

shelleyjory



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DAMN! HOW DID HE DO THAT?

Steve Curtis made racing history by winning his eighth world championship title in Dubai last month. But he had to work for it

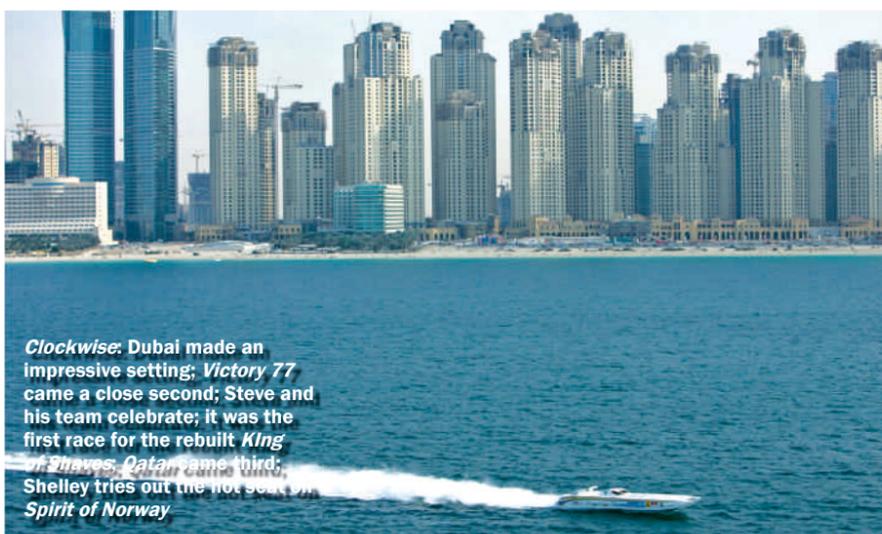
Last year may have been Steve's most successful for championship wins, but it turned out to be one of the worst for mechanical failures, crashes and assorted problems that go hand in hand with offshore racing. Which meant he had to fight to gain his eighth world championship title – his fifth in a row with driver Bjorn Gjeltsen.

While leading the Mina Seyahi Grand Prix, a week before the finals in Dubai, *Spirit of Norway* had piston failure, resulting in a con rod punching a hole in the block of the engine on the last lap. This put them in 5th place and allowed the Victory team to win a valuable twenty points, leaving *Spirit* just one point ahead overall.

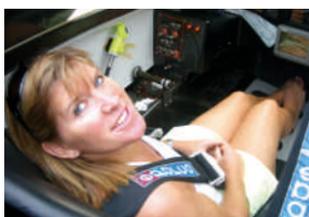
The previous day's pole winners *Qatar 96* – driven by Hassan Al Thani and Matteo Nicollini – powered ahead of the rest of the pack and into the lead position, until they clipped a turn buoy, a costly error that saw them penalised with an extra long lap and designated to second place. This left *Victory 77* – driven by Mohammed Al Mari and Jean Marc Sanchez – to take the winning position and turned the tables on *Spirit of Norway's* dominance in this year's series, leaving them only one point ahead of *Victory 77*.

The English team of Chris Parsonage and James Sheppard in *King of Shaves* fought hard in their newly rebuilt catamaran to gain fourth place, this being their first race since the horrific accident at the Plymouth Grand Prix only three months ago which left their boat in pieces.

A week later, at the Class 1 final, aka the Dubai Grand Prix, the day started with torrential rain and high winds, with bad visibility becoming a concern to race control. Despite the conditions, the race got underway as scheduled and saw the boats reaching speeds of 183.76kph. *Qatar 96* got off to an excellent start again, taking the lead, but the championship battle was between *Victory 77* and *Spirit of Norway*. *Spirit* established a good second place with *Victory* tailing behind in



Clockwise: Dubai made an impressive setting; *Victory 77* came a close second; Steve and his team celebrate; it was the first race for the rebuilt *King of Shaves*; *Qatar* came third; Shelley tries out the hot seat in *Spirit of Norway*



fourth. Engine problems saw *Qatar* fall back to 7th, allowing *Spirit* to take the lead and, with some calculated pit stops from the team time keepers, they 'had it in the bag' as Curtis would say! By the 11th lap, *Victory 77* had powered their way to second place, but it wasn't enough to take the championship.

Steve's year has been incredible. It's the first time anyone has won so many titles in a single year - not only has he won the World Championship for the 8th time, he has also

put another four major titles under his belt in 2006. For this outstanding achievement the country has recognised him, and on 12 December Steve collected his MBE from the Queen. "Did I feel like taking my clothes off and running around the pits? NO! But we were chuffed to bits," said Steve. "It has not been an easy year but we did it, the team have always done an incredible job."

shelley
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