



# If the Caap fits

Jonas Börjesson talks to former World Champion Mats Caap about why he is back in the OK Dinghy

**M**ATS CAAP SHOWED UP AT the Worlds in Quiberon and surprised most of the OK community by putting together a very consistent series. Almost 30 years after his world title in 1987 he was back at the top, ending up just outside the podium. Jonas Börjesson had the opportunity so sit down and have an interesting chat with Mats at his home looking out over the Kattegat sea that separates Sweden from Denmark.

Mats Caap was born in Norrköping on the east coast of Sweden almost 60 years ago. Norrköping was, back then in the 1950s, an industrial town where football was the common sport among the youths. Mats' brother Peter, who is three years older, lured him into sailing. Mats' and Peter's parents were supportive and quite soon Mats spent most of his spare time sailing the Optimist.

Today, Mats is living on the west coast of Sweden in Varberg some 80 km south of Gothenburg together with his wife, Annette, and their children, who are on their way to moving out. Mats works as an orthopedic surgeon at a medical centre in Gothenburg specialised in athletic injuries, and commutes daily by car or train.

Mats started sailing in the Optimist and raced that until he was 15 years old.

*"I made the qualifications for the nationals and I think I was around top 30 or 40 in Sweden during my last two years. From 1972, when I turned 15, I started sailing the OK Dinghy and kept doing that until 1986. Then I started sailing the Finn and did so until the autumn of 1991 when I decided to finally quit my sailing career."*

**MATS STUDIED MEDICINE** from 1978 and in 1985 he moved to Varberg where he got his first job as a medical doctor and has been living there ever since. He made the Swedish Olympic team and participated in the 1988 Seoul Olympics in the Finn, resulting in a 16th place. The Finn campaign he started in 1986 was far from a straight line of success. After Kiel Week in 1987, Mats was so disappointed with his sailing and his speed that he decided to sell his Finn and even told himself never to compete in dinghy sailing again.

*"Then I realized the OK Dinghy Worlds was to be held in Luleå in Sweden later that summer. I was able to borrow my brother's OK and did some practicing and spent a week in Århus in Denmark with Jørgen Holm at Green sails, and suddenly I had the speed. It felt as if I was five per cent faster than everybody else and before I understood it I had become*

*World Champion."*

After this success, a new Finn campaign felt natural and when Bjørn and Stig Westergaard, Mats' Danish training partners during those years, told him about a Finn that had been found in a barn outside of Los Angeles the campaign got started again.

*"Amazingly, that Finn dinghy provided me with the speed I had lacked previously and it was great fun again. I was out on tour in Europe all winter and spring in 1988 and was given the Seoul ticket."*

The campaign continued and Mats was aiming for the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona. He did well but felt he was not competitive enough in windy conditions. He decided to quit his campaign after the Finn Worlds in 1991. Perhaps a certain Fredrik Lööf who was Mats' main competitor for the Olympic qualification had some part in that decision.

*"I told myself that I would never ever do any dinghy racing again."*

**HOWEVER, HE WAS** unable to keep that promise to himself.

*"The 1996 OK Dinghy Worlds was given to Varberg and I thought it could be fun with a little comeback when the Worlds is coming to my home town."*

Mats did well and a top five result in the final race could have given him his second Championship. His main competitor for the title, Christian Carlsson, capsized and retired. Mats was just outside the top ten at the final leeward mark and felt he had to take a chance to move up but picked the wrong side.

*"I remember having a discussion with myself where I argued that I do not care for the silver since I already had won the title once. I want to win again, nothing else counts. As often happens when you take a chance in sailing the lift did not come and I ended up in the middle of the bunch and was seventh at the end. That was very disappointing and once again I told myself never to do any dinghy racing again."*

Mats would probably have kept this promise if he had not have become ill in the autumn of 2011. His wife noticed that





he needed to do something to speed up his recovery and talked him into getting out in the dinghy again. So in 2012 Mats started to sail OK Dinghy again. He could be seen on the Kattegat outside Varberg spending hours on his own to get in shape physically.

*"I was not always up for it but my wife kept pushing me to go out and sail. After a while I realised that the sailing not only improved my physical ability but also provided me with some kind of mental rehabilitation."*

So was Quiberon a targeted campaign to get back in the top of the competition?

*"Not really. I just kept sailing and I was able to increase the hours in the boat every year from 2012. In 2016 I had some built up vacation to take out and I started to sail 3-4 times every week. Mostly, just because I felt good getting the hours in the boat, not because I had any specific aim for a result in Quiberon."*

**DURING THE NORDICS** and at the Kiel week Mats realised his speed was not competitive enough. So, once again he decided to spend a few days with Jørgen Holm in Århus in Denmark as he had done back in 1987.

*"I tested a new mast and a few sails and already within a couple of days my speed was improving."*

Mats says the intention of going to Quiberon was basically social.

*"Nice place, good weather so why not go there and have fun." Mats and his wife rented a house and the rest of the family joined in for a nice vacation. "I felt that my speed was probably alright after the clinic with Jørgen Holm but otherwise I did not know what to expect and I had no pressure on my performance at all. I was totally surprised by my results and I could not believe I delivered day after day. Whatever decision I took, it came out right. Everything went my way and it was just a fantastic event."*

He says is not sure what his next goal will be.

*"It is difficult to say. I will for sure keep on sailing, mostly on my own, as much as I can and am able to do. If it feels all right, I will go to Faaborg for the Europeans. I have a new Delfs from the Vejle Yacht Service on order that I will start sailing this spring. I just do the OK sailing for the fun of it and have no goals."*

Is he focussed on the results?

*"No, first of all I am back in the OK Dinghy because I love to sail it. Secondly, I got some really good old friends in the class and there are a bunch of new sailors that are great to*

*be around so I would say the social side is more important to me than the competitive side. As long as I feel I can handle the boat I will show up at competitions and my initial goal will always just be to have fun but once the gun has gone off the devil within you takes over and I have to admit I want to win the race as much as everybody else."*

What part of the boat (hull, mast or sail) does he think is the most important for the speed?

*"I would say it is all about having a good combination. But, perhaps the hull is most important. I think it is important to have a hull that is rather full up front. That will provide good downwind speed. A fuller bow is probably even more important for the heavier sailors. The mast should have an even bend. It could be soft or medium, but the sail must of course fit the mast perfectly. Regarding sail brand I don't really think it matters which you choose. Every sailmaker producing OK sails today make great and fast sails. I think it is just a question of choosing one brand and sticking with it and getting to know it really well. Very few sailors improve their results by switching sailmakers and you need to be an exceptional sailor to be able to handle different brands."*

**IT'S OBVIOUS THAT** Mats puts a lot of his focus on speed. During the conversation topics regarding strategy or tactics are rarely touched upon, but speed issues crop up quite often. It seems he is really following the old saying that great speed makes you into a tactical and strategic genius.

Mats relates a good story from the 1980s describing his hunt for speed. *"In 1986 while I was sailing the Finn, I and Bjørn and Stig Westergaard went over to Needlespar in England. We brought our dinghies and stayed there for a week and sailed and tested masts. The Needlespar workshop was run by the famous Mr David Hunt and the workshop was located just behind his house. We bought 35 masts, which we loaded on to our van and drove home. The van was really overloaded and we had to drive very carefully not to end up in the ditch. We planned our driving so we arrived in Denmark in the middle of the night to reduce the risk for trouble at the customs. Luckily, it all went well. We practiced in Hellerup in Denmark more or less every weekend and after each weekend I brought one mast at a time to Sweden. I kept the masts I thought were the fastest and sold the rest. That trip to England was repeated in 1987."*

Mats will most likely keep on sailing his OK Dinghy for many years and whenever his speed is right he will show up to have fun at regattas. ►