

Boy's Youth Olympic Gold winner, Ariel Corneil
from the Dominican Republic
Photo: Matias Capizzano / World Sailing

"THE GAWA WAS HARDER TO CONTROL. IT REQUIRED A DIFFERENT BODY POSITION AND SOME OF THE KIDS HAD DIFFICULTY WITH THAT," SAID VANNUCCI. "BUT IN RACING CONDITIONS IN MANY TESTS WITH GPS OVER KILOMETRES IT WAS ALWAYS FASTER THAN OTHER BOARDS—SOMETIMES A BIG DIFFERENCE, SOMETIMES SMALL. BUT IT WAS NEVER SLOWER."

SCOOPING GOLD

UPEKSHA'S MOULD-BREAKING GAWA BOARD DOMINATED THE BOYS' AND GIRLS' PODIUMS AT KITEBOARDING'S INAUGURAL APPEARANCE ON THE YOUTH OLYMPICS STAGE, HAULING BOTH GOLDS AND FIVE FROM A POSSIBLE SIX MEDALS. IAN MACKINNON REPORTS ON HOW A GARAGE START-UP IN THAILAND CONQUERED THE WORLD

WORDS: IAN MACKINNON

As competitors can only register one board at any IKA TT-R event, the boards must perform well in both light and strong wind conditions. A concave runs throughout the length of the Gawa, providing a path for the water to flow along, exiting at the rear, making the board easier to control at speed. To compensate for a concave that can also suck a lot of power from the kite, the Gawa boards are double the stiffness of the average boards, which is crucial for speed, especially in lighter winds
Photo: Andrew Bunnag

The smaller Gawa 37 (left) is longer and narrower than most twin-tip boards (5cm narrower than the average IKA registered boards), more reminiscent of board designs from 2000 to 2003. The narrower, longer board allows the rider to hold more power in stronger wind conditions without skidding out, providing control and a higher top speed. The Gawa 42 is similar but allows better performance in lighter winds or for heavier riders. The boards are light: the Gawa 37 is 2.1kg, the 42 is 2.3kg. The average weight of most IKA registered boards is 2.9kg
Photo: Andrew Bunnag

From the unlikely setting of a bucolic backwater in rural Thailand, Upeksha Kiteboards began its journey to the top. In just over a year the specialist slalom kiteboards became the "must-have" platform for a remarkable 20 of the 24 riders who qualified for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) in Buenos Aires last October.

Yet for all Upeksha's soaring success, most kiteboarders beyond the rarified confines of TwinTip:Racing (TT:R) slalom racing will be only dimly aware of the boutique brand – if at all. TT:R is a specialist format developed specifically for the groundbreaking debut at the Youth Games. Its slalom-boardercross style was designed to foster grassroots racing for young kiteboarders battling on everyday tube kites and twin-tip boards. The discipline's enthusiastic embrace by young riders – some already budding freestyle stars – hunting Olympic glory, was testament to its popularity. But racing remains a niche, if growing, offshoot within kiteboarding, so Upeksha's dominance likely flies under the radar.

It's likely a little explanation is in order about how a tiny board builder that few have even heard of could carve out a name for itself in

