



RaceWeekNEWS



Tim Wilkes / timwilkes.com

A Grand Finale

By Bill Wagner & Rebecca Burg

The emotion was palpable as *Barking Mad* owner Jim Richardson and tactician Terry Hutchinson embraced in a huge, heartfelt bear hug.

Groovederci skipper Deneen Demourkas sported a huge smile and giggled as she climbed back on the dock after being thrown in the water by jubilant crew members.

Numbers owner Dan Meyers wore a look of complete satisfaction as he leaned against the lifeline in the stern of his state-of-the-art race boat at the end of a long week.

Those are the undeniable signs of victory.

Acura Key West 2008, presented by Nautica, was among the strangest and most challenging in the 21-year history of the regatta. However, what the sailors, especially the winners, will remember is a spectacular

final day of racing and the final results.

"I think the race committee did an amazing job this week. To hold eight races in three days is really quite amazing," said Thomas Coates, winner of J/105 class aboard *Masquerade*. "It was a tough situation with too much wind on one day and too little wind on others. Peter Craig and his team made the right decisions all week as far as when to send us out and when to keep us ashore, when to race and when not to race."

Things didn't look good on Wednesday night after two of the initial three days of the regatta were cancelled due to bad conditions. Making matters worse was the fact the forecast for Thursday was for a second straight day of light, fickle breeze.

However, Mother Nature did an about face and brought a solid 12-knot northerly that enabled organizers with Premiere Racing to get in two races on

Twins, skippered by Erik Maris of France, leads *Mean Machine* and about a dozen other Farr 40s during a downwind leg on Friday. *Twins* won two races during the week and finished third in the overall standings behind *Barking Mad* and *Mascalzone Latino*. *Mean Machine*, owned by Peter de Ridder of Monaco, won Race 2 and placed sixth overall.

Thursday. Things got even better on Friday with a northeasterly bringing 16-20 knot winds that allowed for three more races to be held.

"This was a classic Key West day. It was breeze on with warm weather and sunshine. You couldn't have asked for a better final day," Melges 24 winner Dave Ullman said.

Craig, who has been event director for the past 15 years, was pleased the action-packed final days transformed the regatta into a rousing success.

"I think the sailors tend to forget what happened early in the week and remember what happened at the end. We did well in that regard because the racing the last two days was outstanding," Craig said. "It was Chamber of Commerce conditions today so I would think we sent everyone home happy."

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Division 1

Richardson used the word "ecstatic" to describe his reaction to winning Farr 40 class for the first time in 11 trips to Key West. The Boston resident and crew of *Barking Mad* accomplished that feat in dramatic fashion, winning the eighth and final race to capture a tiebreaker with *Mascalzone Latino*. Because the Farr 40 class had seven different winners during the week and the point spread among the top boats was so narrow, *Barking Mad* earned the prestigious Acura Trophy as Boat of the Week.

"It's hard to win any regatta in this class and it has been especially difficult for us to win this particular regatta," said Richardson, who has been second in Key West on several occasions.

Mascalzone Latino, the two-time defending world champion owned by Vincenzo Onorato of Italy, led *Barking Mad* by one point going into the final race. Richardson got a great start and sailed at the front of the 25-boat fleet throughout, passing *Mean Machine* to move into first place on the final downwind leg then holding off a hard-charging *Mascalzone Latino*. Both boats finished with 29 points, but *Barking Mad* won the tiebreaker by virtue of having more first place finishes.

"Vincenzo has a great program and a terrific crew. To be able to beat those guys in such a hard-fought regatta is very gratifying," Richardson said.

Defending Key West champion *Alinghi*, skippered by Ernesto Bertarelli, finished ninth. The Swiss syndicate that is two-time winner of the America's Cup, started

slow and was never really in contention. Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark steered his Farr 40 Nanoq to a very respectable 11th place result. His Royal Highness was pleased to have improved two places from last year and vowed to return.

"We always enjoy coming to Key West. It is much nicer here than it is in Denmark during January," he said. "The wind and the weather here are generally quite good."

Competition was also extremely close in Melges 32 class, which saw a significant increase in entries and caliber of competition at Acura Key West 2008. Star, skippered by Jeff Ecklund of Ft. Lauderdale, FL, finished fifth or better in six of seven races that counted in edging *New Wave* by two points and capturing the Midwinter Championship.

"The class is getting better and better all the time and this was probably the most competitive regatta we've ever had," said Ecklund, who had boatbuilder Harry Melges aboard as tactician. "All the top teams are going really fast and you've got to be on your game at all times. I think the key was that we had terrific boat preparation and awesome crew work all week."

Demourkas led the M30 class from start to finish in winning Key West for the second time in four years. Scott Nixon of the Quantum loft in Annapolis called tactics for Demourkas, a Santa Barbara resident who won three races and finished no worse than fourth in the other five.

"We were doing it the hard way all week. We had to work our way up from the back of the fleet in a bunch of races, but we kept fighting. The team did an excellent job. I'm very proud of them," she said.

Division 2

IRC 1 class was comprised of the 10 largest boats in the regatta and Meyers' new Judel/Vrolijk 66-footer proved the most consistent of them all. America's Cup veteran Hamish Pepper called tactics for Meyers, who won five of eight races in compiling a low score of 10 points – four better than runner-up *Flash Glove*, a TP52 owned by Colm Barrington of Ireland.

"This result had very little to do with me. It's a credit to the guys who put so much time into designing, building and preparing the boat," said Meyers, who won IRC 1 class at Acura Key West 2007 aboard his previous *Numbers*. "I'm really happy with the performance of the boat. It's a heck of a lot of fun."

Andy Fisher and his team on *Bandit* posted a first and a third on Friday to come away with the victory in Swan 42 class, which was making its one-design

debut at Acura Key West. Competition was fierce throughout the week with runner-up *Tiburon* (Mark Watson) leading after the first day of racing and current U.S. National Champion *Amelia* (Alex Jackson) in contention the whole way.

Veteran North Sails professional Steve Benjamin called tactics for Fisher, who added this prestigious title to his class victory in the Swan American Regatta. Fisher finished fifth or better in seven of eight races this week.

"It's fantastic to win in Key West. It's always great conditions and superb racing," Fisher said. "I think the key for our team was that we never gave up. We battled back from adversity in several races."

Emocean, a J/120 skippered by Will Hanckel of Charleston, SC, led from start to finish in winning PHRF 2 by 13 points. Brothers Peter and George Durst teamed to provide tactics for Hanckel, who counted all



Jim Madden raced his J/122 *Stark Raving Mad* for the first time at Acura Key West 2008. The Newport Beach, CA resident obviously got the feel for the boat rather quickly as he led from start to finish in winning PHRF 1 class.

first place finishes in posting a tremendous low score of seven points.

"We got off the line real well in every race, grabbed the lead going up the first beat and were able to cover and control the fleet," Hanckel said. "It's all rather easy when you can get out front, get clean air and sail your own race."

Division 3

Ullman put together a tremendous final day to fourth to first in Melges 24 class, largest of the regatta with

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46 boats. The California sailmaker steered Pegasus 505 to a stellar line of 1-2-1 on Friday to finish three points ahead of week-long leader *Blu Moon* (Franco Rossini, Switzerland).

"Our team likes sailing in the breeze. We are happy whenever it gets above 15 knots," said Ullman, who has won Melges 24 class five times in Key West. "Obviously, we had a great all-around day. We started well in all three races, sailed at the front and were never really in trouble."

Charlie Ogletree (tactician), Brian Hutchinson (bow), Andy Escort (jib) and Pablo Saldano (traveler) comprised the crew for the 62-year-old Ullman, who counted no result worse than a sixth in capturing the Midwinter Championship for the class.

Coates completed an incredible accomplishment by winning J/105 class for the fourth consecutive year at Acura Key West and also garnering the Midwinter Championship. The San Francisco native and his team on *Masquerade* won five of eight races and led the 34-boat class after each day of the regatta and finished with a low score of 13 points – an incredible 42 points better than runner-up *Eclipse* (Damian Emery).

"This regatta always attracts the top programs in our class so we certainly are very pleased to have won here four years in a row," Coates said. "I think it looks a lot more lopsided than it really was. We trailed boats in every race and were challenged considerably."

In J/80, John Storck's impressive team on *Rumor* racked up an impressive six bullets through the week. The Huntington, NY, entry earned first in class by a wide margin of points. "We have a really good crew and we've sailed together for a long time," said John Storck, Jr. John's sons Erik and John and daughter Kaity are collegiate All American sailors. Crewmember Mandi Markee is a family friend.

"We're fast upwind, especially in the breeze," said Kaity, sharing secrets of *Rumor's* success. "My dad tunes the rig and sets it up really well."

Division 4

From fast and furious to a light wind waltz, competitors had it all. With overall honors and the PHRF National Championship on the line, competitors in Division 4 were ready for the three-race grand finale.

"The conditions today were absolutely excellent," noted PRO Wayne Bretsch. The level of excitement was high as boats checked in with enthusiastic cheers. Friday's action was nothing short of suspenseful.

In Friday's first race in PHRF-3, class leader *Temptress* had a late start and then experienced a spinnaker wipe out due to a stuck sheet. The boat recovered to win the class posting six first-place finishes for the week, including back-to-back wins in the final two races.

Three races, a rescue and winning the PHRF National Championship were all part of a Friday's work onboard Robert Armstrong's J/100, *Bad Girl* in PHRF-4, from the

US Virgin Islands. Early on, *Bad Girl's* roller furler casting broke and the team couldn't furl the jib. "We had to sail the entire race with the jib up," Armstrong explained. When rival boats saw *Bad Girl's* modified sail plan, they too began

sailing downwind with their jibs up. Since *Bad Girl* was in the lead all week, rivals may have thought it was a new tactic to gain an edge.

In the second race in PHRF-3, a crewmember from Mathew Petrat's Hobie 33 *Hot Stuff* fell overboard at the leeward mark. In an impressive show of sportsmanship, Robert Armstrong's crew onboard *Bad Girl* stopped to pick up the soggy sailor and continued racing. Unharmed, the crew member was concerned for her team and wanted to return to her boat. The course was swarming with boats and the safest thing was for *Bad Girl* to continue racing. After the finish, the crewmember jumped into the water in the shadow of the committee boat. Using a life preserver tied to a long line, *Hot Stuff* safely recovered their teammate and completed the final race.

Despite the detour, *Bad Girl* still crossed the line in first place. All of Robert Armstrong's team is from the same home town. "There's a lot of good crew communication," Armstrong said. "We all sail together and this is the farthest we've gone to do a race." Due to late flights where six crew members arrived at the last minute before the racing began, *Bad Girl* didn't get any practice time. The boat was fully prepped in spite of the missing practice day. "I did custom changes, within the

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safety regulations, to make racing easier," Armstrong explains. Those customizations worked. "I really love the boat."

Gerry Taylor's Cape Fear 38, *Tangent*, from Annapolis MD, earned second in PHRF-4 with consistent sailing through the week and six second place finishes. Jim Hightower's Dickerson 37, *Hot Ticket*, from Houston, TX, ranked in the middle of the class. "We felt comfortable," said trimmer Johnny Jones after Friday's action. "It was a good day with no round ups." The team was pleased with the day's weather. "This is what we'd been waiting for all week," said trimmer Mike Tyer.

A beautiful breeze for the Corsair fleet, meant tight racing between first and second place entries, *Flight Simulator* and *Relentless*. Scoring three bullets on Friday and with a throw out, Peter Katcha's *Relentless* (St. Petersburg, FL) moved up from yesterday's fourth-place position to second overall with a mere half-point separation with *Flight Simulator*. Kathryn Garlick's *Evolution* finished in third place.

In PHRF-5, Ken Schram's T-10, *Britsar*, Bayview YC, MI, won the class after accumulating four first place finishes for the week, and leading the second place finisher, John Cooper's J/29 *Cool Breeze*. In third place is Ira Perry's *Seefest* who narrowly edged out Adam Farkas' Andrews 30, *Flak*.

In an impressive sequence of moves, Lincoln Schoenberger's Wyliecat 30 *One Up* wrote the final chapter in the PHRF-6 thriller finishing Friday's races with three bullets clinching the overall win.

"Everything went very smoothly," Schoenberger said. "I couldn't ask for a better crew." The mood was jovial all around as a crewmember jokingly piped up, "So how much are we getting paid?" Schoenberger laughed. "The competition was tight and it came down to the very last race. We had pressure from *Horizon*. She's a very well sailed boat and didn't make many mistakes." *Horizon*, Bob Fleck's S2 7.9, Alexandria, VA, won second in the class. Swapping finishes with some regularity, *One Up* and *Lucky Ducky* enjoyed a good-natured, unofficial "Wyliecat East Coast Championship." *Lucky Ducky*, Hall Palmer's Wyliecat 30 finished third for the week. "The additional competition helped sharpen our game," Schoenberger said. Overall, he credits his team. "Sailing with people I enjoy is even more important than winning," Schoenberger said. "Winning is like icing on the cake."

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