

ULRIKE DEPPE

"Canoeing is my life. I was
in boats before I was born."

Ulrike Deppe has paddled in the World Championships since 1969. Since that time, she has been World Champion in each of the four K1W events: slalom individual and team, wildwater individual and team. She is also the only person to win the Europa Cup 3 times. She has won a total of 6 Gold Medals and 8 Silver Medals in her World Championships career for a grand total of 14 medals. The record is 8 golds and 19 total (Manfred Schubert of East Germany, in C1).



Ulrike Deppe is the only paddler in whitewater history to win all four events, the individual and team in slalom and downriver. (Kevin Clifford Photo)

Ulrike was born on December 9, 1953 in Lippstadt, West Germany and grew up there. She has a younger brother, Bernd, who is also on the West German slalom team (in K1) and a younger sister. She got into paddling through her parents. They were touring paddlers and paddled on the Lippe River in a Klepper foldboat on holidays. They never had a car (still don't), and paddled places instead of driving. Her father works as an English language interpreter for the English Army forces stationed in nearby Werl.

Ulrike is 71" tall, weighs 136 pounds, and uses a 203 cm. paddle.

Early Paddling

Ulrike doesn't remember when she started paddling -- "it was before I could run." She started racing at age 12 and competed for the "Walser and Wintersport Club" in Lippstadt. Even though she doesn't live in Lippstadt any more, she is still a member of the club.

She was largely self-taught in her early years, although she did learn some things from other paddlers in the club. The club had 300 members, but only 20-30 of them were whitewater paddlers. Only one other person from the club was on the West German team when Ulrike trained there, Irene Uhlig. She was Ulrike's training partner for a few years. One of the role models in the club was Horst-Dieter Engelke, who was World Champion in K1 slalom team at the Spittal World Championships in 1965. He and Klaus Lettmann coached Ulrike a little. Klaus is now the owner of the Lettmann boat company. Ulrike remembers that the club "had a good youth group" and most of the paddlers were about the same age as she. Many of them were even in the same class at school.

The club didn't just offer summer sports, however. As indicated by its title, there were also winter activities and Ulrike did a lot of gymnastics between ages 12-15, under the guidance of a man named Karl-Martin Durhammer.

In 1969, as a youth, Ulrike was invited to participate in the senior team trials for the World Championships in Bourg St. Maurice. At 15, she was the youngest person ever to be in the senior trials for the World Championships, and few people expected Ulrike to do anything spectacular. But she won the downriver trials, and thereby qualified for the German team.

Although she didn't even take part in the slalom trials, a few weeks after them she received a letter from Peter Maassen, President of the "Deutscher Kanu-Verband," (German Canoe Federation) saying that she should start training both slalom and wildwater because she was going to be entered in both at Bourg. "This was ironic," Ulrike says

now, "because a few years later I had to argue with him (unsuccessfully) over being able to go both ways."

After qualifying for the West German team in 1969, Ulrike spent some time in Dusseldorf, at first simply to see her boyfriend, Juergen Gerlach, who was training there and who was also on the German team (in K1 slalom). Gerlach was training with Karel Knap*, who had been a coach (canoes and kayaks) of the Czech team before leaving Czechoslovakia in 1968. Knap wrote a training plan for Ulrike and she corresponded with him about training for a while. She also did some weight training at his behest, "but not very much." Ulrike says about Knap:

He was very good for me because it was the first time I trained according to a plan. Although he was a very strict disciplinarian, he was also the first person in Germany who had ideas about strokes and technique.

Although Knap was never on the Czech team, he was a C1 paddler who had studied to be a coach. He started out with hockey teams but then transferred to whitewater. Around the time of the Olympics at Munich, he was responsible for helping a number of West Germany's top Paddlers in slalom. In recent years, however, he has switched to coaching wildwater and now has little involvement in slalom.

Ulrike also learned more about slalom from the Peters brothers, Ulrich ("Uli") and Wolfgang. Wolfgang was World Champion twice in C1 slalom, in 1967 and 1969. Uli was 3rd in K1 slalom in 1971 and 2nd in 1975. Once she was on the West German team, Ulrike used to travel to races with the Peters brothers. She says now that she learned more from watching C1s than from any other class, "because they know exactly where to place the boat and K1s don't always."

Training in 1969

Training about the time of the Bourg worlds consisted largely of endurance work -- lots of running and downriver paddling on flatwater. "My doctor was always kidding me about what a big heart I had," Ulrike remembers about that period. In the winter the rivers don't freeze in Germany, so she could paddle outdoors all year round in the downriver boat. In the spring and summer, she did both slalom and downriver. On the whole, she did a lot of distance training because Karel Knap, her coach, "told me I had to" and she felt that it was good for her.

This type of training carried her through the 1969 Worlds where she was Silver Medalist in the slalom individual, the wildwater individual and team and was World Champion in the slalom team. It was

*Once a physical education professor at Prague University and for many years an officer in the Czech army.

also the kind of training she did for Merano in 1971, where she was World Champion in wildwater individual and team, Silver Medalist in slalom and 4th in slalom individual. "In those years," she explained, "my slalom strategy was simply to go slow and clean. I knew that if I did that, I would get a medal, although I would not necessarily win."

While training for these two World Championships was more or less self-directed, by 1972, things changed because slalom was now an Olympic event. Now there were a lot of professional trainers and coaches around to give advice. But instead of helping, all of the extra attention wound up hurting her psychologically and throughout 1972, her performance declined. "I don't have fond memories of the Olympics (she was 7th)...I've thrown away all the souvenirs and press clippings of that time." She goes on to explain:

There was too much pressure. So much money had been spent to build the slalom course at Augsburg with the hope that it would allow West Germany to win gold medals. Everyone expected me to win. Officials from the DKV (German Canoe Federation) were constantly reminding me of this.

I remember the race itself... the crowd was yelling so much... "yeah, yeah, yeah," as I approached each gate, then "AWWWWW!" if I hit one.

After the Olympics, Ulrike began to think more about what she was doing and trained alone more.

She moved permanently to Neuss after the Olympics in order to go to university from 1973 to 1977. While years later she set up her own gates in Neuss, on the Erft River, at this time she commuted to Grevenbroich, 10 kilometers away, and did all her slalom training⁹ there. Karel Knap was the head coach at Grevenbroich then, but Ulrike did not work with him very much. She often trained completely alone, but if she had questions about technique, she asked the other paddlers who were training there.

Since by this time Grevenbroich had become a national training center, there were a lot of really good paddlers to ask, too: "Fuzzi" Kauder, World Champion in 1971 in C1, Olympic Silver Medalist in 1972; Otto Schumacher and Willi Baues, Olympic Silver Medalists in C2; Juergen Gerlach, twice Bronze Medalist in K1 slalom team; Helmut Klein and many others.

The gates at Grevenbroich were on flat, moving water.

During this period, Ulrike competed in 2 more World Championships, Muotathal in 1973, and Skopje in 1975. At Muota, she was World Champion in wildwater team, Silver Medalist in wildwater individuals and 6th in slalom individuals. At Skopje, she was not

allowed to go both ways, and did only slalom. She was Silver Medalist in the individuals ("Cwiertniewicz was so much stronger than I was,"), and fifth in team.

Between the two World Championships, Ulrike won the first Europa Cup in 1974. She was second in 1976.

In 1976, Ulrike finished university and started working as a school teacher. This really cut into her training time. Since she couldn't train as much as in the past, however, she made the quality better. "I wanted to prove that it was possible to work and paddle at the same time." Trying to do this meant she had to budget her time carefully. When she started working, she was only a part-time teacher, so it was easier to combine work and paddling. But today she works full time and it is much harder. Her performance at the 1977 World Championships was fourth in slalom individuals and sixth in team -- the first and only time she won no medals. However, the next year, she won the Europa Cup again. In 1980, she won it a third time, thus becoming the only person to win it three times.

Training for Bala 1981

In 1981, Ulrike had very limited time for training. She was, and still is, a teacher of math, German, and sports for pre-teenage children. She generally teaches from 8-12 each day and teaches canoeing 1 afternoon a week, for a total of 28 hours of work a week. In 1981, she had to fit training in around this, plus making use of special holidays granted for training as well as normal school vacations. The school is in Neuss.

Because of teaching, Ulrike figures she had only about 3 months of good slalom training for Bala. The training followed this schedule:

NOVEMBER-APRIL

Four times a week running and downriver boat training on flatwater. No slalom training at all. On the other 3 days a week, she did no training.

During the running, she ran for 30-40 minutes "depending upon how I felt." She never timed the runs but did aim for a pulse rate of 150-160 during the runs. She would stop during them to check it.

During the downriver training, she often went with Juergen Gerlach ("I had to work to stay with him"), for 40-60 minutes. She never timed these pieces, either. But she'd stop intermittently during the paddles to take her pulse. Once again, she tried to hit 150, but often she didn't make it. She never did these pieces as intervals with short rest, however.

APRIL

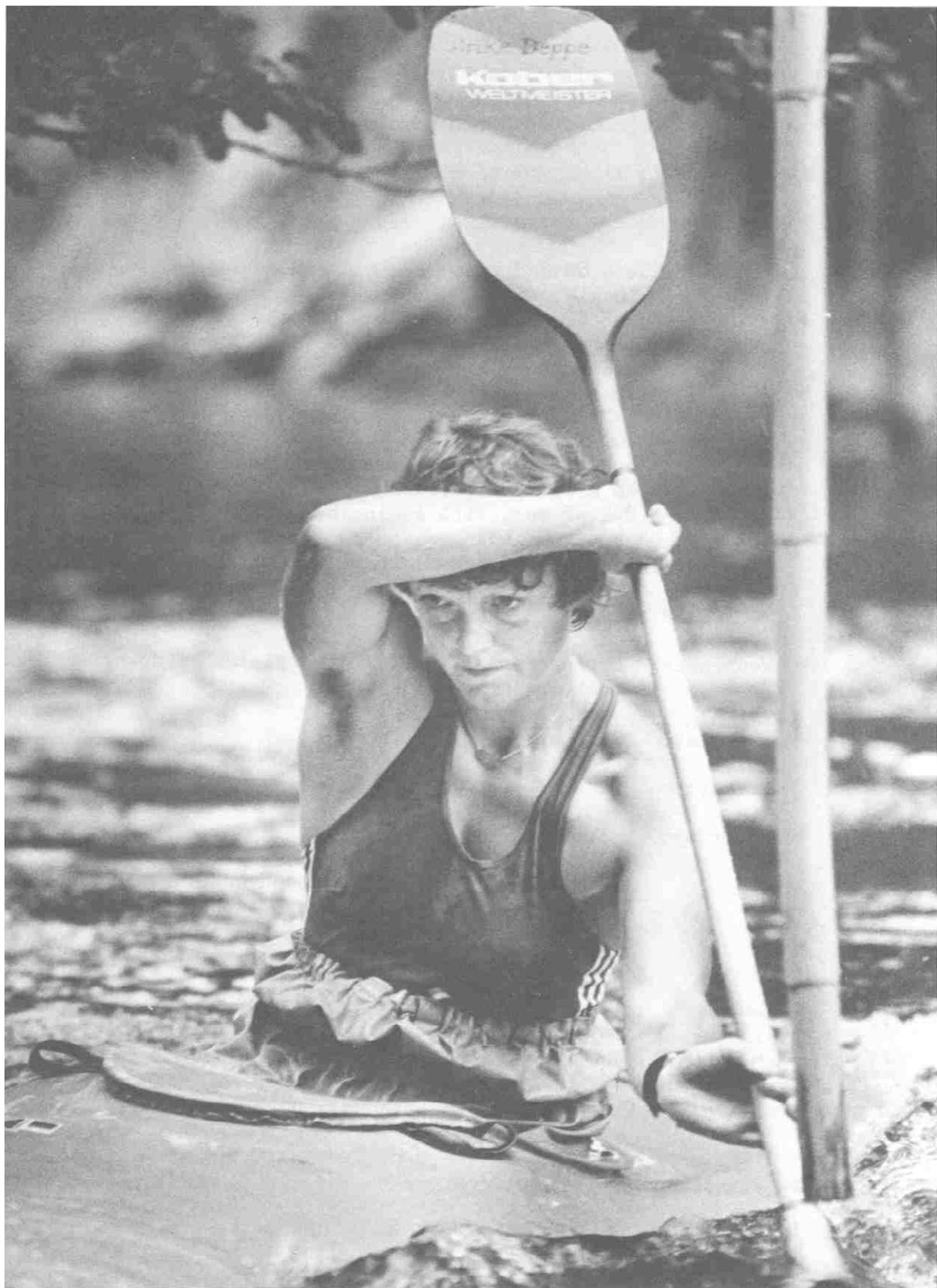
She had holidays during this period and used them to set up a course on the Erft River in Neuss. She spent most of the time setting up the gates, however, not paddling. The gates were fairly good, but she had to put them up and take them down each time. There were 29 gates.

MAY

When the 3 team selection races started in early May, Ulrike practiced going very fast. She often hit gates and sometimes she didn't do very well in the races -- but her running times started to get fast, and she reckons this is how she became fast enough to win the Worlds. Gradually, she began to run cleaner at the higher speeds.

THIRD WEEK IN MAY - END OF MAY

After the team selection trials ended at the third week in May, Ulrike started very serious slalom training. She did 270 second courses consisting of long sprints punctuated by 2 areas of a few gates each. After a sprint of 150 seconds with no gates, she came to 2-3 gates around a weir. When she got to that point she was very tired and for the first few times she 50'd some of the gates or hit them. But soon she got better. Two hundred meters further downstream -- after another long sprint -- there was a cluster of a few more gates, followed closely by the finish. Ulrike would time herself over this course. She would run it 3 times for a workout. She did this workout every other day for a week. After the week, she started feeling pretty good in the gates.



Ulrike Deppe training on the Feeder Canal in America.
(James M. Thresher Photo)

MONTH OF JUNE

The weekly schedule for the month of June was as follows:

* Monday: Massage, sauna, no paddling.

* Tuesday: One workout:

- * 4 X 60 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
- * 10 min. rest.
- * 4 X 60 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
- * 10 min. rest.
- * 4 X 60 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
- * 10 min. rest.
- * 6 X 40 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
- * 10 min. rest.
- * 6 X 40 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
- * 10 min. rest.
- * 6 X 40 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.

These were always timed by someone standing on the shore. Sometimes they were done with Susanne Erbers.

* Wednesday: Depended on how she felt: slalom or downriver boat, going easy.

* Thursday: Same as Tuesday.

* Friday: Same as Wednesday.

* Saturday: Two workouts a day:

1. Running, or downriver boat on flatwater.
2. Slalom -- fartlek always in gates, sometimes in waves, sometimes on flatwater.

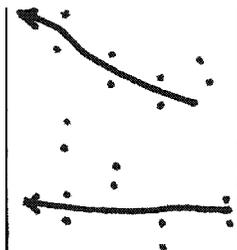
* Sunday: Off.

Ulrike would make up the details of the workouts herself or with Juergen Gerlach.

Training at Bala

During this period, Ulrike did 3 workouts a day, as follows:

1. 6 a.m.: Easy warm-up on her own flatwater gates.
2. For first 3-4 days in Bala, on her own gates:
 - * 12 X 20 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs
 - * 10 min. rest.
 - * 6 X 40 sec. with 1 min. rest between runs.
 - * 10 min. rest.
 - * 1 X 240 sec.
3. After the first 3-4 days, on her own gates:
 - * Stroke mobility / warm-up
 - * 24 X 10 sec., or 2 X (6 X 20 sec.), or some other combination adding up to 240" -- the length of a slalom course. These were done as straight ahead paddles as shown below:



4. ON THE TREWERYN:
 - a. Learning the water
 - b. Paddling upstream from eddy to eddy. This was for strength training and ATP-CP.

Also at Bala, Ulrike paddled on the Bala Lake in a downriver boat once or twice.

Starting 2 days before the Worlds, she did nothing, except mental rehearsal.

"Why I Won At Bala"

Ulrike Deppe says that mental training was the main reason she won at Bala. "It is important for me to get something new each year to keep me interested, and in 1981, more mental training was the new thing." The last 2 weeks before the Worlds she practiced mental rehearsal techniques. She found that she could concentrate on them much better in England than at home in Germany.

She relied on the mental training because she knew she'd not been able to do as much physical training this year as in the past. She learned about mental training from school, and read about it on her own some. Years earlier she had learned a few things from Uli and Wolfgang Peters, who were medalists in the World Championships in the K1 and C1 slalom classes, respectively. They would wait until everyone had left the race course before they'd come out to study it. Other things she just figured out for herself.

Ulrike had two problem areas on the Bala course, gates 24 and 29. For gate 24, she watched videos of Claudia Kerckhoff doing the move and studied her strokes. Ulrike watched the tape over and over again, maybe 10 times.

Another big plus for Ulrike was having a psychologist, Dr. Buchmeier, on the team. He observed what she did, hung around, and didn't say much, but it was very interesting for her to talk to him. He helped her relax and retain feelings of self-confidence. One time, for example, she locked her car keys in the car, and yet was able to simply take a nap while Buchmeier figured out how to get them out -- she had complete confidence that he'd sort things out for her.

Ulrike says that at Bala she felt better about the race than for any other World Championships. She felt that for the first time, she could sneak gates well and turn fast because she had a new Lettmann boat. She also felt that now, for the first time, she was fast enough to win. In previous years, she had been a little "psyched out": she had reckoned that if she went slow and clean, she'd get a medal even if she wouldn't be fast enough to win. This was the strategy she tried at Jonquiere and after her run, she thought she would do well again. But she was 6th: "I learned from the Americans, and especially Cathy Hearn, that you had to be fast to win," she explains, and it is for this reason she concentrated on speed in practice sessions.

I personally regard this as a very interesting situation because Ulrike Deppe is one of the very few "old dogs" in our sport who has been able to learn "new tricks." Norbert Sattler is another one.

"But I lost it in 1982," Ulrike says, "and I've got to get it back again."

Mental Preparation

"For most paddlers," Ulrike Deppe warns, "training ends when they leave the boat." Here we examine Ulrike's mental preparation for the Bala World Championships. That preparation was an outgrowth of what she had developed since the Skopje World Championships in 1975.

"Skopje was the first year I wrote out every stroke I was planning to do in the race." She made up an extremely detailed map of the course with comments on it as to practically every stroke she would take in the race. The evening before the race she went over the map with Juergen Gerlach. She still has the map at home in Germany.

At Bala, Ulrike made a map of only the water and used it to learn the river. Once the race course was announced, she wrote in the gates, "and very quickly, I knew how to do most of the course." At gate 24 there were some problems but once she saw someone do it "with the least number of strokes," she knew exactly what to do. "But I had to see it done first."

A second really important thing at Bala was that she planned out down to the minute what she would do on race day. She planned these details about 4 days ahead. She planned when to get a massage (good to work out muscle stiffness and help you relax; also relaxing to talk to the masseur); planned when to go to the bathroom; planned how long to get away from the race course in between runs (so she wouldn't be negatively affected by racers who were discouraged after having a bad run); she even planned how much time it would take to dry her hair after taking a shower ("just so I would always have something to do and wouldn't have time to get nervous.")

Ulrike feels that she really has to plan out a race meticulously if she is to do well. "I have to do this more now than in the past. If I haven't taken the time to do this, I know that it is unlikely I will do well."

Other psychological boosts at Bala:

She had a good place to stay, by herself (with one or 2 others), so she could train the way she wanted. She had little contact with the other team members.

She was constantly motivated during the last few months of training before Bala because she saw day-to-day improvement in practice sessions. "This was probably because I started out so far behind and had nowhere to go but up."

Subsidization

For her paddling expenses Ulrike Deppe now receives 475 Marks a month, computed as follows:

Basic Aid....	150
Equipment.....	75
Bonus for Winning at Bala	200
Bonus for Winning Team	50
TOTAL/month...	475

Ulrike also gets free equipment, including paddling clothes which she helped design.