Mike Zajicek puts the final touches on one of his custom-designed course boards.

The World's Fastest Kiteboards

BAY AREA SHAPER PROPELS PERFORMANCE TO THE NEXT LEVEL. **BY DAVID WELLS**

The Mike's Lab design that has been winning course races all year long.

Johnny Heineken didn't just win the Kiteboard Course Racing World Championships—he completely dominated them. Rob Douglas didn't just break the world speed record—he obliterated it. So what do Heineken and Douglas have in common? Mike Zajicek.

Zajicek is the Mike in Mike's Lab, the famous San Francisco Bay Area boardmaker. A longtime windsurfing shaper with a collection of world title boards already under his belt, and more business than he knew what to do with, Zajicek was reluctantly dragged in to kiteboarding about five years ago. "Come on, Mike, make me a board. I am telling you this kiteboarding thing is going to be huge," was the plea from Ultra-Nectar's Chip Wasson. It took Wasson nearly three years of continuous prodding, but Zajicek finally saw the light and the results since then have been nothing short of spectacular.

Mike's Lab is based in the hills of a small San Francisco Bay Area town called El Sobrante. Getting to Mike's Lab is an adventure in itself, blazing your own trail through a maze of privately maintained roads with lush, if not overgrown, foliage giving something of an urban jungle effect. But it's a journey many of the world's top kiteboarders have made, knowing a board from Mike's Lab is simply the finest one can buy. Beyond Mike's flawless shaping, it's his attention to detail and innovative construction techniques that make his boards something special. "My board is so light it will blow away on the beach, but even after tons of hard riding it looks just like the day I got it," says Heineken.

Besides Heineken and Douglas you'll also find 2010 World Champion Adam Koch riding Mike's Lab boards and, in fact, it was Heineken, Koch and Bryan Lake—all riding the "Lab" boards—who took a one-two-three sweep at this year's Sylt

World Championships. Even more impressive was Heineken's 10 bullets (wins) out of 12 races sailed! And where was Zajicek while all this winning was going on? On the Sylt beach playing board caddie and more importantly watching and learning. When asked what makes Zajicek's boards so special, Wasson was quick to respond. "Mike listens. He translates things we tell him straight into design improvements and they almost always work right away," says Heineken. "Nothing starts from scratch; it always builds on what works and Mike changes just enough to see if the changes are positive. From there we can push it farther."

One thing that makes Zajicek boards so special is the end-to-end control he maintains on the design and build processes. Mike designs, shapes, laminates, and finishes all his own boards with no other hands touching the prize rides throughout the process. The results are "the strongest, lightest, and most consistent boards on the planet," according to Rob Douglas.

"Mike is first of all a true craftsman and an artist," gushes Koch. "Mike will not make a crappy board just to sell a board. He believes in his riders just as much as he believes in himself. He is also one of the most modest guys I've met in my entire life."

MIKE LISTENS. HE TRANSLATES THINGS WE TELL HIM STRAIGHT INTO DESIGN IMPROVEMENTS.

And where does this modesty come from? A hard fought and well-earned existence. Zajicek, the son of a dissident Czech father, escaped the communist country in the late '80s via a clandestine excursion in Yugoslavia, vaulting over a wall with only 100 bucks in his pocket, his brother Val at his side, and never looking back. After some time in a refugee camp in Austria, Zajicek and his newlywed bride Teresa (the two were married in the refugee camp) arranged a trip to San Francisco in 1987 and Mike's Lab was born.

Given Zajicek's passion for the sport and the zealous nature of his quality control he has been reluctant to engage in any mass production of his boards. That's a problem for anyone who wants one anytime soon, as there can be a long waiting list at any given time. With the release of a production board (slated for winter 2012), however, all that's about to change. Details are still in the works, but look for a no-compromises board that's sure to be in front of the fleet.

"Without Mike, kiteboard racing would not be what it is today. Anyone who rides [Mike's boards] will never want to ride another board again," says Koch. "What can I say, we are all spoiled."

World's fastest kiter Rob Douglas and his speed boards designed by Zajicek.

nObermeyer photo order