

Race Results, Wednesday's Race

The RC boat again faced a weather dilemma this week, given that storms were coming our way Wednesday night. As we were setting the course, we saw the bright daylight turn cloudy and noticed a wide band of heavy weather on the Western horizon. That was a long line of strong storms headed our way. We felt we had to get a race started and then get everyone off the lake before it all hit.

We had another tremendous turn-out, with every single Spinn boat coming to the starting line and all but two of our Jammers present. JaM went first for a long beat, with a perfectly set starting line at 90 degrees to the wind. Then round the mark and head for the piers. Spinn followed five minutes later which made for tremendous action at the mark.

Carrera was in front heading to the mark but was pinching to make it and at the last minute, did a crash tack just prior to being too close to have room to maneuver. Many boats had followed Carrera into the rounding, so this caused something of a chain reaction. Fuzzy Logic, who had split away from Carrera and Silver Arrow midway up the leg appeared and deftly slipped through the confused sea of boats, to just barely round the mark with maybe a foot to spare. This was a marvelous job of boat handling by Dan Emery and his crew. They blasted out into the lead, became First to Finish for both divisions, and won the race on corrected in the JaM fleet again.

On the RC boat in the channel, our anchor was not holding and the finish line seemed to get shorter the harder the wind blew. We later discovered our anchor was being fouled with weeds. We watched several Spinn boats struggle with their chutes in the channel prior to and after finishing. It was quite exciting!

First-to-Finish for Spinn was the very well sailed Distraction—who did not use their spinnaker as they were short-handed, just behind the fast Jammers, but Bill Born could not save his time on Silk and Zot, who finished 1st and 2nd just 17 seconds apart. Spinn had other close finishes, with Dirk in fourth just 22 seconds behind Distraction, and three boats within 5 seconds of each other: Welly, Moody, and Imagine. Over in JaM, the first three boats finished within 53 seconds, with Andy Grootendorst visiting on Little Beauty in fourth just 20 seconds ahead of Eric Mallen in White Knuckles for fifth.

Looking at the standings with just one more race to go, Spinn is all about Wellenreiter, with a commanding 10 point lead over Distraction—although Welly finally spent their throw-out in this race

and wild things are known to happen at times in the last race of the season. There are four boats very close to each other which, along with Distraction, will fight over the 2nd and 3rd place flags: 3 points back of Distraction is Silk, 1 point back finds Captain Blood, and 2 points adrift is Zot, many-time Spinn BotY. These are the five most competitive boats in Spinn this Series.

Over in JaM, the race for Summer Series flags is much tighter, and in fact could not get any tighter, as it is tied between long-time competitors Silver Arrow and Carrera. Six points back is the newly-fast Fuzzy Logic, one point ahead of Little Beauty, who is two points ahead of White Knuckles. These five top boats are genuinely competitive in JaM this Series.

The final race of the Summer Series is next Wednesday, and will play a huge role in determining the Season Champion in JaM, as well as the second and third place flags, and while Welly looks secure in the top spot for the Spinn Summer Series, the second and third place Spinn flags are up for grabs.

Next Race: Dual-Handed Race this Saturday

Skippers' Meeting at 10AM at the Jr Foundation Dock.

Chili Regatta, Saturday, 17 September, bring your chili to the Club at 9AM

Annual Awards Banquet, Saturday night, 22 October, 6PM

So we can be sure to have plenty of food and tables for everyone (we kinda ran out of both last year thanks to the super turn-out), we ask for reservations to be sent to jimschrager@gmail.com this year. Please let me know how many people you expect. We are also working on a Sailing Trivia Quiz that will again revolve around sailboat names, so everyone can participate.

Race Results: Tri-State

Congratulations to all our SJRYC Racers in their exploits on the recent Tri-State long distance race:

Chicago-SJ Leg

Cynthia and Silk: 2nd in Section

Fuzzy Logic: 4th in Section

Dandelion: 7th

Captain Blood 8th

Attitude, Imagine, and Sea Raider: 9th in Section

Chateau Michelle: 11th in Section

SJ-Michigan City Leg

Imagine, Sea Raider, and Cynthia: 1st in Section

Captain Blood and Infinity: 2nd in Section

Distraction and Fuzzy Logic: 3rd in Section

Andy Grootendorst Interview in LMSuRF Newsletter

We were very lucky to have Andy agree to be interviewed for the Chicago-area newsletter on how he and his crew won the Mac again this year. Noted below is the text of the article. For the complete article with photos, find it starting on page seven of the newsletter which can be found here:

<http://files.constantcontact.com/d77aa772101/f21d3797-0234-48bd-bb9b-cc32af347c36.pdf>

HOW WE WON THE MAC (AGAIN) by Andy Grootendorst

On the evening of our final race last year, we saw the 1969 Morgan 41 Cynthia leave their home harbor and slowly cruise the Northerly beaches of St. Joseph, Michigan. Andy Grootendorst, members of his family, and the crew were taking one last, final sail on the boat their Dad, Fred, had bought new, a boat they won so many races over 46 years. The owner, Jim DeVries, had passed away, the estate was selling the boat, and it was not clear who would end up with this family heirloom. We realized it was the end of an era, and were deeply saddened watching the final sail. Does this all have to come to an end?

Although the boat went on the market and was listed in brokerage offerings at the winter sailboat show at McCormick Place early in 2016, Andy's wife Betty became the driving force and they, along with Andy's sister Sue Hertog, purchased the boat.

With Jim Devries onboard in 2015, Cynthia won their section in the Chicago-Mackinac race again, as they have done so many years since restarting the race program in 1998 with a 1st in Section and a 3rd overall behind Bacchant and Larry Ellision's Maxi boat Sayonara. Andy spoke to us last year about general tips on how to win a Chicago-Mackinac. This year he provides a close-up look at the very fast and rough 2016 race.

Jim Schrage: In our last interview, you indicated the start of a Mac race is really important. Did it matter this year, with such a fast race? How was your start this year?

Andy Grootendorst: We continue to believe the start really matters, even though the finish line in a Mac race is a long way away. The weather was gorgeous, clear skies and about 8 knots of wind, and in no way foreshadowed what was to lie ahead on the Lake. We had decided to look for a shore breeze on the West side of the course, and everyone at the start was heading for the windward end of the line, which usually becomes crowded. So we executed a wonderful start, pretty much all by ourselves, on the leeward end of the line, and set about heading to Wisconsin.

Jim S.: In the early going you were not tracking in first place, but second or third. How did you get into the lead?

Andy G.: We grabbed the lead by rethinking our original strategy. As we headed to the Wisconsin shore, we watched boats in our section and saw that the breeze was not better for us. A few hours into the race, we began to sag back East to the rhumbline, as our bet was a loser going West. As we did that, we rejoined our section and were able to sneak ahead.

Jim S.: How did you manage to keep going with all the storms in this race? What procedure do you use to win in such challenging weather?

Andy G.: We remain aware of all boats around us, all the way to the horizon. We keep a close eye on boats ahead of us, to see what they are doing. In the first set of storms, we watched boats out to the West and you could see them get knocked down, struggle, and get the spinnakers down. One by one, we saw it happen. Our response was to be ready, to get the chute down, pull out our roller-furled genoa, and reef the main if needed. We have no desire to wrestle with the spinnaker in the middle of a squall simply because that is not fast.

The worst thing you can do is wait for the squall to hit you, because once it is on top of you, everything is about ten times harder to do--harder to get sails down, harder to get the boat under control, harder to keep going toward the finish line in bad weather. Races are won and lost by how well people keep racing, versus just hanging on for survival. To stay away from "survival mode," we plan ahead so we can keep pushing the boat toward the Island.

We had many storms, starting Saturday night and through the next day. On Sunday late in the afternoon we were way up North entering the Manitou and the breeze started picking up to 30 knots plus. One by one, boats were getting knocked down, and soon, there were no chutes anywhere. We also dropped our chute, but after a bit of time, the wind dropped and for us the key was to get the chute back up. But many boats were reluctant to do that, they had been rounded up, torn a chute, or felt like they would be out of control—even as the wind was dropping into the “safe” range of say 20 – 25 knots. When you keep the big sails up too long, you naturally worry about putting them up again. Because we were alert, always concentrating on the race and other boats, we were ready.

Jim S.: How hard is it to keep the boat going fast in the right direction in such high winds? When and where do you draw the line?

Andy G.: This was a race where at times the wind was over 30 knots from astern. You have to calculate when to stop fighting the boat with the spinnaker up in that much air. Yes, we can go faster that way, but at what cost? We tend to look further ahead and think about what happens in a wipe-out and if it is worth it.

Driving our boat downwind at 35 knots with the spinnaker up means the boat is right on the edge of control every moment. So by pushing it, eventually something will go wrong no matter how good you are. Sometimes we change the helmsman every 15 minutes, just to keep fresh hands on the wheel. We still did a few spin outs in this race with the chance of doing damage or hurting someone. Those are odds we don't like to play.

Jim S.: So did you go wing-on-wing? Don't all the Polar Plots tell us that is slow?

Andy G.: This is all about knowing your boat--and every boat is different. Dead downwind wing-on-wing gets better the more air there is, and there was lots of air in this Mac. We watch it, and carry the chute when we can handle it. Wing-on-wing in very heavy air for us is about 2 knots slower than with a spinnaker. But we are under great control and we think over the long haul of a Mac race that can be the best way to go.

Jim S.: How do you run the crew in a tough race like this?

Andy G.: We do partners and have no race shifts set by the clock. One partner is on duty while the other one rests. This was a very demanding race, and that is another reason why we are willing to be sensible about sails rather than always have the biggest and fastest sail up no matter what. Our crew tended to sleep on deck for some of the race because we were all wet and it was miserable down below.

Jim S.: How well did you think you were doing when you came into cell phone coverage back near the Michigan side up North?

Andy G.: We had no idea, but hoped we were in the top five boats. We knew we had a tough ride, and could not keep the spinnaker flying all the time. What we discovered is that we weren't the only ones that had to take down the big sails, and that we were leading our section. We believe we had that lead because we were able to keep pushing in the right direction rather than dealing with mistakes and cleaning up the mess--especially at night.

Jim S.: How to you gybe the spinnaker in that kind of weather?

Andy G.: When needed, we simply drop the chute, reset the pole, gybe the main, and re-hoist the spinnaker. You can get into so much trouble gybing a masthead spinnaker in really heavy air, we find we do better by spending just a bit more time on every gybe, but not taking the gamble that we will blow a few of them.

Jim S.: You carry both an asymmetrical spinnaker and standard chutes, which you set without a bow sprit. In what wind and tacking angles does the asymmetrical spinnaker work better for you?

Andy G.: We run our asymmetrical spinnakers with our pole set just above the bow pulpit. They work well at 60 – 110 degrees apparent. Many of the top boats in our section use these. It fills in the hole between close reaching with a jib and where you can comfortably reach with a symmetrical spinnaker.

Jim S.: Would you want to do another Mac like this? What is your preferred air for your boat and your crew?

Andy G.: This was our fastest Mac ever and one of the toughest. We did see the wind go light right after a few of the storms, but to get to the Island at 9AM Monday morning was amazing for us. We'll race in any weather, but the perfect race for us is moderate air reaching and running.

Jim S.: That surprises me, you have a heavy boat.

Andy G.: That's where our boat seems to have her sweet spot. Another interesting point is that we can go near dead downwind with our boat, not have to tack downwind, and still go very fast.

Jim S.: Did you have any close calls with other boats in this race? A boat sunk, many boats dropped out—what did you see while on the course?

Andy G.: We did have one, where we were starboard and a boat was crossing on port. He lost the wind in his sails and it got messy when they were close by. We simply altered course to make sure he got by OK. The last thing I ever want is to put ourselves in a place where we can be protested out of the race. We had rights in that situation and altering course took as 20 seconds. I'd much rather lose that 20 seconds and stay in the race to earn it back somewhere rather than throw away all the work we do to race the Mac on a protest, even if we might win the protest. I've never seen the logic there.

Jim S.: Did you shred any sails this time?

Andy G.: Nope. We've ripped one sail since about 1998, when we started racing again.

Jim S.: How about exhaustion in a race like this? Did you feel it? Could you see other members of your crew that felt it?

Andy G.: I felt it and I saw it in our crew at times. This was probably the hardest race for a crew I have been on. We had so much bad weather that it was difficult to get any rest until Sunday. Our great crew is always important, but this year, they won the race for us. I asked for tons of sail changes and they came through every time. There were long periods in storms when everyone was soaking wet, with few chances to get down below out of the weather. Our navigation is usually good, but everyone knew the fast way to the Island was the rhumbline this year. The difference was our crew kept pushing hard no matter how bad the weather got or how late at night it was. Mike Kinney, Bill Thomas, Wayne and Louie Tremblay, Kevin Ziegert, Bob Heathcote, and Mark Bowman are fabulous folks to be sailing with and we are lucky to have them.

Jim S.: You looking forward to next year?

Andy G.: We can hardly wait!

Andy Grootendorst races out of St. Joseph, Michigan, and has won many offshore races over the years; Jim Schrager races in St. Joseph and is the St. Joseph River Yacht Club Fleet Captain for 2016.

We'll see you on the water, Ken Z & Jim S.

The Windward Sheet follows the SJRYC racing fleet and is published at irregular intervals throughout the sailing season.