ON A BUDGET | *J/80s Lead the Way*

J/80 class president Kristen Robinson has come up with all sorts of creative ways to reduce the bottom line on a Key West campaign and encourages J/80 owners to work together to assist one another. After years of fine-tuning, Robinson has developed a budget that enables a J/80 team to compete at Key West for less than $8,000.

J/80 owners new to Key West benefit from a detailed spreadsheet that Robinson developed on how to attend the annual race week in Key West on a reasonable budget. "I was real surprised about how affordable it could be," said Jeremy Reynolds, a first-year owner. Reynolds was skeptical when it was suggested he enter Key West 2010. The Maryland resident started doing a mental checklist of the costs associated with doing a regatta off the southernmost point of Florida and just shook his head. "I saw the dollar signs going cha-ching, cha-ching in my head," Reynolds said.

"You have to plan carefully and think ahead about what you are going to need and shop around in advance so there isn't a big one-time payout right before the regatta."
—Kristen Robinson, J/80 Class President

Perhaps the most notable cost-cutting method involves working a package deal for most of the J/80s to launch and berth at Old Island Marina. Robinson negotiated a discount on the splash fee and storage rate with the Stock Island facility.

Robinson also helped the J/80 teams contain their housing costs by calling around to numerous Key West realtors and comparing rates. Reynolds and his Magic in Motion crew stayed in a house for less than it rented for a few years ago. With the economy being what it is, there are some great deals on housing. People just have to take some time and look around. If you're on a smaller boat, like a J/80, consider "partnering" with another boat you get along with to split the housing cost. Many Key West rentals come with enough beds for all. It's not just the number of bedrooms.

Robinson, who along with her husband Brian has competed at Key West six times aboard *Angry Chameleon*, posted a "How to do Key West on a Budget" article on the J/80 website that provides owners with all sorts of other tips on how to manage costs. She suggests buying food for the entire week before traveling to the regatta and spending less time in the bars. The open bar at the Race Week evening parties for 6 nights is great value and a lot of fun.

Further advice includes buying discounted gear and paying for other expenses in advance so there isn't a big one-time payout right before the regatta. Robinson spreads the costs over time by renting the house in May, entering the regatta at the end of August and paying the marina fees after the event. "It's a way to put myself on a payment plan so there isn't such a big hit one month," she said.

Of course it's important that sailors in the J/80 class get along so well and are eager to help each other out. "People in this class are so generous and willing to share," Reynolds learned.

Some J/80 owners joined forces to enter Key West 2010 and shared the costs of entering one boat. Robinson said every dollar saved counts and looks closely at every possible expense. Six J/80s from Annapolis and a group of sailors that were all flying to Florida car-pooled to Baltimore-Washington International Airport to save money on parking.

Robinson was asked why she puts so much effort into assisting other J/80 owners with their Key West plans and plotting out a budget for the regatta. "I come to Key West for good one-design competition so the more boats the better," said Robinson, who believes other class presidents or representatives should put forth the same effort for a regatta the caliber of Key West.

Premiere Racing president Peter Craig is extremely impressed by the abilit y of J/80 owners to put together a Key West campaign on an affordable budget. "The J/80 class increasing to 19 boats in this economy is one of the great success stories of the 2010 event and should be listened to carefully by the owners in other classes," Craig said. "The J/80 folks have figured out how to do Key West without breaking the bank by being creative and working collectively. They have clearly shown that it can be done."