Jonquiere, 4 minutes from the end, I hit the stern hard and this made 2 cuts in the boat. Up to that point I was second to Burny by 6 seconds. Then I took on a lot of water. From here on I began to lose a lot of time. I came in 5th, 2 seconds out of 2nd. Everyone was within a few seconds of each other.

When Previde returned home to Italy after the World Championships he had to wait 6 months to get his boat back. He says this was the fault of the Federation.

The Forestali

After the Jonquiere World Championships, Previde joined the Guardia Forestale, a 5-6000 man group of government-paid forest rangers in which many of Italy's top athletes serve. The sole obligation of these athletes is to train in their sport and for this they receive normal pay and benefits. There are about 400 athletes in the Forestali, 9 of them whitewater canoeists.

Carlo Perli ("Pierino"), who was 4th in C1 downriver at Spittal, was the first whitewater athlete to be accepted by the Forestali. This was in 1976. As long as an athlete wins the Italian Championships, he can remain in the Forestali. Furthermore, unlike other sports where the athletes must train together at specified locations, the whitewater canoeists are allowed to go wherever they want and do whatever they want.

The pay for someone in the Forestali is 12 million lire (\$6,500) a year. Athletes don't have to do anything for this except train. However, if they want to pick up rank (and higher pay) they must take courses and pass examinations.

Previde joined the Forestali in September, 1979. From September to April, 1980, he took courses at Sabaudia (near Rome). Marco trained on the lake there. "I trained pretty well", Previde recalls. "I did 3 workouts a day." He did gymnastics or running at 6:30 a.m.; weights at 10:00 a.m.; and boating at 4:00 p.m.

In the winter I was in the boat only 3-4 times a week and started doing more roller-ski or running or weights instead of boating. Training on the lake like this wasn't good. In fact, my results that season (1980) weren't good. I was 10th at Garmisch; 7th in France; and around 5th in Spain. In all the races I had the best time three quarters of the way though the race, but in the last 4-5 minutes I lost it. It wasn't all the fault of the training, though. I just wasn't very interested. For me, 1980 wasn't that important. At the end of 1980, however, I started to train seriously for the Bala World Championships.

Marco came in 4th at the Bala Pre-World Championships. His team of Hansjorg Mayr and Anton Plaikner won the team race, however.

Training For Bala

By the time he was preparing for the Bala World Championships, Marco had pretty well formulated his own personal training principles, which he outlines here:

In August I have a rest. I paddle only once a day then. In September I do a month of background work. I do some weights, some running, some boating, games and so on. Then in October, I start the real preparation period which lasts until February. In this period I do 3 types of work:

Endurance. You can do this with running, roller-skiing, swimming and so on. The idea is to get used to working for a long time at a certain heart rate. It doesn't have to be in the boat. (Previde can run 800 meters in 55 seconds and 10,000 in 31 minutes.)

Strength-endurance. Here you are interested in improving strength-endurance through ways that are not at all like being in the boat — dumbbells, free weights, etc. Because these exercises last more than a minute there is an endurance component to them.

Machines which simulate paddling. I have a machine on which I can simulate the pulling of the forward stroke and on which I can work with heavy weights for about 90 seconds intervals. You don't want to be doing more than a total of about 30 minutes of this, though, because if you do, you should be doing it in the boat instead.

After this period I start paddling twice a day and don't do any other type of work.

After many years of training, Marco has cultivated the ability to tell exactly what sort of work he needs to do at any given period:

I've trained so many years by myself and anything I've done I've had to think it out thoroughly beforehand. This has taught me to understand myself well. So I can tell when I need to do one type of work or another. For example, in November I know I need to run. But I know that 2 months is enough. I like running so I could do more of it, but it wouldn't do any good and I would start getting sick of training. Also, I've found that I can't do long distance runs and start weights during the same period. After I do about 30 days with the weights I can go back to long distance runs because by then my body is used to the weight training. This, at least, is true for me. You can't generalize for everyone. But after a month of weights alone, I can do anything else in addition that I want to. If I continued running at the same time, though, I wouldn't be able to do as much weights as possible.

Let us now look more closely at what Marco did for Bala.

In the winter of 1980-81, he trained twice a day, 6 days a week, the way he does at present. He did the following exercises:

- * 2-3 times a week roller-ski.
- * 2-3 foot runs of about 18-20 kilometers (75-80 minutes) each.
- * 5 times a week on the weights. There are 2 types of weight workouts, each done on alternate days:
 1. 60 minutes total:
 - a. Warm-up. 4 sets of:
 - 20 push-ups (using hand blocks).
 - 10 pull-ups (Marco can do 50 pull-ups).
 - 50 sit-ups (on an inclined board).
 - 1 minute jump rope.
 - b. Main workout. 4 sets of:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|
| Bench press: | 50 x 36 kgs. |
| Bench row: | 50 x 36 kgs. |
| Lat pulls with bent bar: | 50 x 26 kgs. |
| Curls with bent bar: | 50 x 26 kgs. |
| Tricep extensions (lying on a bench): | 50 x 26 kgs. |

2. 30 minutes total work on a pulling machine:

60 seconds on, 60 seconds off

60 seconds on, 30 seconds off

* 1 time in the boat.

In explaining why he didn't spend more time in the boat, Previde made these comments:

It was cold outside, but that's not the only reason I didn't do more in the boat. I just don't think it's important for me to be in the boat during the winter. Last year (1983-84) I wasn't in the boat at all. There are two reasons for this. First, it's easier for me to correct my mistakes after I've been out of the boat for a long time. If one goes in the boat every day, day after day, he makes the same old mistakes. But if he takes a break for a month, when he comes back he can start to think about his mistakes. I think it's bad for me psychologically to go in the boat in the winter. It just isn't any fun when it's cold. I prefer to be in the gym and lift weights. This is more fun for me. In the summer I don't use weights at all, not because they don't help, but simply because at that time of year they are not fun.

Starting in March and continuing throughout the spring and summer, Marco did 2 boat workouts a day, 6 days a week. His "rest day" was not a complete day off, either, but rather 2 half days, Wednesday and Sunday afternoons.

Marco's boat training in April and March consisted of 2 hours in the morning and an hour and a half in the afternoon "at about 70% of the intensity I use in a race (heart rate of 140 beats a minute)." In May he did intervals in the mornings and in the afternoon an hour and a quarter continuous paddle of the same sort he did in April and March. The types of intervals depended on the day:

One day I did 6 x 5 mins. with 3 mins. rest. The next day I'd do 8 x 3 mins. with 2 mins. rest. And the day after that I'd do 6 x 5 mins. with 3 mins. rest. Then the following day would be like the second day and so on.

At Bala

The Italians were at Bala for 10 days before the Worlds. "We were supposed to go in May," Previde muses, "but didn't."

One negative factor, say those who were on the Italian team that year, was that each athlete had to wash the dishes for the entire team — "a job that took 2 hours" — because the Federation hadn't bothered to arrange a better plan.

At first we did whole river runs, but after that we started doing it in 3 sections. The 4-5 days before the race, we ran the river in team. The first man went right into the hole below the bridge on the slalom course. I came in right on top of him and his stern hit me in the shoulder. I flipped and rolled. My shoulder hurt so much that I got out of the boat and didn't paddle for 2 days. When I came back I practiced on the lower part of the course, which was the easiest. Then I did the non-stop and the race. We were lodged near the lake, so for a warm-up I did the whole lake — for 20-25 minutes. Then I arrived at the start and waited a half an hour before the start. I had a good race — didn't make any technical mistakes — but I started out too fast and was too tired for the bottom part.

Previde came in second to Claude Benezit, 26:26.54 to 26.18.03.

Marco mentions that one big thing he learned from the Bala World Championships was that he wanted a boat designed specially for him. He had finally resolved to do something about the equipment problems that had plagued him in the past:

I believe that the Prijon '81 was not a good boat for me because it just wasn't fast enough. At the time, it was the only thing available so I had to use it. I saw that the French had boats which were much narrower. I don't know whether they were actually faster but they sure looked like they would be. I knew that you needed one sort of boat for one river and another sort for another river.

So, in the fall of 1981, Marco designed the boat he would ultimately use at Merano, "the Fly", and started using it in the 1982 season.

I thought that for Merano I needed a boat with a lot of volume because Merano was a river with a lot of water. But it also had to be fast — a difficult combination. I had the idea that the sides of the boat shouldn't be vertical, but instead should angle outwards. The 1981 boat had very vertical sides. So this is what I designed with Alessandrini (of the ASA company). It was finished in the fall of 1981 and I tried it out a few times in the winter. At the beginning of the spring I decided to race it.

Marco made one more change with the Fly. He recognized that the bow of any boat tends to weave from side to side with each stroke no matter what you do to keep it straight. So instead of fighting it, Marco felt a better strategy was to keep the part that moved out of the water as much as possible and thus reduce the resistance this weaving caused. For this reason the underside of the Fly's bow is cut away a bit.

More Troubles With the Federation

Although he trained well for 1982, Marco did not compete in the Europa Cup: "In 1978 the Federation didn't take me to the Europa Cup and the same thing happened in 1982."

People who know the story say that Previde's rift with the Italian Canoe Federation had its roots in two factors:

- * Long standing problems between the Federation and himself, such as we have seen above.
- * A rivalry between the athletes in the Guardia Forestale and some athletes from Merano. This was important because the national team was made up of athletes from those 2 places. The 2 groups continually argued with each other over what the team should do. These disputes festered and reached a climax at the team selection trials in 1982 at the Sesia River when Marco Previde and Carlo Perli were accused by the Merano athletes of disrupting the race by pushing a boulder into the river one hour before the start without telling anyone. Because of this disunity in the team, the team would not intervene on Marco's behalf when he had problems of his own with the Federation.

As the story goes, in 1982 the Federation was supposed to provide the boats for the Europa Cup team. But right before the first race they were not ready. This had happened once before and Previde had said that if it happened again he wouldn't compete.

Previde did this to change the Federation, it is said, but it seems not to have worked because in 1984 the same thing happened yet again. This time, however, Previde competed because the Federation told him they would give him some money if he won a medal. Having just gotten married, he needed it, so he competed. By finishing second in the Cup, he got about 4 million lire, after taxes (about \$2,000) from the Federation.

Marco did, however, compete in the Merano Pre-World Championships, which he won in 19:59.43 to Konrad Hollerieth's 20:27.71. Previde's team also won the team race.

In September, 1982, Marco applied for admission to the University of Milan in a physical education course. But in order to be admitted, he had to pass certain physical tests, among them the high jump, and a basketball dribbling test. He flunked these; he couldn't jump high enough and did not exhibit enough coordination on the basketball dribbling test.

Preparing for Merano

Previde's training for Merano followed the same pattern as in the past. While Marco does not keep a training log, he estimates that he does about 3 hours

of training a day, for 6 days a week. This figures out to about 1000 minutes a week, which is very high. "I train like that," Marco claims, "because it is fun."

The results are not the most important thing to me. I do only what I like to do, even if it means I come in 15th and not first. For me it's the same. If I train eat and sleep, I'm content. I do it for my body. Oh, I suppose I like to win. But I know that results can come or not come. You have to be a philosopher about what life gives you. You can't train just in order to win. There has to be something else. You have to take every day as it comes.

There was, however, one big change for the Merano World Championships: since the Passer river was near his home, Marco could run it a lot. He and the Italian team did 3 training camps at Merano, each one of 4 days' duration. But this had its problems:

We did only complete runs, about 40-50 of them. I got sick of it. From this I learned that it's not worth it to do something a lot; it's better to do it fewer times but really well. If you do something too much you lose the desire.

It isn't necessary to run a river like Merano, say 50 times. 10 or 15 times is enough because it's very big water and you always have to be alert to follow the fastest lines. You have to run it a number of times to learn it, but after that it doesn't help to repeat it over and over again because you just get tired of it. It's water that you have to study carefully before the race in order to be able to understand it. Bala, on the other hand, is completely different: it is easy water which doesn't require the same concentration.

Another problem which grew out of running the Passer so much was that it disrupted Marco's normal training routine. He figures this left him physically below par on race day:

My conditioning training during the whole last month before the Worlds was not what it should have been. I couldn't train as I had in the past; only the first 3 days of the week were the same. Then I went to Merano and did 4 runs a day. This left me in a condition such that on one day I was good, the next day bad. I was not able to be good every day, as I had been in the past.

A final problem was an allergy which affected Marco's breathing:

In May, June, and July it got worse. It's cured now but at Merano it was a problem. I had a blocked-up nose, a bit of fever, and a cold for all of May and June.

Going into the race, the fact that he was the favorite caused Marco some worry:

Let's say it bothered me a bit because I knew I wasn't in the best condition I could have been in. I knew I had the same chance that, say, 2 or 3 other athletes had to win the race. If it had been the year before and people had picked me to win, it wouldn't have bothered me.

At Merano

Right before the race, Marco and the rest of the Italian team did 2-3 runs a day on the course. They looked for the various route possibilities:

Right after the start there was a hole which everyone went into. But Fabio Ceccato found that it was possible to avoid the hole. Soon everyone on our team did it his way, but after a while we didn't use this method any more so the other competitors, particularly the French, wouldn't know about it. In the race, I did it Fabio's way; it was a place where you could pick up 2-3 seconds.

During the race, Italian support personnel had radio contact with split takers. They saw that Germany's Konrad Hollerieth, who started right before Previde, was 2 seconds ahead of Marco at the first split station. But they also saw that he was too tired to keep it up. Sure enough, at the second split station, about 1 kilometer later, Hollerieth was 1 second behind Previde. Germany's Degenhard Pfeiffer, on the other hand, was dead even with Previde at the second station. The Italians radioed that ahead and Previde was told that he would have to go all out to win. Even though Pfeiffer knew Previde's split times, he couldn't catch him at the end. Marco did 22:09.97 to 22:12.11 for Pfeiffer. Hollerieth was third at 22:13.23.



Marco Previde was the first Italian ever to win a World Championship in whitewater. (Will Summers Photo)

"The top part of the course went well," Marco summarizes, "but I lacked physical conditioning on the bottom part because of the flatwater training I failed to do in the last month."

After the race Marco remembers being elated at having finally won. But it didn't last long:

When I won I was thrilled, but 1 hour later it began to seem like any other race — the Enza or even the Ticino.

In one sense it could hardly be called an ordinary race: for his victory, the Italian Canoe Federation gave Marco 6 million lire (about \$3,200).

In September of 1983, Marco succeeded in getting admitted to a physical education course at the University of Torino ("ISEF"). But after 2 days, he gave it up for 2 reasons: first, he didn't like it, and second he wasn't able to train because he was supposed to spend the whole day at school.

1984

The year 1984 was an important one for Marco. He was second in the Europa Cup, which meant another several million lire from the Federation. On top of that he received a 15-million-lire (\$8,200) "study grant", even though he was no longer in school and never planned to return. He also got married in the fall.

In the spring I had to train while getting the house ready for my wife-to-be. I painted it. My fiancée and I did everything ourselves. So I worked and trained. The training was the same as in the past except that I was able to get rid of the allergy that had caused so much trouble at Merano. The first race, Bovec, went without any problem. I won by 12-13 seconds. Then we went to Garmisch and a lot of things happened. We were tired and quarrelled with each other. It wasn't a good atmosphere. In the race I made a mistake a few minutes after the start. I broached on a rock and lost 15-20 seconds. Then I started up again but I had lost a lot. Still, because I was in such good shape, I almost made it all up again during the first 4-5 minutes of the race, which is the most difficult part at Garmisch. To do this, however, I had to expend a lot of energy and from the technical point of view, I didn't have a good run, even though I caught up. In fact, on the lower part of the course, I was down only about 1 or 2 seconds. I felt I just couldn't do any more, though, because I had used up everything I had. At the finish I came in only a few seconds out of first but it was 5th place.

After Garmisch, Marco lost his interest in training because he realized that in all probability he would lose the Europa Cup to Claude Benezit who was 2nd in Bovec, 1st at Garmisch (of the Cup contenders), and who would probably be either 1st or 2nd at Bourg St. Maurice (he was 2nd).

After Garmisch I didn't want to train any more. I worked at home and trained only once a day. For me the Europa Cup has never been terribly interesting.

Still, Marco managed to win at Bourg and he came in 2nd in the Cup. In the fall, he and the ASA company designed a new boat, the "Sprinter":

This is the boat I will race at the Garmisch worlds. I moved the seat forward in order to balance the boat better. It's good for the type of water you have at Garmisch, but I don't think it will be good for the Bourg St. Maurice Worlds. The first few minutes at Garmisch consist of difficult water, but then there are 15 minutes of easy water. I made the boat so that it has volume in the front because this teardrop shape is the fastest. This is a scientific thing, I didn't make it up. There isn't much volume in the stern of the boat. This works best on easier water. But on big water like the Passer it is bad because the boat bobs around too much — the waves keep it from running straight. The Sprinter is much smaller than the Fly.

Paddling In Italy

Certainly one of the most interesting things in Marco Previde's career is how he was able to win the World Championships coming from a country which had never done it before. Marco addresses that subject here:

There weren't any problems from the point of view of the competition in the sport in Italy because the fellows I had around me were of the same level of ability. So we always helped each other. Even if we didn't have a tradition of good people before me, we did have several good ones at the same time as me. From the organizational viewpoint, however, there really were problems. At first the Federation was part of the Rowing Federation and they were skeptical of canoeing and didn't think it was very important. So, if someone needed some equipment or needed to practice on a certain river for a week before an important race, the Federation would make the arrangements just for 2 days. They just didn't understand. I don't think the French have these problems. Things aren't so bad any more, though, because the Canoe Federation has split off from rowing and has a lot of money. Also they listen more. But it's still always a conversation between 2 different minds.

Why did no Italian ever win the Worlds before Marco Previde?

Well, competitive whitewater canoeing in Italy grew up completely on the shoulders of Roberto D'Angelo. He got good results — 12th in the Olympics and in the top 10 in both the downriver and slalom Worlds. But he just didn't have the physique to get really great results. I had no problems physically. And there were already D'Angelo's results before I came along, so I wasn't starting from scratch.

Flatwater Racing

Previde is also very good at flatwater racing, but he was never on the Italian team. In 1984 he was even Italian National Champion in the K1 10,000 meters.

In the first years I did flatwater — 1979-80 — things were pretty closed to me because of Oreste Perri (who was World Champion 3 times, in the 10,000 meters). So I raced flatwater only 3 times a year. I never trained it. The seating position in the flatwater boat was always a problem for me: a wooden seat, the knees in the middle of the boat. Finally, I put a whitewater seat and backstrap in a flatwater boat and won the Italian Championships.

But Previde wasn't ever on the national team.

If I had wanted to be on the Olympic team I would have run into lots of problems which, from my point of view, would have been insoluble. I would have had to be in training camps 5-6 months out of the year. I always would have had to do what the officials told me to do. For these reasons I couldn't get on the team — not because of results but because of lifestyle. I would have liked to go to the Olympics but only if I could have done it the way I do downriver, that is, by myself. But that isn't possible because they have team events. In downriver I am not obligated to anyone.

Advice

Marco Previde has some very simple words of advice for someone seeking to do what he did:

First of all, I would attempt to advise only someone who I saw was truly interested. There are, for example, a lot of people who train and have their own ideas, but they never ask others, never seek to learn from them.

I would say that the results should be the last thing they should think about. I think it's a mistake to train just in order to win. A person should be at peace with himself. It's like agriculture: If you plant a field well, you'll reap the harvest. But if you don't plant it well, you'll reap nothing.



*Jean-Pierre Burny, the Living Legend of Downriver.
(Kevin Clifford Photo)*

THE CLASS OF KINGS

Of all the classes, K1 is clearly the most competitive. Sometimes called "The Class of Kings", it has regularly attracted the most competitors in the World Championships, as the following table shows. (Note that in 1963, the year fiberglass boats came in, there was a foldboat class and a rigid boat class.)

Number of Competitors

| | C1 | C2 | K1 | K1W |
|------|----|----|----------------|--------------|
| 1959 | 15 | 15 | 38 | 15 |
| 1961 | 15 | 17 | 39 | 6 |
| 1963 | 24 | 19 | R1:26 F1:26 | R1:9 F1:9 |
| 1965 | 25 | 23 | 38 | 14 |
| 1967 | 26 | 27 | 40 | 15 |
| 1969 | 27 | 27 | 50 | 21 |
| 1971 | 21 | 19 | 48 | 21 |
| 1973 | 28 | 18 | 48 | 23 |
| 1975 | 29 | 20 | 48 | 31 |
| 1977 | 28 | 26 | 57 | 29 |
| 1979 | 28 | 22 | 42 | 23 |
| 1981 | 26 | 35 | 61 | 33 |
| 1983 | 30 | 25 | 46 | 22 |

K1 is the most competitive from the point of view of closeness of finish. The following table shows how many boats finished within 20 seconds of the winner in each class over the last 5 World Championships:

Number of Boats in First 20 Seconds

| | C1 | C2 | K1 | K1W |
|------|----|----|----|-----|
| 1975 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5 |
| 1977 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 |
| 1979 | 2 | 3 | 6 | 2 |
| 1981 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 |
| 1983 | 2 | 5 | 9 | 5 |

K1 is the most competitive from the point of view of different nations winning it:

Number of Nations Winning Each Event Over the History of The World Championships

| C1 | C2 | K1 | K1W |
|----|----|----|-----|
| 5 | 4 | 7 | 4 |

Finally, it is interesting to note that Belgium and Italy have won K1, but no other event in the history of either the slalom or downriver World Championships. It would seem, therefore, that K1 is a pretty wide open event with no one nation having a lock on it.

Still, I think K1 is the least technical of the events, with the premium being more on physical conditioning rather than boat or water handling ability. In C1, having only one blade poses severe technical problems. In C2 the coordination of the two paddlers does, too.

Luc Verger has done C1, C2, and K1 internationally and is probably best qualified to compare events:

- * K1 is the worst of the 3 classes in waves. It gets thrown off course the easiest.
- * In K1 the strategy is simpler; the technical aspect of paddling a K1 is easier so you just have to paddle and train hard.
- * There are a lot of good K1s and the margin between them is a lot less than in C1. I wasn't used to that at first and in the 1983 French Championships (in K1) when I heard I was ahead of Benezit by only 6 seconds, I was so depressed I pulled off the course. I thought I needed to be ahead by much more than that if I was going to win because we were going into a flat section where I thought Benezit would beat me. I had been used to being ahead by more than 6 seconds.
- * Because K1s are so close, you have to work on little things to get a small advantage, whereas in C1 the errors tend to be greater.
- * C1 paddlers are always designing new boats or fiddling around with new outfitting while K1s aren't. This is because the penalty for a bad C1 is immediate: You tip over all the time. But in a bad K1 you always make it down the river without tipping over so you are less inclined to change the boat even if you should.
- * It's really important to test the speed of a K1 in realistic white-water conditions. Too many people are content to time it on flat-water, but go simply by feel in the whitewater. In C1, you can tell immediately by feel if there's a problem because you have all sorts of trouble. But in K1 the differences are smaller and you can't always tell them by feel alone.

JEAN-PIERRE BURNY:
The Living Legend of Whitewater

Belgium's Jean-Pierre Burny is not winning races any more. But because he has won the World Championships 4 times in individual competition, more than anyone else in history, Burny has to be regarded as the greatest downriver paddler ever. He won the first time at Bourg St. Maurice in 1969 when the course was one of the longest ever, and in 1975 at Muotathal when the course was one of the shortest ever. He also won at Skopje in 1975 and at Jonquiere in 1979. On top of this he won the Europa Cup in 1974 and 1978.

Burny has influenced downriver greatly — and not just the K1s — largely through importing flatwater training techniques to downriver. He even influenced New Zealand's Ian Ferguson, who won 3 gold medals at the 1984 Olympic Games in flatwater racing. Ferguson spent months with Burny many years ago. So it is appropriate that we know a little about Burny by way of background before studying the people who are winning today.

Jean-Pierre was born November 12, 1944 in Mont Saint Guibert, Belgium and grew up there until age 10. He subsequently moved to Wavre, to Brussels, and finally to Dinant where he is today.

Some statistics on him:

- * Height: 1.75 meters
- * Weight: 70-71 kgs. "69 kgs makes me nervous."
- * Resting pulse: 52-55
- * Recovery pulse: After reaching 180-190 beats
a minute and having a 1-minute rest: 86

Since 1969, Burny has worked for the Sports Administration in Belgium, which is part of the Ministry of Sport. He works with young people and visits schools, clubs, and physical education centers. He sometimes gives lectures to people studying to be physical education teachers.

Chronology

Burny first stepped into a kayak — a slalom boat — in September of 1957 at the age of 13 and a half. He had recently been on a fishing trip with his father during a vacataion, and while they caught no fish, they did see a kayak go by and Jean-Pierre was enchanted. He asked where he could learn, joined the local club and took up slalom. Neither of his parents had ever paddled, but they were very supportive. He had a younger brother who also paddled; "He was pretty good as a junior but then he stopped."

Very shortly after starting, Jean-Pierre was in his first slalom race in Belgium and placed 7th. Soon after that he started competing in downriver races on class 1 and 2 water. Three years later, in 1960, he also took up flatwater racing.

In 1965, Jean-Pierre was entered in the Spittal World Championships in both slalom and downriver, but actually competed only in the downriver where he placed 22nd out of 38 competitors. After 1965 he gave up slalom completely and says now that his involvement had never really been too deep: "I never even owned my own boat. I always borrowed someone else's."

Influence of Flatwater Training

After 1965, Jean-Pierre began to think seriously about the 1968 Olympics in flatwater racing. After several years of hard training he placed 7th in the K2 1000 meters at Mexico. On the way there, he was 5th in the 1967 downriver World Championships at Spindleruv Mlyn, Czechoslovakia.

During these years, he trained half in the downriver boat and half in the flatwater boat, as follows:

January - April: downriver boat
From May on : flatwater boat

He would compete in a downriver race one weekend and in a flatwater race the next. However, at the time he preferred training in the flatwater boat for the following reasons:

- * There is no whitewater in Belgium.
- * The flatwater boats were narrower than the downriver boats and thus easier to paddle. "But today's downriver boats are much better", Burny points out.
- * It was easier to get good stroke technique in the flatwater boat. From his flatwater training Burny learned to like the Struer paddle, and after 1975 he started using it in downriver, too.

Jean-Pierre feels that the downriver and flatwater strokes are almost the same. "Oh, because the downriver boat is a little lighter, the stroke rate is a bit higher, but not much." To underscore the similarity, Jean-Pierre draws attention to the fact that in 1969, building off the training he did for the 1968 Olympics, he was 5th in the 500 meters at the flatwater World Championships in Moscow and 7th in the 1000 — 2 weeks after winning the World Championships in downriver at Bourg St. Maurice. The next year he won a bronze medal at the flatwater World Championships.

"There are a few differences, though, and it takes 3-5 days to switch successfully from one to the other." The differences:

- * The downriver boat rocks fore-and-aft because of the waves, while the flatwater boat glides on an even keel.
- * The downriver stroke requires a slightly jerkier pull-through to keep the boat accelerating through whitewater. The "fall" of the paddle into the water is also different.
- * The bow of the downriver boat rides up the harder you paddle while the bow of the flatwater boat does not.
- * There is more involvement of the abdominal muscles in the downriver stroke. They are used to control the turning of the boat and also to assist in the last few inches of the pull-through. Flatwater paddling does not use these muscles to the same extent.

"But only the flatwater 500 is so specialized that it's quite unlike downriver racing", Jean-Pierre concludes. He feels that it is much easier to switch from the flatwater boat to the downriver boat than vice versa.

Jean-Pierre reckons that the reason he got so good in downriver was because of the competitive flatwater workouts he did in the late 1960s. He figures that tremendous endurance was his forte: "after a few days everyone knows the proper routes down the river." At that time he trained with a number of other paddlers who were about as good as he was, some of them in his own club. They raced head-to-head just about every day. Workouts during this period included:

- * Fartlek. One variety was wake riding. One paddler would tow all the others and when he started to tire, one of the others would notice and "attack" and take over the lead, until he, too, was ultimately bumped off.
- * Long intervals. A typical workout:
 - 4 x 5 mins.
 - 3 x 4 mins.
- * 1500 meters on, 500 meters off.

During these workouts, the stopwatch was not used at all before March. After mid-March to April, they switched from 1 boat workout a day to 2 and used the stopwatch about 1 workout in every 4.

Bourg St. Maurice in 1969 was Jean-Pierre's favorite World Championship, "because it was the first one I won." Coming into the race he was hoping to finish about 5th, the same as in 1967. As he was racing the course, spectators whom he did not know, and therefore did not trust, yelled that he was 12 seconds

ahead on the splits. Jean-Pierre just didn't believe it. Later after he finished, other strangers told him he had won and again he didn't think it was true until he had checked the scoreboard himself.

Since 1976 Jean-Pierre has had to train pretty much alone. While he occasionally trains with others, the good paddlers have quit. "Now the guys on my wake don't attack any more", muses Jean-Pierre, recalling the old flartlek workouts he used to do with wake riding.

Jean-Pierre trained exceptionally hard for the Spittal World Championships in 1977, "too hard", he says now. Right before the race he did all his training on the Lieser — no flatwater work at all — and he feels this was an error because he lost basic speed. Furthermore, the water rose significantly the day before the race and this psyched him out because he had done all his training at a lower level.

Jonquiere in 1979 was another favorite Worlds for Burny, "because it was the last one I won." He had to run the river many times to learn it, including 2 times the morning of the race itself.

For Bala in 1981 his training sessions were very long. "I was very good for the marathon", he quips. The workouts consisted of 8-9 x 5 mins. He chose this strategy was because the Tryweryn was a shallow river and he reckoned he would have to paddle very hard all the way. But he misjudged the number of rapids — places where he could take the cadence down — and thus he says his strategy was not the best. Furthermore, he made the mistake of taking short, choppy strokes right off the start instead of longer, smoother ones. "People were yelling at me all the way down the course to change, but for some reason, I just couldn't. Once you start out one way, it's hard to change."

Nowadays, Jean-Pierre trains according to a plan he himself devised, the ultimate phase of which is outlined below. It is pretty much the same as what he did in 1979. He would typically follow this plan beginning 4 weeks before a big race and take the last week easier.

Each workout would begin with a warm-up consisting of 15 minutes of stretching and 2 kilometers (10 minutes) in the kayak.

AM

PM

| | | |
|-------|---|--|
| Day 1 | Endurance: 12 mins./ 25 mins. /12 mins. with accelerations. Paddle all pieces at race pace. | Resistance: has to be done at very high intensity. 4-6 x 30 secs. with 1 min. rest. |
|-------|---|--|

| | | |
|-------|---|---|
| Day 2 | Endurance: 4 x 12 mins. with accelerations. Paddle 1 x 12 mins. at race pace. | 2 x (3 x 3 mins., with 1-2 mins. rest) with 3 mins. rest between the 2 sets. Paddle at race cadence. |
| | | 4 mins. rest. |
| | | 2 x (6-8 x 1 min. with 30 secs. rest) with a 3 min. rest between the 2 sets. Paddle with a cadence higher than race pace. |
| Day 3 | 3 x 5 mins. with 2 mins. rest. | 2 x (4 x 2 mins. with 1 min. rest). Cadence greater than race pace. |
| | 3-4 mins. rest. | 4 mins. rest. |
| | 3 x 4 mins. with 2 mins. rest. | 8 x 1 min. with 30 secs. rest. |
| | | Changing cadences: 6 x following: 1.5 mins. with cadence at race pace; 1 min. cadence greater than race pace. |
| Day 4 | Same as Day 1 | Same as Day 1 |
| Day 5 | Same as Day 2 pm | Same as Day 2 am |
| Day 6 | Same as Day 3 pm | Same as Day 3 am |
| Day 7 | Same as Day 1 pm | Same as Day 2 am |
| Day 8 | Rest Day | Rest Day |

For a schedule involving only 1 workout a day, Jean-Pierre did:

- Day 1 12 mins./25 mins./ 12 mins.
- Day 2 4-6 x 30 secs. with 1 min. rest.
- 2-3 mins. rest.
- 3 x 2 mins. with 2 mins. rest.
- 3 mins. rest.
- 4 x 1.5 mins. with 1.5 mins. rest.
- 3 mins. rest.
- 6 x 1 min. with 1 min. rest.

Day 3 2 x (4 x 2 mins. with 1 min. rest).

4 mins. rest.

8 x 1 min. with 30 secs. rest.

6 x following:

1.5 mins. with cadence equal to race pace;

1 min. with cadence higher than race pace.

Day 4 Same as Day 1

Day 5 Same as Day 2

Day 6 Same as Day 3

Day 7 Rest

Day 8 etc.

During these workouts, Jean-Pierre uses his pulse rate as a guide, trying to get it up to 180-190. If I can't get it up that high, I stop what I'm doing and try something else or quit."

Right after completing a piece, he takes his pulse from his carotid artery, using a 10-second count as the measuring period. After a 1-2 minute rest, however, he uses a 15-second count — "it's more accurate." typical sequence would be:

* 4 x 2 mins. on, 1 min. off. After the on-piece, his pulse would be at 180. After 1 min. rest, 87.

* 3 mins. rest.

* 6 x 1 min. on 30 secs. off. After the on-piece, his pulse would be 180+. After 1 min. rest 84-86.

Burny contends that if you are trying to practice the same rhythm then paddling for a set time is best. But if you are trying to attain a maximum effort, then times over a set distance are best.

Nowadays Jean-Pierre trains about half again as much as he did around 1969. However, he notes that "as I get older, the recovery period between workouts takes longer and longer." Now also the workouts are more varied. Around 1969, for example, he did 2-3 months of weight lifting in the winter. The lifting consisted

of the following exercises on which he tried to use explosive movements on all but the last few repetitions:

- * Abdominals
- * Triceps
- * Vertical rowing
- * Dead lift
- * Biceps
- * Trunk
- * Bent over rowing

He would typically use weights of increasing heaviness, eg:

15 x 30 kgs.
20 x 35 kgs.
30 x 37 kgs.
15 x 40 kgs.

Now he also does running and cross-country skiing, as well as weight lifting and kayaking. Jean-Pierre runs during the winter but not at all during the competitive season. "I'm a mediocre runner," he insists. He usually goes for about 40-50 minutes slow, then accelerating, and then slow again. He tries to find "flat ground," he said with a smile, "no hills."

Whereas a decade ago he did half downriver, half flatwater from May to July, now he does 70-80% of his work in the downriver boat. Now, as before, he does only downriver training during the winter and uses the flatwater boat almost exclusively when he does times.

If he had the ideal set-up today, Jean-Pierre says, he would prefer to follow a plan similar to what he has been doing, but "perhaps with more variety" and with a group of athletes as good as he was so the workouts could be more competitive. Whenever possible during the workouts just before a big race, he "recruits" fresh paddlers to compete with him in training and push him to better performances.



*Claude Benezit in "the danger zone" at Bala in 1981.
(Kevin Clifford Photo)*