

kiteSista

READER'S CHOICE
AWARDS 2016

It was a whirlwind year for female kiting with the freestyle bar being raised thanks to the World Kiteboarding League and more importantly the progression of the level of female riding. That coupled with the creation of the Kite Park League, successful Junior World Championships and the continued growth in reach of KiteSista means that the presence and profile of female riders in our sport is at heights not yet seen and continuing to move upwards.

It is time to say thank you and give credit to those making a difference and putting their hard work and effort into the cause. This leads to inevitable awards which often

come down to an internet vote of popularity but you cannot remove the need for you the public to have your voice. The nominations however are up to us so this year rather than just throw the same winners and big names into the nominations we decided to look a little deeper and find riders and those involved in the industry who deserve credit for their hard work.

We created the categories, proposed the nominations and spent the time to justify each nomination on www.kitesista.com and after a popular voting process we are very pleased to introduce you to the winners of the KiteSista Reader's Choice Awards 2016.

The role of a female brand ambassador in kitesurfing can be a difficult path to tread with critics ready to punch from all sides regardless of the hard work and dedication you put in. No longer is being a competition winner, product tester, lifestyle blogger, social media superstar, magazine contributor, media generator, sales person, coach and inspirational speaker enough, now you must excel at everything to really be a great ambassador. The ambassador voted for by our readers was Liloo Gringa of Crazy Fly so we sat down to talk to her.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

I've been at my home spot in Venezuela for the last month. After the event in Germany, I spent 3 months doing shoulder rehabilitation because I spent all of last year with an injury and I couldn't handle the pain anymore - crazy, but I didn't want to take a break until I finished the 2016 season. So I decided to stop kiting for few months to focus on my recovery. I feel much better now and am starting to train again combining my kite training with rehabilitation and cross-fit to be more than ready for 2017!

HOW DID YOU END UP IN YOUR POSITIONS AT CRAZY FLY?

In 2014 I did a few stops of the kite tour paying for myself, but I couldn't afford to do it again in 2015, even if I wanted it to so bad. So I was in France, asking myself what I was going to do with my life and Crazy Fly showed up like a miracle! They told me that they had selected me from the list of riders in the PKRA and were looking for a professional rider to become the main face of Crazy Fly and to compete in all PKRA freestyle events. When I read that, I could not believe my eyes so I said YES and a lovely adventure with Crazy Fly began. I have a great relationship with them, I feel part of the family and I'm really grateful for what they have done for me.

THE BEST FEMALE BRAND AMBASSADOR LILOO GRINGA For Crazyfly

DO YOU OFTEN FEEL PRESSURE WHEN YOU RIDE AS A FIRST LADY OF CRAZY FLY?

Actually I don't feel pressure because I'm the only professional rider in the team and competing for the tour. However, I feel some pressure when I'm competing or doing photoshoots, because I want them to be proud of me and I want to give them my best.

HOW MUCH IMPACT BASED ON YOUR FEEDBACK GOES INTO THE DEVELOPMENT OF BOTH THE FEMALE AND FREESTYLE PRODUCTS FROM CRAZY FLY?

Giving my feedback to enhance the products is part of my job and they pay very close attention to it. Also a lot of distributors and clients ask for my opinion before buying the products.

Crazy Fly is the first and only Kiteboarding brand producing all of their equipments in their own factory based in Europe. Having their production and R&D department right next to their offices allows them to be really reactive in product development and applying innovation in serial production very quickly.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

2016 has been an amazing year apart from the injury and I hope 2017 will be even better! I'm starting to train again here in my home spot to be ready for the World Kiteboarding Tour. I want to take advantage of being in Venezuela to get some good media for my sponsors and travel to others spots like Adicora and Los Roques. I'm also organising kiteboarding camps and will be doing the Crazy Fly Photoshoot for the 2018 products plus some other projects that I can't talk about, but stay tuned for more!

THE BEST FEMALE RUN BRAND BIANCA BIKINIS

We wanted to reward the girl putting in the hard graft off the water to create a brand and products for you the kiting masses. Taking a dream and working hard at it mastering commerce, marketing, accounting, logistics and a lot more to make it a reality. The winner was Bianca Bikinis and so we sat down with founder and owner Bianca Forzano.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

Right now I'm in Cabarete. After a full autumn working hard in the city I'm finally in my Caribbean house enjoying the water, warm weather and my friends. I spent last months in Italy working on the 2017 production of Bianca Bikinis. We are an Italian brand and all production is hand made in Italy in a little factory with 12 women cutting and sewing all pieces with their hands. I wanted to offer an high quality product and "Made in Italy" has always been synonymous with good quality, and I also wanted to support the historical "sartoria italiana" of my country instead of escaping to other countries for a cheaper production. Now the Surf Capsule collection is ready and soon will be available online for all the water-girls.

FOR THOSE WHO DON'T KNOW, TELL US HOW BIANCA BIKINIS CAME TO BE?

I love to tell this story because it is a story of a radical change and still now sometimes I wonder how it all happened. All my "first life" I was career oriented. From primary school to MBA to business consulting work, I worked hard to be the first and to reach my goals until 8 years ago something made me doubt that life was just that. I was feeling that I was missing something important: I was missing time! for me, for my hobbies, for my family and friends, for discovering the world, or just for chilling.

Kitesurfing definitely helped me to jump into the new adventure of my "second life" and as I started travelling around I discovered Cabarete. I loved it so much that I decided to make it my base! After some years doing many different things I started sewing bikinis with the style of the mediterranean islands where I grew up

make more and sell them at the beach markets. Then some fashion shows, shoots with friends and improvements to be durable and stay in place and Bianca Bikinis became a real business. It's easy to think that it is just fun and sun but it is definitely hard work and I'm happy that I was well trained for that from my previous life. So now I'm still success and goals oriented but my goals and ways to define success are just different.

HAVE YOU SEEN A NOTICEABLE CHANGE IN STYLE OF FEMALE KITERS AND THE NUMBER OF BIKINI BRANDS SPECIFICALLY AIMED AT THIS MARKET?

When I started to kite I could not even imagine doing it in a bikini. Most of the time I was wearing the oversized board shorts of my instructor or when water was cold a terrible wetsuit I was ashamed to be in. I was a beginner and I needed to concentrate on the kite and not on the little tiny piece of fabric covering my butt or not. After starting Bianca Bikinis and as a kite girl I am more aware of the market and I can say that definitely now there is more demand in the market. The girls are more extreme than the average sun bather but don't want to lose their cheeky style when they are in the water so each year new brands and new styles appear which is great.

WERE YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS AFFECTED BY THE RECENT STORMS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC?

I was lucky not to be in Cabarete during the storm as my business is almost full based in Italy. Cabarete is the magical place where the business was born which gave me the inspiration, the idea, the beautiful kite girls friends that now are ambassadors of the brand, the playground where we ride and test the new samples in action, and definitely the wonderful backdrop for all the pictures and videos.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

A teaser for the new Surf Capsule collection is already online for a few months and we have been testing the products surfing and kiting in Cabarete. Now the production is ready and soon will be online and available to buy on the Bianca Bikinis website which should keep me busy.

THE BEST FEMALE VIDEO RITA ARNAUS *Ready to bloom*

There has been a huge increase in the number of videos coming from the girls this year which combine both quality of edit and content. So many in fact that we had trouble narrowing the nominations down. However the winner we will not disagree with as we know she also put the hard work in and edited the video herself, so we sat down for a chat with Rita Arnaus.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

I am in Cape Town and have been having a lot of fun as I just joined the Brunotti team and we are all together shooting for the next season and it has been a really amazing experience with a cool team.

IS THIS YOUR FIRST TIME IN CAPE TOWN?

Yes! Since last year I really wanted to go to Cape Town but somehow it didn't happen so I'm super excited to be here and really looking forward to getting to know this place better as it is all very beautiful and breathtaking!!

WE KNOW THAT YOU DIDN'T JUST STAR IN THIS VIDEO BUT YOU ALSO DID ALL THE EDITING YOURSELF. HOW LONG DID IT TAKE YOU TO GET TO A LEVEL YOU FELT COMFORTABLE PUTTING OUT ONE OF YOUR OWN VIDEOS?

I really like to edit videos although it takes a lot of time to do. I think it's a nice way to really show how you experience the moments and how you see them. The first kite video that I edited was from the Caribbean three years ago. It wasn't very good but you have to start somewhere. I knew I had a lot to learn and big scope for improvement. The kite video that made a big difference was my first video from Brazil two years ago as I got great feedback from people so I knew I had to improve it and make an even better one the next time!

This is how Ready to Bloom came to be! I was very motivated and I was also enjoying my kite career to the maximum so I wanted to capture it and show it to the world!

WE SAW HEARTBREAKING PHOTOS OF YOU AS YOU

NARROWLY MISS GETTING INTO THE FINAL AT THE LAST WKLE EVENT IN NEW CALEDONIA. HOW DID YOU DEAL WITH SO MUCH EMOTION WHEN ALMOST EVERYONE AROUND YOU WAS FULL OF JOY CELEBRATING?

I was also full of joy and celebrating!! 2016 it was a really good one for me, I learned a lot and I got loads of experience. I'm actually very grateful of how things went, everything happens the way it has to be for a reason and from everything you have to take a lesson.

I was really happy that I was able to do such a great performance in the water in the New Caledonia competition but also disappointed that it wasn't enough to make it to the final. I have been through a lot in the past years, sometimes actually thinking that I was too late for this as I only started kiting 5 years ago but I worked really hard to make it where I am today.

My passion and love for this sport is endless and I know that I have so much more to give so I am really sure one day the results from all my efforts are going to show.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

As I mentioned I have joined the Brunotti team for 2017. I will keep riding Best kites so I have the perfect combination for a great year. I have some video projects in mind and new travel destinations and of course I'm looking forward very much to start the 2017 competitions. I have a good feeling that this year is going to be a good one.

THE BEST FREESTYLE COMPETITOR THERESE TAABEL

Winning does not make you the best competitor. A great competitor is just as good at taking a loss and being a worthy adversary. We have stood on the sidelines and watched as the year's competition unfolded showing the true spirit of competition of the top female freestyle riders as they battle it out. This is why we were in complete agreement with the public vote having watched this young rider show exemplary sportsmanship in competition and are pleased that we get to sit down with the winner, Therese Taabel.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

I am just back from Brazil which is always a perfect place for training for the upcoming season. Good wind, flat water and always people to kite with followed by celebrating Christmas at home with my family.

WE HOPE YOU REMEMBER THE MOMENT IN GERMANY WHEN YOU WENT MID-HEAT TO HELP RITA ARNAUS WHO WAS IN TROUBLE WITH HER KITE. DID YOU WEIGHT UP YOUR OPTIONS OR WAS IT A PRETTY NATURAL REACTION FOR YOU?

She was struggling with her kite as it had inverted and she had gone very downwind. I went straight to her because the kite just needed that little push to get into the right position. To be honest I did not even think about it, I went there straight as I had a few minutes until it was my turn to perform my trick. If I had been in a situation like that I would have been so grateful and happy if my friend helped me. Even though we are tough competitors - you have to be able to see a line between competing and still being there for each other. It did not influence my own result and I know Rita was very happy for my help.

DO YOU FIND YOU HAVE TO SACRIFICE CERTAIN ASPECTS OF FREE-RIDING TO TRAIN FOR COMPETITION AND IS IT A CONSCIOUS CHOICE FOR YOU?

Sometimes of course I need to focus more on training as I need to do that to push myself and try reach my next level but I try to keep a

good balance between having fun on the water and pushing myself. I think back to the reason I started kiteboarding and why it makes me so happy that I am willing to sacrifice different things to work on my goals. That is also one of the things that keeps me motivated, thinking about why I love this sport and that really makes me happy being on the water feeling the adrenalin.

WE SEE YOU HAVE BEEN GETTING INTO THE SLIDERS QUITE A BIT RECENTLY. WILL YOU BE COMPETING AT ANY OF THE KPL EVENTS THIS YEAR?

We will see where 2017 is gonna take me. I love mixing up my training on the water; wakeboarding, kitesurfing, freestyle, foiling or sliders. It keeps my motivation going, and also there are hundreds of different things that I want to learn within the different aspects of our sport. Freestyle will still be my main focus for 2017 but I can't count out competing in the KPL if it fits in. I have been practicing a bit. Will see where the wind will take me.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

2017 has just begun and I am sure there is plenty in store. The World Kiteboarding League is kicking off in April and there will be some pretty amazing tour stops around the world. I am so excited for the tour to begin as the girls are really pushing the level. It's so cool to be a part of a new kitesurfing generation of rockin' powerful women.

WHICH NEW TRICKS ARE YOU WORKING ON?

I have been trying to focus on a different direction by doing some tricks most other girls could not do. This winter I started to work on some toe-side tricks and so far I landed the Pete Rose (toe-side back-to-blind), but there are many more tricks to learn so I better keep practicing.

Thank you to everyone that have voted for me, I am full of gratitude and very thankful. Also thank you to my sponsors for your full support: Cabrinha & Lindberg DK.

THE BEST JUNIOR FEMALE RIDER AND ROLE MODEL MIKAILI SOL

These days just being a good rider is not enough, you have a responsibility through the exposure it allows you to also be a role model. We often look to the older riders to fill this role, but as the media coverage of the junior riders grows there is a new generation of young riders looking to the best of their peers to inspire them. We are lucky to have an inspirational group of young female talent emerging. Topping this group is the young Mikaili Sol, dominating her age group and those above in the Junior competition and off the water she is a real pleasure to spend time in the company of.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

At the moment, I am packing my suitcases and getting ready to return to Brazil. I have spent this past month experiencing for the first time snow, sleet and rain while visiting my family in the United States. Remember my mom is American and my dad is Brazilian. So even though I was born and raised in Brazil, I am half American. While in the states, I hooked up with Sadie Morway, an amazing athletic trainer, and spent three days a week for the month learning about the physical aspects of my body and how it relates to kitesurfing. She helped me with so many exercises in order to improve my flexibility, strength and endurance. I also had the opportunity to do gymnastics! Wow, you think kitesurfing is hard? Well, in my opinion, gymnastics takes it to another level! I learned to do the kip on the bars. This trick uses so much of your lower abdominals that it is kind of like doing a Slim Chance where you have to get your board above your head... If you didn't know, the Slim, well, it is ALL lower abs and timing.

THIS MIGHT BE THE LONGEST YOU HAVE SPENT AWAY FROM THE WATER, WELL IN LIQUID FORM, ... HOW HARD IT FOR YOU TO BE AWAY FROM THE SUN, SEA AND KITING?

Actually, being away from the sun, sea and kiting was a nice change of pace! I live on the beach in Ceará, Brazil where the wind blows everyday. Kitesurfing is my true passion but, it is nice to experience new things and take a break every now and then. Remember, I am only 12 years old. But now, after freezing for a month, I am really anxious for some Brazilian sunshine, warm water, and an epic kite session!

DO YOU FEEL PRESSURE TO COMPETE THE BIG STAGE NOW YOU HAVE 6 WORLD TITLES UNDER YOUR BELT, WITH A LOT OF EXPECTATIONS ON YOU?



I really don't feel the pressure to compete on the "big stage" as you call it! Yes, I am excited to do a few stops on the Pro Tour this year if possible because I think it will be a great experience not because I have to win and be on the podium! Don't get me wrong, I love to win, too. But, I am young and I have time on my side! Just having the opportunity to travel around the world, meet new people and kitesurf with the best is what is the most important for me right now. It is all part of my life and my adventure. And one day when I am a little older, being number one on that podium will surely be one of my goals!

AWAY FROM THE WORLD OF KITESURFING, WHAT INSPIRES YOU IN LIFE?

There are a lot of people that inspire me in my life but my mom is a different kind of person! I think she is the most inspirational of all because she is a really good example of what she preaches! She always tells me I am capable of doing anything as long as I am dedicated, honest, hard working and have a good education. She always tells me that nothing comes for free! My mom has had an amazing life. She tells me that life is all about your experiences and adventures, not only being number one on the podium! When my mom was around 30 years old she traveled alone around South America for two years on her motorcycle with a tent! I don't know about you guys, but to do that, it takes a lot of courage! She was also a very high level competitive gymnast and at my grandparents house, she has a lot of trophies, medals and plaques. She was also a school teacher, so she stresses the importance of a good education and how is invaluable. She too is always reading and studying and working! So those are just a few reasons why my mom inspires me the most. She inspires me to be brave, strong and dedicated to whatever choices I make. She supports and encourages me to follow my dreams, believe in myself and do what I love most... Kitesurfing!!!

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

I have lots in store for 2017! But, let's take it one day at a time. Once I am back in Brasil, I will train and prepare myself for the Jr. Kitesurfing Championship in France. Then, I will see how things evolve. One thing for sure, I can only thank my parents for believing in me and sacrificing so much in order to give me the support and opportunities I need to become the best that I can be!

THE HARDEST WORKING FEMALE CONTRIBUTOR TO THE INDUSTRY CRYSTAL VENESS



This is an award we want to give out to the unsung heroines of our industry who are responsible for the furthering of female kitesurfing through continued hard work and support of the industry even when it doesn't always come with praise and accolades. Our winner may not be a household name or hold a lucrative sponsorship deal, but she knows how to contribute to projects, be professional in all that she does and in the times we have collaborated together has always impressed us with her professionalism and work ethic. So we are very pleased together to introduce you to Crystal Veness.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

It seems like I'm constantly on the move these days... depending on the week, I'm in San Francisco, Seattle, La Ventana (Mexico), or looking for some fresh powder in Banff (Canada)! Lately, I've had my head down launching the next phase of my small business consulting company and developing a 24 hour 'Concept-to-Completion' web design business. That, and searching for every adrenaline rush I can find wherever I happen to be!

HAVE YOU ALWAYS BEEN SUCH AN AMBITIOUS PERSON AND WHAT MOTIVATED YOU TO BRING THIS AMBITION TO THE KITEBOARDING INDUSTRY?

Yes! I grew up working an obscene amount. Nothing really existed in my life outside of work, and while it was certainly worth it, it wasn't always fun. After selling my business shares, I finally got to choose my own direction, and I was excited to learn that it is, in fact, possible to love what you do. I put passion and energy into everything I do, because I only do things I love. It's only natural to bring the ambition and energy to this industry, because that's how I approach everything that's important to me! Kiteboarding is in my soul.

DO YOU FEEL THERE IS STILL AN IMBALANCE OF THE SEXES IN THE INDUSTRY OR HAVE THE SCALES BEEN REDRESSED?

That's a bit of a mixed bag. In kiteboarding media, I think women are very well represented thanks to sources like KiteSista and fans of kiteboarding who are connecting with us on social platforms. There's definitely still an imbalance in competition and prize money for the pro ladies, though there's typically less kite chicas competing and registering for events in general. What I really love seeing is how many girls are showing up at the beach - often solo - and ready to throw down as hard as they can on the water. I see the number of ladies riding on the up and up, and that is seriously awesome!

WE SEE YOU HAVE BEEN GETTING REALLY INTO THE CABLE PARK RECENTLY, WAS IT A PRETTY NATURAL PROGRESSION FROM KITING?

Cable park and snowboarding have both been massive sources of stoke for me. The board skills that I learned from kiting make learning and progression easy, and nothing feels better than nailing a new trick or technique, whatever the sport. So yes, one board sport inevitably leads to others, and all the good times and confidence I pick up in other sports add a lot of joy to my kiteboarding. More excuses to strap on a board and go for it? Hell yeah.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

2017 is the year of balance. I've been very focused on my priorities and consciously trying to align every action I take or decision I make with them. When trying to juggle my businesses, full time travel, kitesurfing progression, and personal relationships, finding my footing feels like a constant challenge. But the best things in life are rarely handed to us, so it's always worth the battle. I plan to be traveling to either a kite spot, cable spot, or snow spot every month, and really taking time to appreciate my friends and family. 2017 is already delivering in spades, and I'll be out there crushing it every single day!



THE MOST "STEEZIEST" PARK RIDER JULIA CASTRO

2016 has certainly been the year of park riding. With the formation of the KPL and a host of events around the world we have had a chance to see a number of girls stepping up to the challenge of kickers and sliders. Park riding is however all about 'steez' ('style with ease' in case your wondering) and this girl has got it. It gives us great pleasure to talk to Julia Castro.

WHERE ARE YOU AND WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN UP TO RECENTLY?

I am in Denmark right now. For the past 6 months I've been at university... No, I didn't go to Brasil or Australia... I stayed at uni studying and having a boring life. It is quite difficult to be able to attend lessons, pass exams and so on at the same time as traveling the world, training and competing... So I thought I would be happy in the future if now I passed my whole first semester... So yeah, it's been pretty tough and boring but... I hope I won't regret in the future.

HOW HARD IS IT TO STAY AT HOME BURIED IN BOOKS WHEN YOU KNOW SO MANY OF YOUR OTHER FELLOW RIDERS SKIP SCHOOL (OR HAVE FINISHED) AND ARE OUT HAVING FUN?

Well, you just said it all. It's been really hard on my mind... Social media makes spotting where everyone is and how much fun they are having really easy. I hope in the long term this will have been a good decision. I do know that while everyone else is getting more and more new tricks I am home working on my brain... but let's not rush 2017 and let's see how my late winter training goes.

HOW MUCH OF A CHALLENGE WAS IT FOR A 'KITER' TO ENTER INTO THE EUROPEAN WAKE CHAMPIONSHIPS FOR THE FIRST TIME?

The thing is that in 2016 I discovered that wakeboarding was way less painful than kitesurfing for my shoulder, so I focused a bit more on wakeboarding and on doing sliders with my kite. When I appeared at the Spanish Champs I had a pretty

got level and winning gave me direct access to the Wakeboarding European Championships in Tel Aviv.

I honestly didn't think I was going to make it to the finals as the level was very high as all the other people live for wakeboarding and do it everyday. So there was I, Julia the kitesurfer. In the end I managed to pull out a pretty decent heat and managed to get 6th place. I was crazy stoked but also had a bitter-sweet feeling knowing I could have done better with more training.

DO YOU FEEL THERE IS A CONVERGENCE BETWEEN KITE AND WAKE GOING ON, OR WILL WAKEBOARDERS ALWAYS VIEW US KITERS A BIT DIFFERENTLY?

Well, wakeboarders don't want to admit it but they all want to try kitesurfing. Actually, I feel there is a lot of respect at cableparks for us. I hate to speak in the "they" and "us" way but everyone recognises I am a kitesurfer with my North Gambler board but If you are respectful in the water, everything is fine. Like everything in life I guess.

WHAT DOES 2017 HAVE IN STORE FOR YOU?

I sincerely have no idea. 2016 was a year full of ups and downs and 2017 is supposed to be the year were I don't remember I had a surgery on my shoulder anymore so I won't have any mental block stoping me. You'll see me trying to get up there on the KPL events and maybe the new freestyle tour! Let's see! Stoked for my kite life to begin again.

Can I add something? BIG thanks to everyone who's there supporting me (sponsors, family, people all over the world), included you, KiteSista! You guys are the fuel of what we do! Thank you! Danke! Mange Tak! Merci! Obrigada!