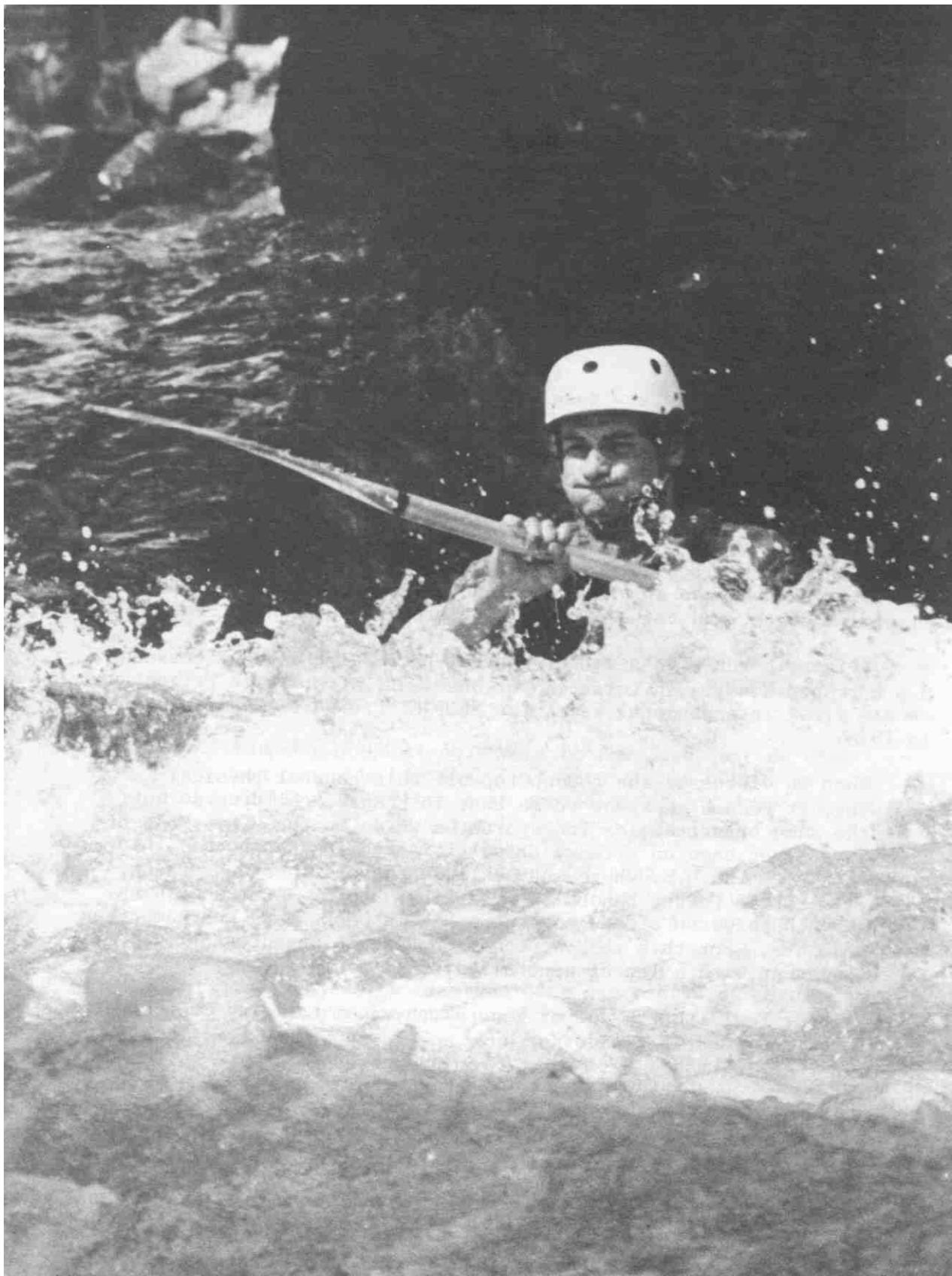


JEAN YVES PRIGENT



Jean Yves Prigent of France at Bala. "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down!" (Photo Courtesy of Jean Yves Prigent)

JEAN YVES PRIGENT

Jean Yves Prigent was something of a "late bloomer" in slalom, having obtained his best result in the K1 individuals at age 27. He was World Champion in team in Spittal at age 23, but it was not until 1980 and 1981 that he really started to come on. In 1980 he was in the three-way tie for second in the Europa Cup. In 1981 at Bala, he was Bronze Medalist in both the individual and team races.

Jean Yves Prigent was born May 16, 1954 in Rennes, France and grew up there. At Bala, he was 69 inches tall, weighed 154 pounds and used a 206 paddle -- wooden blades on an aluminum shaft.

Chronology

Jean Yves started paddling when he was five years old and started racing at age 14. However, he really didn't start training hard until he was in the army from October 1973 to October 1974. Virtually everyone on the French team has done a year in the French army, where they are allowed to join the "Battalion de Joinville" in Fontainebleau, where they do nothing but train. When Prigent was there, there were 15 paddlers, five each from slalom, downriver and flatwater. There was an army coach who talked with Erik Koechlin, the K1 slalom coach, and between them, they prepared a plan for Prigent.

Prigent began with a lot of general physical training, between 3-5 workouts a day. This lasted for one year, after which Prigent was in his first international race, the Skopje "Pre-World Championships" in 1974.

When we discussed the reason for all this general physical training, it became apparent to me that in France, children do not have the same opportunities for sports as we do in the U.S. Most of them have never been on a team, or participated in any sport. This contrasts with the U.S. where many children have either done track, football, Little League baseball, wrestling, hockey -- or something. Thus, French children often lack the athletic background that American children have. For this reason, the French begin an international racer's career with a lot of general physical training.

Prigent feels that a lot of general physical training is good background and good if you do not have access to whitewater -- which he doesn't during the week. But if you have free access to whitewater, he suggests you use it instead of all the weight lifting, running and so on. Prigent doesn't have whitewater where he lives (in Rennes), but he can get to some on weekends. Bernard Renault, on the other hand, lives very close to whitewater and paddles on it all the time.

OCTOBER 1974 - OCTOBER 1975: Prigent trained less hard during this time, but the work was specific boat work. He was French National Champion at Bourg St. Maurice, but he did not try out for the World Championship team that went to Skopje (and was subsequently barred from competition).

OCTOBER 1975 - OCTOBER 1976: This was Prigent's first year in CREPS, a school for physical education teachers. Because he was enrolled in a physical education school, he was required to take many different sports. Thus, he did skiing (near Grenoble); flatwater canoe (not K1) on lakes, and other sports. During the winter, he had a swimming pool with 15 gates. He trained once a day in the boat, twice a day in preparation for the Europa Cup.

OCTOBER 1976 - OCTOBER 1977: His training was similar to 1975-6, except that this year, being a World Championships year, he did a lot of team training. Erik Koechlin (himself a Bronze Medalist in K1 Team in 1969) picked the team at Easter. The other two (Bernard Renault and Christian Frossard) and Prigent trained together a great deal, especially in the weekend training camps. There were three of these, lasting from 8 to 21 days apiece. Usually, at these camps they would use 30-gate whitewater courses and take 3 individual runs and 2 team runs, practically every day. He discovered the following about team racing:

- a. If the first upstream is in a big eddy, have all three boats go into it one right after another, it's faster than weaving.
- b. You should be close enough to the lead boat so that you can ride his wake. If part of the course is shallow, the first boat should wait so the second and third boats can catch his wake.
- c. Order of the team: Put a fast boat first to pull the team - but the boat has to be very clean. Let the team experiment, though, and decide on the order it feels most comfortable with.

At Spittal, Prigent's team had only one ten point penalty -- Christian Frossard hit gate 18R.

Prigent mentioned that just before Spittal, he had to take a big exam in school and this hampered his training. I have always remembered that French team run in 1977, because none of the 3 had a good individual run:

Renault: 15th out of 71
Frossard: 20th out of 71
Prigent: 43rd out of 71

Perhaps studying for exams hurt Prigent's individual finish, but the fact remains that three relatively mediocre boaters won the World Championships in the toughest class.

OCTOBER 1977 - OCTOBER 1978: Prigent's training this year was very similar to the last two except that he did much less team training. He did a lot of skiing.

1979 1980: Training for these years was quite different than for the previous three because he was now out of school and was not required to do all the general physical education stuff. Thus, Prigent did much more specific boat work in these two years. In 1979, the French did not practice team anywhere near as much as in 1977 and consequently did not do as well. But Prigent did succeed in placing second (to his teammate Bernard Renault) in the 1980 Europa Cup.

1981: In the fall of 1980, Jean Yves visited England. While training there, he did an in-depth study of the elite British K1 paddlers. When he returned to France, he wrote a comprehensive paper on what he saw. The paper examined in detail the year-round training of all of Britain's top K1s.

During the winter Jean Yves' training often consisted of work in the downriver boat:

- * 4 X 10 minutes, OR

- * 3 X 15 minutes, OR

- * 2 X 20 minutes

In each case, he would have a rest of between 2-3 minutes between each repetition. The work was done on flatwater, usually a canal. Each workout lasted one hour and was designed to improve his aerobic powers (V_{O_2} Max).

Jean Yves also did 15 second courses with long rest (120 seconds) to improve speed, acceleration and starting abilities. He would do 30 repetitions of these very short courses. Other work consisted of 60 second courses with 60 seconds rest. Sometimes (but rarely) he did five minute courses. As race season approached, he did 120-210 second courses, thus simulating race distance.

In the spring, Jean Yves made a trip to the United States and trained with the U.S. team, largely in Washington, D.C., for five weeks. During that period, he did two workouts a day consisting of 30, 60 and 120 second courses on the Feeder Canal, a class I-II rapids; and full length, timed and scored runs on whitewater in training camps with U.S. team members.

When he returned home to France, he did a great deal of timed work against Bernard Renault (4th at Bala).

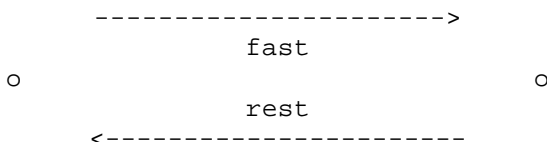
Scientific Principles

French slalomists based their training on a manual of scientific principles. The paddlers take a series of physical examinations and gear their training around correcting any physiological weaknesses discovered during the tests. The manual they use contains yearly training plans for all ages, up to elite levels. In a general sense, the manual advocates a great proportion of aerobic work up to the elite levels at which point a larger proportion of anaerobic work is recommended. The manual deals solely with the physiological aspects of training. It does not say a word about gate technique or how to practice it. Looking back on it now, Jean Yves says of the manual:

We were hurt by the training technique which says that during the winter work should be done on long courses, going to short ones only right before races. This has limited many athletes (but not all!).

Interestingly, the French say that they discovered the value of short courses all year round (anaerobic work) through Bernard Renault's training with American Cl, Ron Lugbill, in the fall of 1979. Ron lived in France that year, and Renault said that training with him helped him (Renault) win the Europa Cup in 1980.

SPECIAL PEAKING TECHNIQUE. Two days before the big race, the French have a hard session on flatwater. They set up a short course (20 paddle strokes) around buoys:



They do 10 reps on this, rest 10 minutes and then repeat the whole thing. This supposedly builds up your speed.

One day before the race, they do some speed work in gates but not a hard session. They have a 10 gate course: 3 gates are done hard and 7 easy. This is balance work and helps build confidence.

SPECIAL DRUGS TO WARD OFF COLDS. Just before he left, Prigent showed me a prescription for a drug called "Ribomunil" which he was supposed to take twice a day between then and the Worlds. Prigent was vague about what it does, but said that he thought it was supposed to ward off colds. It was prescribed by the team doctor who happens to be the brother of Erik Koechlin, the National coach.

TRAINING LOG. Prigent keeps a log but is sort of lax in filling it out. I looked at it and found it to be vague in parts: "two hours training today" (no description of the kind of work done, etc.). Other times he just forgot to fill it out at all. I gathered that he worked more on intuition than anything, intuition and his knowledge of physical education.

Technique

Jean Yves Prigent is very good at keeping his boat on the proper line. His style appears to be quite relaxed, except that he has the habit of puffing up his cheeks when he gets tired. His stroke position is quite precise and he is very agile and quick on turning movements. When he paddles forward, he is pretty much of an "arm paddler", employing very little torso rotation during the stroke. He leans quite far forward when paddling straight ahead. He explains how he evolved his technique:

I worked a lot on gates with my brother when we were young. He's the one who first started doing two-stroke upstreams, which was better. We tried to learn how to use the paddle better, the water better and the boat better. We reached a certain level (French National Team).

Certain coaches, like Erik Koechlin or Claude Peschier helped our technique by using a video.

Our objective is to achieve the most rational utilization of the paddle, that is, insert it like the Cls (very vertical), get it solidly in the water, and apply the appropriate force. For this, you have to be physically strong and we did weight lifting during the winter. I don't think my technique has developed simply with the passage of a lot of time. I and other coaches and athletes observed the fastest boaters, like Fox, Lugbill, and Hearn -- we learned a lot from looking at them.

Late Bloomer

When asked why he thought he had taken longer to get to the top

than most elite paddlers, Jean Yves offered the following explanation:

I think I achieved my best results relatively late in my career for several reasons. We had a good team in France in 1969 with Claude Peschier. The athletes were training for the Olympics in 1972 but they had bad results and left the sport.

The French team had to rebuild from scratch with people like Bernard Renault who was very young and without experience: we were without a "driving force," if you will. Also, technically we were behind very much. For example, on upstream gates we hit them very low and lost a lot of time. Our boats were too large and not competitive. It took us a year to get used to the Elite -- it required quite a different style of paddling. Then, it took us another year to believe that we actually could win. B. Renault, T. Junquet, and I won races, and then we knew that victory was possible.



France's Bernard Renault won the Europa Cup in 1980. Photo by Stuart Fisher of "Canoeist" (incorporating "White Water Magazine")

The last reason is that I trained alone a lot and without times. We worked with times only once in a while. For the last two years we have worked together more often, and against the watch much more.

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