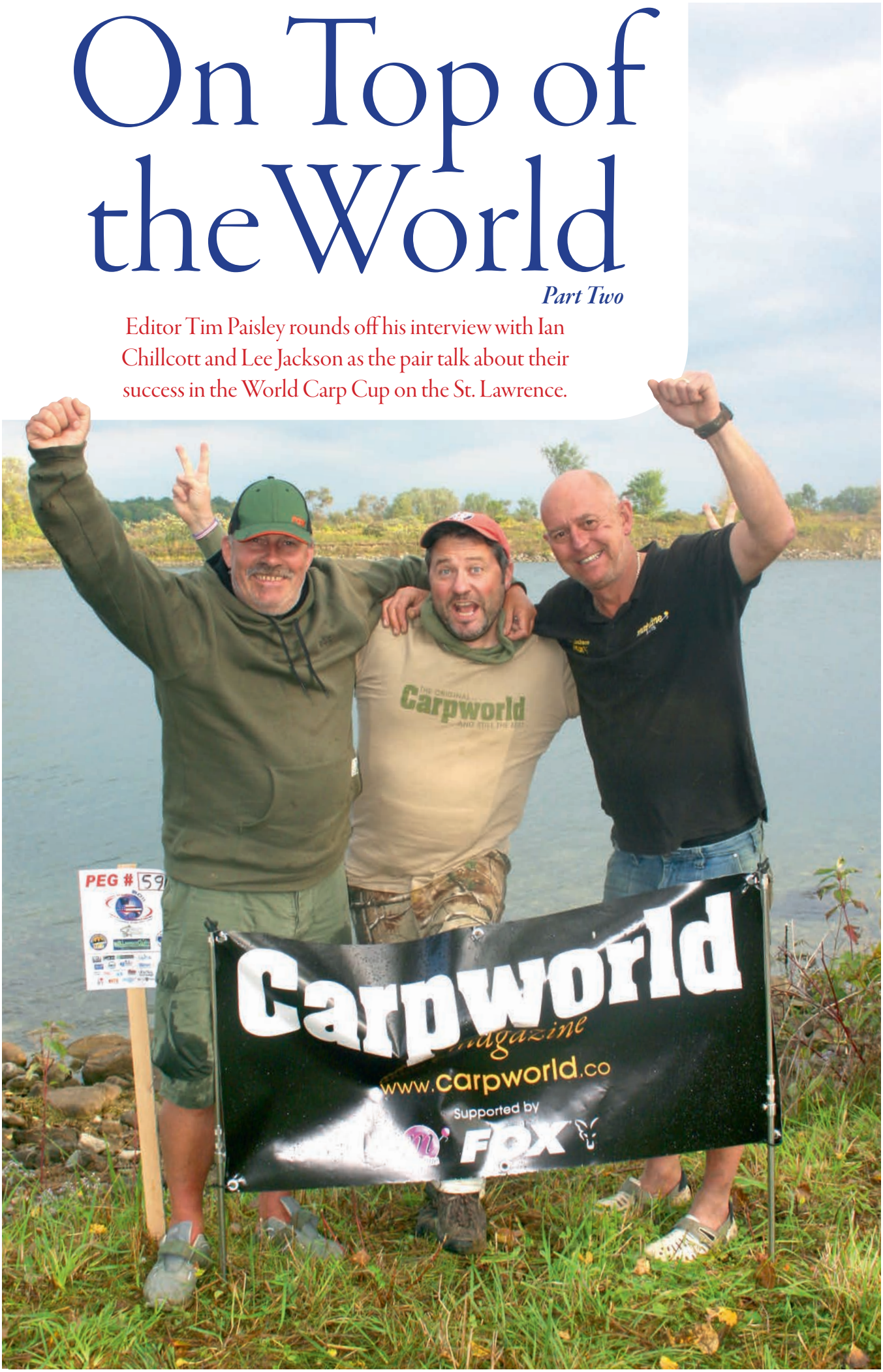
On Top of the World

Part Two

Editor Tim Paisley rounds off his interview with Ian Chillcott and Lee Jackson as the pair talk about their success in the World Carp Cup on the St. Lawrence.



At the end of part one we left our two heroes on the verge of St. Lawrence World Cup success, but with the Americans further down the river reportedly closing fast, and terminal fatigue and five days of accumulated aches and pains undermining their mindset and efforts. We pick up the story on the final evening of the match after Jacko and Chilly had reeled in for a two-hour sleep...

Lee: That last evening we both got absolutely soaked to the skin. We had to wear shorts because we had to keep going into the water to land fish to get them up over the ledge, and I remember sitting there under my brolly, looking at my legs absolutely smothered in these black flies and my back aching like you wouldn't believe, and thinking, 'This isn't fun any more.' But the thing was we both knew that there was an American pair catching up and we kept hearing that they were doing really well. We knew we were in the lead, but as you know Tim, it doesn't take very much on that river for someone to catch up, and we just knew that we had to keep going and going. As Chilly said, we had two hours' sleep and when that alarm went off at midnight I really had to force myself out to start fishing again.

Chilly: Within the hour we both knew that it had been the right thing to do; we were back in the groove and catching again and we both kept at it flat out until the hooter sounded for the end of the match. We were still playing fish five minutes before the match finished. There were other little things going on that kept you going. It has to be said that information on the ground was very sparse, and we were all a little bit miffed about that, but Lynn kept us up to speed all the time. She just sat there at her computer, texting the results through to me as they came through.

Lee: I think the first time I realised that we were in the lead was when Rob Tough rang me. I think it was the Thursday when we got into the lead, and we just stayed there.

Tim: Rob was a big help. I think one of my main memories was the leader board coming through from Toughie with a few hours to go and me thinking, 'Game on, they've won this!' But when I sent a text through to you Lee I got the reply, 'We're worried now, the Americans are catching us up!' We'd had a drink on Friday afternoon to celebrate your win and there we were, with a few hours to go, and you guys were worried! So I rang, Lee, straight after the end of the match and his first words were, "We're in tears here!" and for a brief second I thought he meant you'd been pipped at the post! But then his next words were, "We've won it by a mile!" It was game on!

Chilly: I have to just dive in here. I'm not the sort of bloke to believe anything until I've seen it with my own eyes, or seen it in writing, or had it from the horse's mouth, so to speak. And nobody wanted to tell us anything from an organisational point of view. With two or three hours to go Jacko was saying, "We've won this you know..." but I wasn't having it. I just kept saying I wasn't going to celebrate until someone actually told me that yes, we had won the World Cup, but no one was telling us a thing. Our marshal disappeared back to HQ to have our night's catch of fish entered onto the computer and we were left with the other young marshal, Tyler. But then our main marshal came back and again we asked him the score, but he still said he didn't know. But then he said, "Dave's asked me to come back and take a load of photographs of the pair of you," and I knew then; that was the moment. And what anyone thinks about what I'm going to say now I really don't give a damn, but at the end my eyes just filled with tears. I can't really describe my emotions at that moment. You've had seven hours' sleep in 120 hours, and to put in all the effort that had gone into the match, and then to finally know that you've won...

MAIN IMAGE Celebrating with Benji, who helped out as runner for the last couple of days.

ABOVE "This just isn't fun any more!" Jacko wilting towards the end of the gruelling match.

BELOW "I couldn't agree more!" Chilly battling it out through the rain of the last night.

Tim: It's a hugely emotional thing to win a title like that after all you'd gone through to get there and then beat a field of anglers like that in those conditions. Of course it's an emotional experience; we were all emotional about it!

Chilly: It's difficult isn't it? People have their own perceptions of carp fishing and we all view it differently, especially as we get older. World carp-fishing matches are absolutely the best thing you can ever do in carp fishing. The whole atmosphere of the event is incredible. There were Chinese, Japanese, Russians, Ukrainians, South Africans...

Tim: And Romanian Americans...

Chilly: And Romanian Americans, which we never realised was an affiliation of any sort prior to this event! And everyone who is there wants the same thing. I think everyone knows that I'm an ex-paratrooper, but I would far rather fall out of the side of a plane with a parachute on than take off and land in a plane without wearing one. I sat on that aeroplane on the way out, gripping the arm rests with white knuckles showing, but all the time thinking, 'What would it be like to be flying home (still gripping the arm rests with white knuckles) as a world champion?' The last couple of hours of the match were two of the best hours I have ever spent in carp fishing.

Lee: I remember keeping in touch with the girls back home, Jayne and Lynn. Even right at the end we still didn't know absolutely for sure that we had won, but right at the end there was a text came through from Lynn, bless her, while Chilly was playing a fish, and she was absolutely at her wits' end: 'For heaven's sake put me out of my misery!' Lynn knew the match ended at 10.00 in the morning, but she was thinking in terms of English time, which was, of course, five hours ahead of us out there! I had to send a text back telling her it didn't end till three in the afternoon, her time.

"I've been round the world a hundred times, I've been everywhere, and those days out there were as good as it gets"

Tim: And then the aftermath when you got back to base and we were all back together after five days and nights of roughing it, and you guys coming out on top of the pile. That afternoon in the kitchen back at Jerry and Marcy's will live with me forever. That was just epic.

Chilly: When I do something I don't necessarily want the accolades of lots of people. I want to share the moment with people who are important to me, and going back to the end of that match, with me and Jacko looking at each other with tears rolling down our cheeks, I needed – and I think Jacko was the same – just to be on my own for a little while. I went to Kermit, as we'd named our green 4x4 vehicle, and I was on one side of the vehicle and Jacko was on the other and we were both in our own little world; but then ultimately we couldn't wait to get back to base. We slowly packed away and everyone came down to congratulate us, which was wonderful because there was a real carp-fishing camaraderie to the aftermath, which I thought was awesome. Then we got in the truck and stuck the George Cross flag out of the top, and the Americans loved it. They love patriotism. Within reason it doesn't matter what country you come from as long as you are proud of it. And once we were back on the road, we couldn't wait to get back together with you guys, because of all the people on that bank you all knew what it meant, and they are the people you need to share the immediate aftermath with. We got back, we got out of the truck, and we knew you were all back by then because all the trucks were there, and I thought, 'This is the moment for me...' because you all understand. And that was the feeling you need to share with your friends, the immediate aftermath of the event, and it was just incredible, absolutely incredible.

Tim: We've talked a fair bit off tape about our prematch preparations because I felt that the one area we fell down on during the run-up to the event was being at the water at dawn each day to check out if there were carp present along the various stretches. But the prematch crack was so incredible that something had to give, and apart from the fact that I would have liked a slightly more productive swim for me and Steve, I don't think I would have changed any of it. Part of the team selection for these matches is based on angling ability, and part is based on being with people you enjoy the company of and can share the crack with, and I certainly think we made it crack!

Lee: Well I know what you're saying, but it's all very well being up at the crack of dawn and seeing those carp jumping, but you've still got to pull the right swim out of the bag, and that's the part you can't control.

Chilly: Just going back to what we were saying earlier, and I said that match fishing in this country isn't my idea of something I want to do, it's the world events that I want to be part of. And I think that if you want to share something as massive as that, as good as that, you want to do it with good people, and you need to do it right, and those four days leading up to the event were absolutely brilliant. I've been round the world a hundred times, I've been everywhere, and those days out there were as good as it gets. I hardly knew some of the guys before we went out there, but we soon got to know each other and as a group we gelled. That made the experience of walking into the kitchen in the lodge after the event all the more special. Yes, we were falling over every night for four days before the event – and for three days after – but that was just the nuts. The whole thing was biblical.

ABOVE "I think we're going to win this Jacko!" "I think you may be right Chilly."

TOP RIGHT "We'll have to stop putting it in the bait and drink some of it!"

BELOW One of the overworked marshals getting in on the act.

Lee: I think it's important to stress that while Ian and I were the lucky ones who got the draw and won the event, it was a real team effort. There were no secrets. We all cooked our maize in the big Burco in the garage under the lodge, with a lot of help from Donny, bless him. We were open about the grits and the seed, and when we were running out of baits and leads then we had fresh supplies sent from the guys who weren't experiencing as much action as us. I think it's worth stressing that in the swim we were fishing (and I would think it's true of most St. Lawrence swims) we just had to fish to eject the lead, otherwise we would have lost a lot more fish. But we all pooled ideas about swims, baits and tactics, and that made a huge difference in our approach to the river and being able to keep going to the end. You could see some of the results in some of the swims tailing off, and I did wonder if some of that was down to the anglers just not having the backup that you need for a prolific match like that. I know Chilly and I took enough maize and groundbait to sink a battleship into the swim in the first place, but we were getting additional supplies brought through well before the end. I think we had an extra four buckets of maize and groundbait in the end, and dozens of extra leads! We hardly had time to eat, but we were running out of food and water at one time, and Paul, Marcy, Julie and Joan all came through with fresh supplies to keep us going. We didn't have a hot drink throughout the match until right at the end when Benji turned up to act as runner.

Chilly: I think Benji should get a little mention in despatches. He's a mate of Lee's and he turned up from Austria because he was in America on business, which was great. For three and a half days we'd been dealing with the fish on our own. We've already talked about us playing fish for a total of 34 hours; well you can add another 68 hours to that for dealing with those fish. And while we

are talking about sleep deprivation, another thing you have to bear in mind is the safety of the sacked fish. We were on our own with no marshals around through the night, and when the big ships came through we had to make sure the sacked fish were OK. All the water was sucked away by the container ships and the fish were left high and dry. I know one night, Lee took a picture of me supporting ten sacks until the water returned to its normal level after the passage of a ship. I waded as far out as I could to keep the fish submerged as the water level dropped. But to be honest, the more I look back on all the problems, the more it adds to the memories of the whole occasion.

Tim: The problem with the marshalling was that the event was pegged over 35 miles of river, I would guess to keep all the sponsors from the three towns of Ogdensburg, Massena and Waddington happy. During the Pete Henwood events the pegging was more localised and the marshalling was terrific. From memory, we never had to sack a fish during the Henwood Internationals. The combination of numerous sacked fish, rocks, and passing ships will have given all the competitors who were catching a real problem.

Lee: I've got to mention one special moment which happened on the second night we were there. Very near to where I live we've got Blue Water, the big shopping centre, and at certain times of the year they have light beams going up through the sky, which you can see from quite a distance. Our swim was facing north, as most of them will have been I suppose, and one particular night we were looking across to the Canadian side and there were these lights flashing across the sky in the distance, and I commented to Chilly, "I wonder what they are?"

Chilly: I thought a car had driven up a tree and its headlights were shining up into the sky!

Lee: Anyway, Dave Moor turned up and I asked him about them. "They're the Northern Lights!" he informed us – the Aurora Borealis. It wasn't a spectacular show as Northern Lights go, but I was absolutely thrilled to have seen them. And the other thing about the night sky arising from the match was that we were facing north and there was no way I could avoid seeing the star constellation the Plough. Up until this trip I'd always considered seeing that to be really, really unlucky, but I guess that's been put to bed.

Tim: Thank heavens for that! Having fished with you numerous times, I've often wondered how a carp angler was supposed to go through a carp-fishing life without seeing the Plough; I see it every night when there's a clear sky! I actually commented to Steve during the event that I didn't know how you were going to avoid looking at the Plough.

Lee: Till now I've been looking away but I don't think I'll bother from now on. I'm going to spend the rest of my life looking for it now!

Chilly: We've talked a bit about the local population out there and the support the local towns give to the event, and it's hard for people back home, with no concept of what that part of America is like, to appreciate how fantastic the local people were and how welcoming every single one of them was. They all just wanted you to be there enjoying it and they weren't afraid to show it.

Lee: They made us so welcome. They all say, 'Have a nice day!' and they mean it!

Chilly: It wasn't just the attitude of the local people. I think Marcy was just amazing. She was an incredible hostess, and I think she is one of the nicest, most sincere people I've ever met in my life. She just couldn't do enough for us throughout our stay there, and she just loves to see people enjoying themselves. And it wasn't just Marcy: Jerry, brother Paul, mum Viv and Donny the Baitmaker, they were all superb and the help we got from them made all the difference to the occasion. But I can't let this look back go without mentioning the music! We were a bit put out that they didn't play the national anthem at the presentation ceremony, but apart from that, music played a large part in the event for us. Jacko and I are both AC/DC fans, and prior to the match I went into Walmart and bought the soundtrack from Iron Man 2 to play as loudly as we could whenever we felt we needed a raising of the spirits. At one point Julie and Joan were in the swim after they'd made a delivery and we'd had a little quiet period of about two hours when we hadn't had a bite and Jacko said, "I think it's about time we woke them up son, isn't it?" So he went over to the car, put the tape on, and cranked up the volume of the track *Shoot to Thrill* which, if I am honest, I think is my favourite AC/DC track of all time. And just as Angus was hacking his guitar to pieces, two of our rods roared off! I don't know what our neighbours thought, but after that we played the tape so loud for so long that we actually flattened the car battery!

Lee: It was bizarre. All the time it was playing we were getting bites.

RIGHT The following morning at the door of the lodge: "I don't know whether I've mentioned this guys, but I'm a world champion!"

BOTTOM LEFT We were the only ones who hadn't been mentioned, so we finally knew we'd definitely won it! A magic moment.

BOTTOM RIGHT Last night celebrations: "I'm number one in the world!"

Chilly: Then eventually, after the dust had settled and we'd had our afternoon of cleaning up and celebrating, we came to the presentation ceremony at the casino, and at that stage we still didn't know officially that we had won it. No one had told us. We sat there while they were building the amateur dramatics suspense to a crescendo, but then eventually there were only two names left to talk about, namely the winners, and as we still hadn't been mentioned, we finally knew for sure that we must be the winners. And then as we went up on the stage there was no national anthem, but *Shoot to Thrill* came blasting over the speakers, so that made us smile. We would have loved to have had the national anthem but that was second best. But you asked how we felt about it now. Well, for my part it just gets better and better. At the time, winning was almost overshadowed by the fact that we were having such a good time, but it all gets more significant as time goes by.

"As we still hadn't been mentioned, we finally knew for sure that we must be the winners"

Tim: And if it helps you put it into perspective, you've only got to look at what happened to me and Steve this time around. Last time round there was no way we could win a second title, but this time we were thinking, 'Well there's no reason why we shouldn't get lucky a third time!' We now know how lucky we have been in the past, and appreciate it all the more.

Chilly: It's the magnitude of the whole thing and the million memories we've brought back from New York State, some of which we haven't even remembered yet.

Lee: With me, I've gone through my carp-fishing life always having a target at the back of my mind. I've won the British Championship; I've caught the British record carp in the past; I've taken part in quite a few of these world matches, partnering Martin Locke and you, Tim, and one of my ambitions was to one day win one of those things. I actually said in the last chapter of my book, *Just for the Record*, that an ambition of mine was to win one of these world events, but when you write something like that it gives you pause for thought because you think you might be running out of time. For some of these young fellows like Jamie and Billy, that's their type of fishing, and when you are facing the prospect of fishing against them, you do wonder if you've still got it in you to keep pace with them. But we did. The memories of the whole trip burn bright. The lead-up to the event, the trip out, the prematch preparations and crack, the match itself, and the after-match celebrations will live with me forever. That was one of the highlights of my carp-fishing career, without any shadow of a doubt.

TOP LEFT Chilly on the final evening, with his legs looking worse than ever two days after the event finished!.

ABOVE To the victors the spoils . . .

BELOW Our wonderful hosts Jerry and Marcy rightfully taking centre stage with the four World Cup pairs enjoying Marcy's remarkable hospitality. Special people, all of them.

Chilly: You just mentioned a line there about *For the Record,* and I'd like to put something on record. These things just don't happen without people helping you, and the support we got from the two companies I work for, Fox and Mainline, was just terrific. All the bait that went out there, and Fox sent eight bedchairs and eight brollies, which was tremendous support. And ultimately the support came from you and Angling Publications, Tim, and one of the first things I did when I got off the plane was to ring Pip and Jemima and thank them, because they were as big a part of all this as the rest of us, and it meant the world to us.

Tim: The pleasure was mine, and you guys put the icing on what was already a hugely enjoyable cake by winning it. I'll have the last word here because Julian uses this word 'mindset' a lot, and it's a hell of a word to apply to a St. Lawrence event. You're not just fishing against the carp, and the other competitors, and the river and all it throws at you, but it's like golf, you're also competing against yourself. That's when mindset becomes as important as all the other carp-fishing attributes you guys possess. You proved you had the mindset and the ability, and now you've got the title. Forever you will be the 2011 St. Lawrence World Carp Champions. There's no other carp-match venue like it in the world, and in my book it's the greatest of the titles to win.

Pictures by Tim, Lee and courtesy of Tom Duncan-Dunlop and Steve Briggs. **CW**