

All to sail for

Adam Szepter looks ahead to the 2017 America's Cup World Series sailing extravaganza to see what's in store for fans for its 35th edition



The America's Cup, first awarded in 1851 after a race around the Isle of Wight, comes full circle this July. The best sailors in the world, including Britain's Sir Ben Ainslie, will be in action in the opening America's Cup World Series (ACWS) event in Portsmouth on the south coast of

England, just across the Solent strait from the Isle of Wight.

Under the watchful gaze of Queen Victoria, Britain's Royal Yacht Squadron lost that first race to the New York Yacht Club schooner 'America'. Britain has never since had its hands on the 'Auld Mug', renamed in honour of the first

winning boat; but Ben Ainslie Racing (BAR), led by the most successful sailor in Olympic history and representing the Royal Yacht Squadron once more, is aiming to rectify that in 2017, starting with the opening ACWS event in the team's home town.

Sir Ben Ainslie, who helped Oracle Team USA to victory in the 2013 America's Cup after winning medals at five consecutive Olympics from 1996-2012 – including gold at the last four – launched BAR last June in the presence of the Duchess of Cambridge. The team is made up of some of the best British and international sailors, designers, builders and racing support. Two of its most high-profile recruits – designer Adrian Newey and CEO Martin Whitmarsh – came from the world of Formula One motor racing

Inset: Ben Ainslie's BAR team aim to bring the Cup back to Britain
Main: Ainslie led the USA's Oracle team to victory in 2013

and are expected to help bring the cup back to its original stomping ground this time round.

The history and prestige associated with the America's Cup attracts not only the world's top sailors and yacht designers but also the involvement of wealthy entrepreneurs and sponsors. It is a test not only of sailing skill and boat and sail design, but also of fundraising and management skills. It was well over 100 years before the America's Cup was taken away from New York following the inaugural race; indeed, in more than 150 years since, only four nations have won what is often referred to as the oldest trophy in international



sport: USA, Australia, New Zealand and Switzerland.

One colourful character who will be missed from the 35th edition of the America's Cup will be Alan Bond, who led that first successful America's Cup challenge back in 1977, bringing yachting's most famous trophy home with him to Western Australia after his fourth campaign. Bond died in June this year at the age of 77.

The ACWS is the first stage of the 2017 America's Cup, with all of the teams competing on foiling, wingsailed catamarans, an updated version of the AC45 raced in the last series. The other America's Cup teams who will be battling it out for the 'Auld Mug' are defenders Oracle Team USA; Artemis Racing of Sweden; Emirates Team New Zealand; Team France; and Softbank Team Japan.

Overall ranking position in the ACWS determines the starting points score of the teams in



the America's Cup Qualifiers in 2017, ahead of the America's Cup Finals that year in Bermuda. Subsequent ACWS events in 2015 include Gothenburg, Sweden, in August and Hamilton, Bermuda, in October. Four to six events are expected in 2016, including a



Above: The BAR team training ahead of this year's event

Left: The oldest active trophy in international sport

Below: Sweden's Artemis Racing will be battling it out to be crowned champions of the prized 'Auld Mug'

second event in Portsmouth. But before all that, get set for quite an extravaganza on England's south coast this summer, with the sailing accompanied by high-octane water sports demonstrations and a Red Arrows display as well as Portsmouth Live!, three evenings of musical entertainment ending with a rock concert headlined by 1980s super-groups Spandau Ballet and Wet Wet Wet.

Saturday is when the sailing gets serious, with the first two races on the road to the 2017 America's Cup, and 'Super Sunday' is when the outcome of this first ACWS event is decided. It's a double point scoring day so there will be all to play for until the very last race. ■

Tickets and more information:
<http://acws-portsmouth.americascup.com/en/home.html>