

Ernesto Bertarelli: My vision for the America's Cup

Since Alinghi's successful defence of the America's Cup in July, much has been said by many and I wish to explain my personal passion for bringing my vision of the America's Cup to life.

When I founded Alinghi it was all about creating a team to share the passion of sailing through every channel available to as wide an audience as possible. We tried to adopt a fresh and open way of doing things and making part of our base accessible to the public was only one example of the many innovations Alinghi brought to the America's Cup. I believe this approach was a contributing factor to our success in 2003.

With the Defence of the Cup, we got the opportunity to share this spirit with the whole event. When we began, we set out a clear and innovative strategy focusing on the choice of venue, the set up of a purpose built port, the America's Cup Park and the Acts as part of our vision of opening the event to as large an audience as possible.

Over six million people attended the event, which for the first time saw the participation of syndicates from five continents. The television coverage extended the reach to over four billion viewers.

The critics who opposed the Acts, the choice of venue, the television production, etc. were numerous and vociferous but the facts proved that the 32nd America's Cup was a positive turning point for this historical event.

At the same time as realising some of the fascinating aspects of the America's Cup I also became aware of its weaknesses. The uncertain format of the event meant that teams – and the entire America's Cup Community – had no future beyond the next Cup. This leads to teams only surviving one cycle and the whole event needing to recreate itself every three to five years. This results in a substantial increase in costs and difficulty in securing long term sponsors.

For the 33rd edition, the concept was to empower the organisers to implement further innovations without unnecessary disruptions. The proposal to create the new AC90 class with the one boat sailing rule in a two year cycle is a major measure towards managing the costs while creating further excitement and by using the existing facilities of Valencia we had the ideal platform to maintain momentum. This would have enabled the event to prosper and generate greater revenue for the organisers to share with the teams.

The recent events in the New York courts, with the Judge ruling the CNEV invalid because it had not held its regatta at the right time, show the Achilles' heel of the event and the possibility of its destabilisation through individual actions. Again, as in 2003, our vision has received criticism from those reluctant to change. I stand by one of the principles of the Cup: the Trustee, with the Defender, has the responsibility for the governance of the event and to implement changes which will allow it to prosper.

With a view towards the future and having studied the rules of the Cup I observed that the Deed does not actively promote parity for the teams and a long term future of the event.

In October of this year I went to New York to start a dialogue with the New York Yacht Club to examine what enthusiasm there was to make the event more relevant to

today's sporting landscape. The Deed of Gift was, after all, written over 150 years ago at the NYYC and could not anticipate the changes that the world has undergone. I was not expecting the discussions to be completed swiftly but I was thrilled when Charles Townsend, Commodore of the NYYC and George W. Carmany III, Chairman of NYYC America's Cup Committee, expressed the same feelings.

It is fair to say that the 33rd America's Cup has been ill-fated and I have a desire to make it right. The fastest way to achieve this objective would be for the Golden Gate Yacht Club and the Société Nautique de Genève to work with the New York Yacht Club on revising the Deed of Gift to make it appropriate for today without losing what makes the America's Cup special. As part of this process I am happy to compromise on some of the Defender's rights to achieve what is best for the event.

In effect, I raise the following questions:

- Should the Defender automatically be qualified for the final AC Match or should all teams start on equal footings?*
- Should the schedule of venues and content of regulations be announced several cycles in advance allowing planning and funding?*
- Should the governance of the Cup become permanent and be managed by entities representing past and current trustees as well as competing teams?*

Over the weekend I spoke at length with Larry Ellison explaining our proposal and I was pleased that he was very supportive of the principles in the proposed changes.

Based on these principles it is my intention to work towards a renovated America's Cup to take place in Valencia and to be raced with the certainty that the event cannot be disrupted to meet individual requirements to the detriment of those willing and able to compete.

If this revision of the governing documents of the America's Cup cannot be achieved, we will have to accept the GGYC challenge under the Deed of Gift.

*Ernesto Bertarelli
President of Alinghi
Defender of the 33rd America's Cup*