

LANDSAILING



ABOVE

Sleek designs reduce drag and skim along the dry lake bed

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

This thrilling sport is pursued on dry lakebeds throughout the world and generates camaraderie among participants and spectators. Sailors participate in races at several desert locations in California and Nevada. Although most participants are from the United States, people travel from Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand to compete in the desert. On this continent, competitions culminate in the America's Cup held each spring, coordinated by the North American Land Sailing Association.

Landsailing is an exhilarating sport that brings action to the dry lake beds without the noise of motorized sports. It's done at Ivanpah Lake, El Mirage, and Superior Lake, when conditions are ripe enough to fill a sail with wind. This family-oriented sport requires some technical knowledge and a sense of adventure. Speeds of up to 45 miles per hour are reached in rigs only inches above the ground, often balancing on two wheels as racers change tack.

As with rockclimbing, the sport can be as technical as the participants choose to make it. Crafts range from the affordable, open-frame, California-manufactured Manta to sleek, custom, fiberglass rigs with adjustable sail area. BloKarts are landsailers that can be disassembled and shipped in the same space required by large luggage; although they are slower than other crafts, they can easily be placed into cars and on airplanes. Rigs are typically sailed by a single person, but there are two-person crafts as well. Racecourses are adaptable to both the larger craft that have longer legs and the smaller craft that do much more tacking and jibing. On open courses, landsailers follow the same right of way rules as do yachts.

As with any sport, personal safety gear such as safety belts, helmets, gloves, and goggles are standard.

Following rainstorms, sailors must engage in responsible use of the desert playa, waiting until the ground is dry enough to support the weight of their rigs. As a result, the structure of the surface soil is kept intact, leaving no tracks or ruts in their wake. In general, landsailers do not create braking or wheel marks since they aren't driven by engines.

The landsailing community engages in a variety of other conservation measures. Race coordinators limit the number of automobiles on the playa and use bicycles to establish and monitor the race course. At night, participants put their campfires in steel washing machine tubs to keep the fires from burning into the sand. In addition, event organizers advocate the principles of Leave No Trace throughout their race materials.

Several local clubs run classes and events, including the SASSASS Club, the Western Landyacht Club, the American 5 Square Meter Association, the Wind Seekers Blokart Association and the El Mirage Wind Wizards. Through the Outdoor Adventure Program at Edwards Air Force Base, servicemen and women sail on Mantas, which can be easily recognized thanks to the letters "ED" emblazoned on their sails.

Books and Online Resources for Landsailing can be found at http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/landsailing.pdf and on page 47 of this report.

PERSONAL PROFILE

Pete Gilbert

LANDSAILOR

In Pete Gilbert's first week of racing, he moved up 12 places from the bottom of the pack by sailing a Manta twin. Landsailing is a lot less expensive than sailing on open water, and more accessible for newcomers. Although Pete had no prior experience, the sport offers several levels of racing, so he was able to compete as an amateur. Pete picked up the essential tips he needed from expert sailors who were readily available for coaching and mentoring. Since the Manta is easily trailered or packed on rack, Pete looks forward to picking up a used rig in the near future. He admires the world record holding landsailer, the Iron Duck, and looks forward to someday piloting the larger boats that cruise at 70–80 mph.



LEFT

Stepping the mast on a fiberglass rig with roller furling sail

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

BELOW LEFT

Pete Gilbert has benefited from expertise of fellow sailors

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

BELOW RIGHT

Manta landsailers jockey for position as race flag falls

PHOTO BY D. A. DEMEO

[HTTP://WWW.NPCA.ORG / DESERT_RECREATION / LANDSAILING.PDF](http://www.npca.org/desert_recreation/landsailing.pdf)



LANDSAILING BOOKS AND ONLINE RESOURCES

SUGGESTED BOOK:

Landsailing, Scott Robert Hays, Capstone Press, 1992

WEB SITES:

BloKarts (<http://www.blokart.com>)

North American Land Sailing Association (<http://www.nalsa.org>)

SASSASS Sailing Club (<http://www.footeprint.com/sailingweb/sassass.htm>)

WindJet — A world-record-holding landsailer (http://www.windjet.co.uk/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)

WindPower Sports (<http://windpowersports.com/landsailers>)

Wind Wheels: The Online Landsailing Journal (http://www.sevenravens.com/landsailing/Windwheels_page1.html)

