

Life Styles

Valencia Throws a Party

During the first America's Cup ever held in Europe, a persistent lull on the water contrasted with the constant activity on land, as millions flocked to Valencia, turning the world's oldest sports competition into a giant party for young and old.

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Happy hour:
The crowds gather to celebrate on the pier; passersby are dwarfed by the gigantic image of the Swiss team's *Alinghi* (right)





Everyone wants a glimpse of the legendary cup. The 156-year-old trophy looks rather battered and isn't even really a cup, but rather a bottomless ewer. It's almost poetic in its symbolism: the cup as bottomless pit. For as everyone knows, no matter how much money you pour into the America's Cup—it's never enough.

**Head to wind:
Valencia is on the move—and the Cayennes are
on the ready for those on firm ground**



The “Foredeck” is where the action is. As the name suggests, the appearance of the elegant structure is reminiscent of those on luxury yachts. Its location in the Port America's Cup is a prime one, too. Here, the grinders, trimmers, floaters, helmsmen, and skippers are so close the enthusiastic crowds can almost reach out and touch them. Throngs of fans gather on the pier every day to cheer their favorite crews.

With a reception like that, anyone would feel like a winner, though, technically speaking, most of the sailors will leave Valencia as “losers,” since no one takes silver or second place in the America's Cup. There's only one winning team, and the silver trophy they take home is surrounded by the nimbus of legend. The cup is on display in the Foredeck, and the lines to see it are long. But seen up close, it's actually rather unattractive. The 156-year-old trophy looks rather battered and isn't even really a cup, but rather a bottomless ewer. It's almost poetic in its symbolism: the cup as bottomless pit. For as everyone knows, no matter how much money you pour into the America's Cup—it's never enough.

Maybe it's the legend that draws the masses here on this hot summer's day. I suspect the prospect of catching a whiff of the cosmopolitan breeze wafting around the different nations' base camps may also be part of the appeal. The water taxi stand is located between “South Africa” and “France.” The kiddie park with the pond for remote-controlled boats isn't far from “Switzerland.” Just a stone's throw from the Americans' base camp is Porto Pasta. The Italian restaurant is the ideal place to chill out and watch the goings-on, as it affords a perfect view of the marina. Later the yachts of the rich and famous will moor here, but for now, this is where the eleven syndicates have set up their headquarters. Shaped like giant cubes, the base camps are both repair shops and living quarters. They are also status symbols. The Swiss *Alinghi* syndicate has come up with an especially effective way to project an image of speed. A giant photo of the team in action takes up the entire outer wall of the camp, which tilts outward at an angle like a sail in the wind for a particularly dynamic effect. ▶





Unflagging appeal:
Fans come to stroll through the harbor
or enjoy the attractions around the
Foredeck (above right)

The hosts went all out to turn Valencia into a venue befitting the occasion, spending a total of 410 million euros. The investment paid off. Between April and early July, almost three million visitors descended on the bars, restaurants, and souvenir shops in Valencia's harbor.



Only a select few have access to the inner sanctum of the base camps; admission is by invitation only. The lucky guests can hobnob and enjoy refreshments in elegant surroundings, but the chief attraction is the unobstructed view of the regattas from up on the roof terrace. The breeze is invigorating, and the boats on the water paint a pretty scene. Viewed from the harbor, however, the competition seems very far away, almost unreal. We can only guess at the effort, speed, experience, and tactical skill involved in the skirmishes taking place in the distance.

Down below in the harbor, there are plenty of TV screens that provide a closer look at the action, but even there only the cognoscenti can really follow what's going on. However, no one seems to mind too much. There are 22 bars and restaurants offering pasta, seafood, deck chairs, and any number of rainbow-hued cocktails. As if by unspoken agreement, the sound emanating from the various speakers is pretty much the same and is perhaps best described as "chill-out music." It's not so bad. At least our ears are spared clashes between different beats battling for supremacy. We're having such a good time that we don't feel like go-

ing back to the hotel after our late dinner. Instead, we head to the legendary Estrella Dam Lounge, where guests often party into the wee hours of the morning.

The hosts of the first America's Cup ever held in Europe went all out to turn Valencia into a venue befitting the occasion, spending 410 million euros. The investment paid off. Between April and early July, almost three million out-of-towners flocked to the bars and restaurants in Valencia's harbor; the record for visitors on a single day stands at 70,000. Tourists descended on the souvenir shops in droves: it appeared that everyone wanted a T-shirt with the logo of their favorite syndicate—or at least in their favorite colors.

Can it really be that a few years ago Valencia was nothing but a shabby container port? If you don't believe it, just check out La Lonja bar. Located right next to "China," this decidedly unpretentious watering hole is a relic from the old days when hardly anyone in Valencia, not to mention the rest of Europe, paid much attention to the town's harbor. No one under sixteen is admitted, the beer flows copiously—from cans—and even smoking is still ▶

allowed. The noise level is considerable, made up of a cacophony of voices, the clatter of dishes, and the regular swoosh of brooms that sweep up the stone floor. La Lonja might not be the most glamorous place around, but business is still good. There are plenty of passersby to add to the ranks of the diehard regulars—and this is where the yachts' crews like to hang out. After all, they're not here to kick back—they have a job to do. And in addition to full concentration, that job requires a strong team and an aggressive competitive spirit. In that sense, La Lonja is perfect: the raucous atmosphere is like an injection of pure testosterone. Chill-out music is not playing here.

When the boats head out for the day's racing, the teams also rely on music to get their competitive juices flowing. The New Zealand crew swears by ZZ Top, the Swedes prefer Guns N' Roses, and the Germans pump themselves up with Eminem. Of course, the cheers of the crowds help, too. But as much as they bask in the constant attention, the scrutiny and barrage of questions from television crews and reporters can get pretty exhausting. In the words of Danish veteran sailor Jesper Bank, skipper of the United Internet Team Germany, "For three years we've just been trying to lead a normal life and do a good job. But it hasn't always been easy."

The party is over now. Dusk has descended on the harbor and life on the water has settled back into its normal pace. The Swiss team is on its way home with the cup, savoring the sweet taste of victory. The others may not have a trophy to take home, but they'll surely be taking home plenty of memories. ◀

United Internet Team Germany: A Fleet of Cayennes for VIP Guests

Strutting their stuff:
The fleet of Cayennes in front of the German syndicate's base camp

As the teams competed in the waters off Valencia, six Porsche Cayennes showed their mettle on land. As the United Internet Team Germany's mobility partner, Porsche placed the fleet at the German syndicate's disposal to ferry VIP guests to the harbor. About 60 guests a day came to enjoy the exclusive ambiance in the German base camp, stroll through the harbor, watch the regattas, and experience the excitement and thrill of the America's Cup.

