

LUBOS HILGERT

"It is easier to make a fast paddler
go clean than to make a clean paddler
go fast."

Lubos Hilgert, Sr.

Lubos Hilgert was Silver Medalist at the 1981 World Championships. Nicknamed "Kosina," he was born in Prague on October 25, 1960 and raised there. At Bala, he was 6 feet, one and one half inches tall, and weighed 165 pounds. He used a 210 paddle, the longest of any of the elite paddlers.



Czechoslovakia's Lubos Hilgert, Silver Medalist in 1981. Photo by Stuart Fisher of "Canoeist" (incorporating "White Water Magazine")

Lubos' younger brother, Ivan, is also on the Czech K1 team and both of them are coached by their father, Lubos, senior, who was himself a K1 paddler from 1955 to 1969. Mr. Hilgert is currently the Czech K1 coach, having formerly been a junior coach. He is responsible only for the K1s, while other coaches handle the other classes. Mr. Hilgert is an engineer by profession.

Lubos started paddling when he was about 10 years old. He began in a "kiddie kayak" which was much smaller than a regular boat. His father believes this was very important to his development because it taught him balance and control at a very early age. Lubos paddled the little kayak about two years before switching to a regular one. His brother, Ivan, also started paddling about this time and the two boys were always racing each other.

SVS Club

The Hilgerts and many of the top Czech paddlers are affiliated with the Stredisko Vrcholoveho Sportu (SVS) club in Prague (formerly called "Slavia Praha").

In Czechoslovakia, when a paddler reaches a certain standard he is invited to join the SVS and train with others in Prague. At one time, as many as 30 paddlers belonged to this elite club, but recently cutbacks in state financing have restricted the number to 10. Members of SVS are highly subsidized by the state, with traveling expenses and several free boats provided each year. If the athlete has a job, he receives as much paid vacation time as necessary for travel to competitions abroad.

There are, however, many drawbacks. The bureaucracy is very important and powerful. Visas for travel abroad must be arranged very far in advance -- before the team selection trials. Therefore, the coaches select the team members. Furthermore, if a racer has several poor race results, he can easily be kicked out of the club. In order to keep getting subsidized, athletes must periodically turn in their training logs for official inspection to prove that they have been training enough.

Training at SVS

The Hilgerts emphasize high intensity in training instead of long duration, especially when training in the boat. They feel racers should not get used to the slow stroke rate common in endurance training. For this reason, endurance training is done mostly outside the boat -- running, cross-country skiing, swimming, lifting smaller weights (about 20-60% of personal maximum).

Endurance training is concentrated in the period September through February. In January and February, speed training is added to the running, weight lifting and swimming. Beginning in March, on-the-water training is aimed at developing speed. This is achieved by timing the racers during almost every training session. One very important source of endurance training for slalom racers is training and racing downriver. The Hilgert brothers are primarily slalom racers but one third of their practice is in downriver boats and they race in many downriver competitions a year.

A summary of the yearly training cycle follows.

AUGUST. This is a rest period.

SEPTEMBER. In September a lot of other sports are done, including windsurfing, tennis, ball games, cross-country running. In-the-boat training is aimed at improving gate technique and forward stroke technique. About half of the workouts are in the downriver boat. The racers paddle slalom only 3 times a week or "as much as we can stand without getting tired of it."

OCTOBER. In October, weight lifting is introduced, along with gym training, methods for improving agility, such as basketball, and running (entering 3-5 cross-country races in October and November).

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER. In the winter, the goal is general physical conditioning with emphasis on agility and strength. Weight workouts (3 times a week), improve absolute strength, by using heavy weights (almost at personal maximum) and improve endurance strength, by using more repetitions (and weights at about 60% of personal maximum).

JANUARY-MARCH. In this period, the aim is increasing speed, even in weight lifting (by using smaller weights). Training is done in the boat during the winter whenever possible, but not against the watch and more in the downriver boat than in the slalom boat. The Vltava River in downtown Prague rarely freezes over because of its many dams. Thus, unless the weather is very bad it is possible to paddle downriver all year round. During the January-March period there is also a lot of skiing, mostly cross-country, but some downhill as well. Foot running on obstacle courses is added to increase quickness.

FROM THE END OF FEBRUARY TO SUMMER. With the advent of warmer weather at the end of February, everyone is anxious to do slalom again. Thus, out of the boat training is abandoned, except for some interval work with weights, which is done once a week. Starting at the end of February, boat training increases, weather permitting. In the beginning, the majority of the training is done in downriver boats, but then shifts over to slalom boats. About 75% of the training at this time is interval training, intervals in the slalom boat lasting 20-60 seconds, intervals in the downriver boat lasting 3-5 minutes

(on flatwater). The rest of the training is aimed at slalom technique on whitewater. Full length courses are run for time and penalties. Normally, much time is spent on a moving water canal in downtown Prague in organized group workouts, with plenty of coaching. However, in 1982, the canal was dammed up and Lubos was not able to do the same kind of training that he did for Bala in 1981.

SUMMER. Besides the boat training described above, other training includes weightlifting about once a week, and running, but less than in the winter. Part of the paddling is done with resistance on the boat. Normally about half the training during the spring and summer is done under the stopwatch. Mr. Hilgert says that when he comes to practice, there is almost always some kind of competitive, timed gatework. When he isn't there, the paddlers do distance work, or work on technique by themselves. They work out twice a day but never more than that.

Mr. Hilgert bases the training for the Czech kayaks on material he read about U.S. swimmers. The message he got from that was "train with intensity." Thus, the Hilgerts do a lot of timed gatework. Mr. Hilgert doesn't believe that non-timed gatework is worth very much. He also believes that the first priority in training for slalom is achieving great speed. "It is easier to make a fast paddler go clean, than it is to make a clean paddler go fast," he summarizes.

The Czech paddlers work out in classes, so there are nevermore than 4 or 5 boaters at a slalom workout in Prague. Mr. Hilgert is responsible only for the K1s. Only at whitewater training camps and the soccer and basketball games do all the classes come together. While there are several training camps during the season, the famous artificial Liptovski Mikulas course is so far away -- about 400 kilometers -- that the Hilgerts seldom use it.

Four Races a Weekend

The racing season begins at the end of March. From then on, there are several races each weekend into July. Often 4 races are packed into one weekend: a downriver race in the morning and a slalom race in the afternoon of both days. The paddlers usually enter all of them, thus meaning that they compete 30 or 40 times a year, in 10-15 downriver races and 20-25 slaloms. Most paddlers race both slalom and downriver at the national level but then specialize in one or the other for the international races.

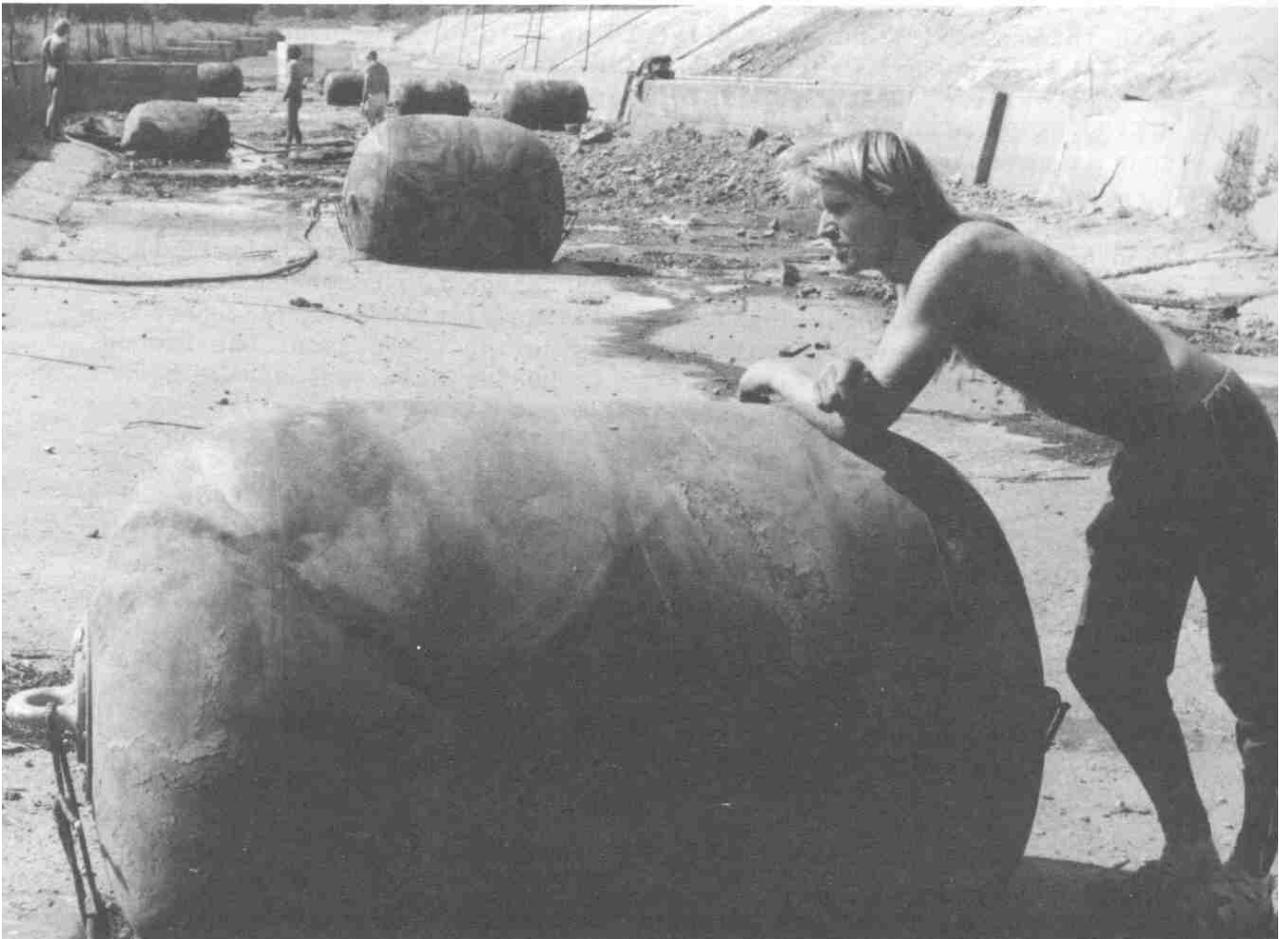
Because of the time constraints -- 200 entries at most races -- practice runs in slalom were seldom held until this year when the racers demanded that they be instituted at the national championships. Thus, the Czechs get a lot of practice in memorizing courses quickly,

and then having to run them cold. In some cases, they must memorize two different courses at the same time, run one, then run the other.

When I asked Mr. Hilgert what he considered Lubos' most noteworthy paddling characteristic, he said "long reach, and pushing way out for each stroke." I thought this was a bit ironic because compared to other top Kls, Lubos paddles with very bent arms. However, his arms are so long and his paddle is so long (210), that even if his arms are bent severely at the catch, he is probably getting more reach than most people.

Training Log

Czech paddlers keep training logs but it appears to be more because they are required to rather than because they rely on them. Several paddlers are very lax in filling them out and one commented that he had to work hard to ready his for official inspection since he hadn't looked at it for 3 months.



An artificial course at Troja, Czechoslovakia. The rubber barrels are filled with water. (Lubos Hilgert Photo)

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