



# RaceWeekNEWS



Tim Wilkes / timwilkes.com

Sailors in all 16 classes waited and were rewarded with perfect conditions and two races setting the stage for the finale. In J/105 class Alice Leahey's Grace O'Malley (43) sets up for a tight mark rounding ahead of Malcolm Geffer's Vmax (47). Thomas Coates Masquerade leads the class and could add another top spot to his string of three straight overall wins at Acura Key West.

## Back on Track

By Bill Wagner & Rebecca Burg

There was much rejoicing around the Conch Republic on Thursday. The wind Gods smiled on Acura Key West 2008, presented by Nautica, delivering excellent racing conditions and bringing much joy to both competitors and organizers.

Early forecasts for Thursday were not favorable and talk on the dock was that another day of racing might be lost. Racing had been abandoned on Monday because of too much wind and Wednesday as a result of too little.

However, event director Peter Craig emerged from an early morning meeting with his four principal race officers with encouraging news. Commander's Weather, which has been spot-on all week, issued a forecast for building breezes in the afternoon and the Premiere Racing team believed it could conduct at least once race.

Craig wisely held the fleet of 262 boats onshore in the morning while waiting for updated information. Since the forecast still looked promising at noon, the AP Flag came down and the armada of racing boats was sent out to the Atlantic Ocean.

Lo and behold, conditions proved even better than expected with the wind starting at 5-8 knots from the southwest then clocking around to the north and increasing to 12 knots. That allowed for two races on all four courses and resulted in an awful lot of happy faces when the boats returned to port.

"What a surprise! We had very nice sailing conditions today, the best we've had all week," said Dave Ullman, who holds fourth place in Melges 24 class. "It didn't look promising last night, but if any of us could really predict the weather we would be in a different business."

There was minimal shakeup in the standings with the lead changing hands in only five of 16 classes. However, the difference between the first and second boat in the

other 11 classes is six points or less and things could change dramatically before this series concludes. It sets the stage for an historic final day at Acura Key West 2008 with organizers moving the first gun up one hour and planning to conduct three races.

For two decades, there had never been a three-race day at Key West. Now, in the 21st season of the largest winter regatta in North America, there could possibly be a pair of three-race days. Prospects of that happening are quite great as the forecast is for 15-20 knot winds on Friday.

"It's the first time we had no racing on Monday. It's the first time we've had more than one race on Friday," Craig said. "This has been, without question, the most challenging week weather-wise in my 15 years of running this regatta. To be able to race on three days and quite possibly get in eight races is rather incredible considering the circumstances, and ultimately I think the competitors will go home happy."

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### Friday is Acura Day





## Race Week News

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### Division 1

There was a change atop the ultra-competitive Farr 40 class with *Barking Mad* jumping from third to first on the strength of a bullet in yesterday's second race. Skipper Jim Richardson has finished sixth or better in the 25-boat fleet for all five races and now holds a four-point advantage over opening day leader *Mascalzone Latino*.

"We had a good day. We didn't do anything fancy, sailed fairly conservatively in the race we won," said Terry Hutchinson, tactician aboard *Barking Mad*.

Hutchinson, an Annapolis resident who was tactician for runner-up Emirates Team New Zealand in the last America's Cup, said anything could happen with three races being held on Friday.

"Obviously, I'd rather be where we are at the moment,

going the right way and we've had some boat-handling issues," she said. "We have really put ourselves through the ringer. Fortunately, we have recovered from all our mistakes and have managed to hang on."

Thursday marked the 10th wedding anniversary for John and Deneen Demourkas, who have both been skippering separate entries in Key West for years. John, who is sailing a Farr 40 also known as *Groovederci*, wisely booked dinner reservations at Louie's Backyard, one of the most popular restaurants in town.

Jeff Ecklund sailed *Star* to a first and a third yesterday to take over the lead in Melges 32 class, which has proven incredibly competitive at Acura Key West 2008. Ecklund and tactician Harry Melges have been sailing together for 15 years and certainly found the chemistry on Thursday.

"We had a great day and it felt good. The wind conditions were to our liking and we found some special speed," said Ecklund, a Ft. Lauderdale resident. "Hopefully, we can

find the same groove tomorrow and keep our nose clean. This is the strongest field we've ever seen in the Melges 32 and it is still anybody's event."

### Division 2

*Samba Pa Ti*, a TP52 owned by California native John Kilroy Jr., vaulted from third to first in the overall standings of IRC 1 – another class comprised entirely of professional crews. Kilroy posted a pair of seconds on Thursday and has now finished no worse than third through five races.

*Stark Raving Mad* continues to lead PHRF 1, albeit by only four points after second-place *Spaceman Spiff* won the day with a third and a first. This is owner James Madden's maiden voyage on *Stark Raving Mad*, a J/125 that was sailed on only two occasions by its previous



owner. *Swan 42* is making its one-design debut at Acura Key West and the competition has been quite close and intense. *Arethusa*, foreground, leads a congested group of seven of the Nautor-designed sloops during yesterday's racing. Skipper Phil Lotz and team have *Arethusa* in sixth in the overall standings. Mark Watson's *Tiburon* led after the opening day of racing, but Andy Fisher's *Bandit* jumped to the top of the standings with a strong performance on Thursday.

but at the same time we have to sail very well tomorrow in order to hold this lead," he said.

*Mascalzone Latino*, the two-time defending world champion owned by Vincenzo Onorato, was still first overall after placing second in Race 4, but was over the starting line early in Race 5 and wound up 12th.

*Twins*, skippered by Erik Maris of France, also had a solid day with finishes of first and third to move into third place in the overall standings. "The regatta is very tight and we are pleased to be in contention. *Barking Mad* and *Mascalzone Latino* are the best boats – very fast, consistent and strong tactically. It will be difficult for us to stay with them," said Maris, seeking his first Farr 40 victory in four trips to Key West.

*Groovederci*, skippered by Deneen Demourkas of Santa Barbara, CA, maintained its lead in M30 class after getting the gun in Race 5. Demourkas, class winner at Key West in 2005, said her team sits atop the standings in spite of itself.

"We've done everything the hard way. We're not

owner.

"The boat is practically brand new even though it was built in 2000," said Madden, who owns a Reichel-Pugh 66-footer with a swing keel that is also known as *Stark Raving Mad*. He is fortunate to have several crew members from the big boat here this week, such as Gary Weisman and Chris Busch. "We are learning the boat little by little every day."

There was a lead change in the *Swan 42* class, which is making its one-design debut at Acura Key West 2008. *Bandit*, owned by Andy Fisher of Newport, RI, jumped from second to third on the strength of a 3-2 line on Thursday. *Amelia*, owned by Alex Jackson of Riverside, CT, won the day with a pair of bullets.

### PHRF-2

*Emocean*, Will Hanckel's J/120 from Charleston, SC, has been playing this week's tricky winds like a virtuoso. The unbelievable team has four first-place finishes,

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dominating the PHRF-2 class. The crew was all grins as *Emocean* returned and gracefully pirouetted into her slip after Thursday's action. "We had pretty good starts. We were getting off the line clean and were lucky enough to sail the right shifts." Hanckel said. "We were able to keep everybody in check." On Tuesday, *Emocean* did loose track of *Rush*, who breezed ahead to win race one. "We didn't keep an eye on them that time," Hanckel said. Preferring heavy air, the team was initially concerned about the light air day, but things ended up fine in the end. Hanckel's crew consists of friends from Charleston and they've been sailing together since youth.

Steven Stollman's C&C 115, *Primal Scream*, placed second today with strong, consistent sailing. *Rush*, Bill Sweetser's J/109 from Annapolis, MD, is in third. The highly competitive boat won J/109 class in 2005. *Rush* is leading the J/109 subclass competition, which includes *Caminos*, *Tastes Like Chicken* and *Sea Trial*. "The racing is fairly close," said *Sea Trial*'s Jim Powers, from Houston, TX. "We have a chance for two trophies each race day. *Rush* did a great job on Tuesday." It's *Sea Trial*'s first Key West.

Race week veteran, *Reggae/Red Rain*, has several Naval Academy members onboard. A larger boat, the Beneteau 40.7 likes heavy air and had to work carefully in Thursday's conditions. Mike Case, Navy Class of '82, considers the radical change in from Tuesday to Thursday. "You have to shift from heavy air tactics to lighter air crew tactics." *Reggae* had lagged behind on Tuesday after blowing out the jib early on in race one. The team took it in stride. "It's a blast," Case says, grinning. "We just love it."

## Division 3

*Blu Moon*, the Swiss entry skippered by Franco Rossini, remained atop the Melges 24 class by counter-balancing an 18th in Race 4 with a victory in Race 5. Helmsman Flavio Favini said the team will be hard-pressed to hold off the likes of *WTF* (Alan Field), *Tresvailles.com* (Benoit Charon), *Pegasus 505* (Ullman) and *Full Throttle* (Brian Porter), all of whom are within striking distance.

"There is still a long way to go and things can change quickly in this fleet... as we showed today," Favini said. "Tomorrow should be windy and we are looking forward to some great racing."

Leaders in two of the three classes on Division 3 have built comfortable leads going into the final day. *Masquerade*, skippered by Thomas Coates of San Francisco, holds a seven-point cushion in J/105 and is closing on a fourth straight title in that 34-boat class.

Chris Perkins is once again calling tactics on *Masquerade*, which will no doubt cover second place *Savasana* (Brian Keane, Marion, MA) since the next nearest competitor is 30 points in arrears.

*Rumor*, skippered by John Storck Jr. of Huntington, NY, has notched bullets in three of five races and now leads J/80 class by 11 points. Erick Storck, a four-time All-American and two-time finalist for College Sailor of the Year while at Dartmouth, is calling tactics for his brother.



**Pete Hunter and long-time friend and crew mate Jay Price sailed *Wairere* to first place in PHRF 1 at Acura Key West 2007. Hunter, a resident of Kill Devil Hills, NC, is contending once again this year. He steered *Wairere* to first and third place finishes on Thursday and is third in the overall standings with 13 points - five behind PHRF 1 leader *Stark Raving Mad*.**

*Lifted*, last year's J/80 winner, held onto second despite being over the start line early and sailing to the wrong mark in Race 4. Skipper Kerry Klingler (Larchmont, NY) had high praise for the performance of the *Rumor* team on Thursday. "John Storck just cleaned up. They've been dominating," Klingler said.

Third overall so far, the *Painkiller Jane* team, three crewmembers from Sweden and one from Australia, couldn't wait to get out there and put their combined skills to work on Thursday. "This is the best possible time to be here," said Ola Quiberg, trim. Magnus Tyreman is at the helm. Curt Johnson from Marina del Rey, CA, is thrilled to race *Avet* in its first Key West. Johnson's team of regulars have been racing the J/80 for six years, winning race five.

From Prince Edward Island, Canada, *Team Dog Party* chartered a J/80 just to be in Key West this year. Terry McKenna races his own J/29 in Canada with his three brothers and some best friends for crew. "Chartering is just simpler," McKenna explains. "Although we are on a different boat, we just want to race." This is their second Key West and *Team Dog Party* are hoping that it won't be their last.

## Division 4

So far, mother nature's mood swings have been all over the map. The Atlantic high pressure area shifted, starting the day with gentle breezes. Early on, seas were flat across Division 4's course and winds puffed in from around the southwest at up to 8 knots, and then dropped. This day tested everyone's light wind skills. *One Up*, first overall if PHRF-6, and one of the S2 7.9s, *Magic*, were the first enthusiastic teams to glide up to the course in anticipation of two races today. While waiting for the start, a few boats threw out fishing lines and a *Caribbean Soul 2* crewmember jumped overboard. It was that calm.

When the winds swung around, piping up to 12 knots from a northerly direction, the races were on. A perceptible current threw in an additional challenge before the starts as boats struggled not to prematurely poke their noses the line. In PHRF-3, *X-Esse*, *Temptress* and *Hot Stuff* did just that, but artfully recovered. *Bad Boys* and *Relentless* also jumped the gun in the excitement during the Corsair 28R's tense launching sequence. The Corsair class saw

a few radical changes on Thursday. *Evolution*, Kathryn Garlick's Canadian entry, leaped from fourth to second with a bullet in race five. Lead boat, Tom Reese's *Flight Simulator* was on the defense and fending off a strong and aggressive Corsair 28R class. *Flight Simulator* earned a bullet in race four, but an unexpected run-in with a keelboat caused them to withdraw from race five.

*Resurgence*, Fred McConnel's Columbia 32 in PHRF-3, challenged *Temptress* winning race four. Bill Berges' Evelyn 32-2, *Bluto* sailed consistently and remains in second with just three points behind *Temptress*. In PHRF-4, *Bad Girl*, Robert Armstrong's J/100, scored a first and third maintaining a strong lead. Scott Piper's *Pipe Dream*, is hot on his heels scoring a third in race four and winning race 5, placing second for the day. *Tangent*, Gerry Taylor's Cape Fear 38, breezed into third. *Cool Breeze*, in PHRF-5, started the day on their best foot with a perfect performance scoring two bullets on Thursday. *Britsar*, Ken Schram's T-10, remains in first place by six points. PHRF-6 broke its three-way tie after a fierce competition that scrambled the class's status quo. *Horizon*, Bob Fleck's S2 7.9 from Alexandria, VA, climbed the ranks to take second on Thursday, with two perfect races. Lincoln Schoenberger's Wyliecat 30, *One Up*, remains in first by a single point.

## PHRF-3

First in class, Robert Hibdon's SR-33, *Temptress*, from Charleston, SC, has four firsts and a third place finish for the week so far. "We had beautiful sailing conditions today," Hibdon says. He explained how his team had low confidence about the weather prediction models for Thursday. *Temptress* is built for rugged conditions and the flat seas didn't bode well. Then the breeze filled in. "It was a little bit of redemption," Hibdon noted, relieved that they had something to work with. "In PHRF, it's a game of seconds and every second counts." The remarkably sailed *Temptress* might make it look easy, but the Charleston based team did not have their best day on Thursday. "We were over early in race four," Hibdon explained. The boat's spinnaker then wrapped and Hibdon felt that he steered too far from their intended course. His main concern though was for his trimmer, Andres Hernandez. Unfortunately, Andres sprained his ankle on the dock while on his way to the boat. The devoted sailor stuck with his team and stayed below the entire day. While racing, he answered a telephone call, only to learn of the unexpected death of his beloved pet dog, Morris. "The crew ended the day by raising their glasses to Morris," Hibdon said with thoughtful concern for his friend and crewmember. "Hernandez is our rock."

## PHRF-4

The Tripp 36, *Predator*, from Houston, TX, is racing in Key West for the first time. The boat is a joint entry by Race Week veterans Fred Prella, Chuck Buckner and Ken Womack. "Last year was the best sailing vacation I've had," Prella said.

*Mr. Bill's Wild Ride*, William Wildner's J/35 from Clinton River, MI, has a crew of regulars from their community. Everyone is an experienced racing sailor, but it's the boat's first Key West. "Although I still like to perform at a high level, in the past two years I have changed my focus from winning to sailing well and having fun," says Wildner "The pressure of winning can sometimes spoil the fun."